

Finding peace on Amish roads

January 21, 2016 By Anietra Hamper

At 6 a.m., my consciousness is somewhere between REM sleep and reality. The click, click, click sounds in my dream are getting louder, while blended smells of coffee and baked goods seep into the storyline.

My senses begin to align, and I realize the clicking is actually the sound of horseshoes on pavement and Amish buggies outside. The smell of baked goods is the made-from-scratch blueberry pancakes cooked by Mennonite women in the kitchen of my bed-and-breakfast. It might be the most peaceful awakening I have ever experienced.

The Miller Haus Bed & Breakfast in Holmes County, Ohio, is my home base for exploring the back roads of Amish country. I will head out for the day along the winding rural roads where mile-markers are replaced by Yoder's Cheese signs and laundry drying on the line. The miles will uncover a simpler life that still exists, hidden treasures unearthed if we take the time to look for them and non-tangible life nourishment that feeds the soul.



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Simpler Life

Hidden throughout Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York, miles of tangled back roads lead to the country's Amish communities. The families who live along these roads are untouched by the technological world that most of us cannot live without.

After leaving the Miller Haus for the morning, I drive onto County Road 135 in Millersburg, Ohio, to see where the day leads me. A montage of unfamiliar yet peaceful imagery blurs by me: horses grazing in the pasture; chickens pecking at feed on dirt driveways; Amish men and boys plowing the fields and Amish women picking fruit from the orchards. Driving with the top down on my convertible, I feel as if I'm a visitor to a P. Buckley Moss painting that has come to life.

An Amish buggy on the road slows me down to 20 mph. I start to feel anxious, forgetting that I have no reason to be. I have no agenda and no definitive destination. The buggy is a literal reminder I need to slow down in my life.

On these small county roads, the only stores I see are cheese factories and wood mills where everything is done by hand. Breakfast staples come from local markets where berries are picked fresh and eggs are collected each morning. Here, hard work still matters and there is a personal touch to all facets of life.



Hidden Treasures

When I slow down long enough to enjoy my surroundings, I start to notice the little treasures that make up the larger scene. It's like looking at an impressionist painting: You see the image, but only when you get close enough to the art can you see and appreciate all of the little dots and colors that make it a masterpiece.

In Farmerstown, I make my way to County Road 114. I'm looking for "the blind broom maker" as the locals know him, and his small shop called Farmerstown Broom and Book. I knew it from a previous visit to the area when I met a very humble Amish woman and her legally blind husband who spent his days making brooms by hand in the shop at their home. They told me about the hours it takes to make the many sizes of brooms and their passion for creating durable high-quality products one at a time.



I remembered a small garage-turned-store where the only available light came from one tiny window. In one corner were completed brooms, hand-controlled equipment and piles of straw. Another area housed metal bookracks with children's books on manners, cookbooks, spiritual books and religious daily devotionals. Natural ointments for burns and oils used for sleep aids were by the door.

In the last corner of the room a frail woman sat wearing a plain dress held together by safety pins. I remember buying my broom and bee sting salve and getting on my way.

That brief visit with the blind broom maker and his wife made an impression on me. I wanted to find them again.



When I found the shop, everything looked exactly the same, down to the frail Amish woman sitting in front of a metal cash box. But one thing had changed: A few months earlier, the blind broom maker had died from cancer.

The few brooms in the corner were all that his wife had left of his handiwork to sell. The broom I purchased previously suddenly became a sentimental token of a shared moment I will never forget.

The true treasures of the back roads of Amish country are places like this that are found by mere chance or by word of mouth from the locals. The owner of my bed and breakfast, Lee Ann Miller, told me about another place called Yoder's Bargain Store in Fredericksburg, Ohio. It is a shop used by locals and run by an Amish family.

The small gray stone at the end of Yoder's long, winding driveway features white hand-painted letters in an understated display welcoming guests, but not advertising for them.

I feel almost intrusive driving up the unpaved farm entrance to the store. A horse and buggy is tied to a post outside. I park my convertible next to it, feeling the awkward juxtaposition of the two modes of transportation.

The dark, two-story shop is illuminated by a small amount of outside light, although some oil lamps are affixed to pillars. The room is silent. I quietly peruse tight aisles of glassware, trinkets, Amish work attire and cooking gadgets priced at a steal. My small basket was loaded with fruit dishes for less than \$1, kitchen utensils and some very hearty wool hats and gloves.

The elderly Amish woman at the checkout added my items with a calculator. For less than \$50 I had a stash of things that would've easily cost me \$150 elsewhere. Conditioned for convenience, I almost presented my credit card before remembering that here, they sell and acquire goods the old fashioned way – with cash. Yoder's Bargain Store was never designed to be a tourist stop, which is why so few know about it and why it is such a gem to find.

Self-discovery

The slower pace from point-A to point-B in Amish country is therapeutic. The reduced speedometer reading reminds me to notice things like the rolling countryside, windmills, hard labor in the fields and handmade baskets for sale on the side of the road. As I log miles on tight turns on seemingly endless county roads to nowhere, it all begins to equate for me.

I remember that living in the moment is something we choose. We make decisions about whether or not to notice flowering trees, a mother horse with her foal and the smell of fresh biscuits. There's a sense of gratitude in the air, for family and relationships and things that are authentic.

To stop for a moment – for a day – for a weekend is to nourish the soul. A break in the churning of emails, appointments and deadlines is worthwhile, healthy and essential.

As darkness falls for the day, I draw the shades and rest my head while the country stars watch over me until morning. I can't wait to see where tomorrow's roads lead me.

All photos by Anietra Hamper. An award-winning writer based in the Midwest, Hamper is a frequent contributor to Positive365. Her previous features include a [misty trip to Loch Ness](#), a journey of [self-discovery in Southeast Asia](#), and a profile of [a family whose home is bursting with love](#).

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