



Laments of a weekender

DAVID WELCH

In my car aboard the freight deck of the Governor, headed over choppy waves to Woods Hole one fall morning, I couldn't help but notice the large windshield sticker on the car in front of me: *VINEYARDERS*. While I considered whether or not a true Islander would ever own such a sticker, the reality of my own Island status hit and humbled me. If the Island is divided into two kinds of people, those who own or rent property and live here year-round are *Vineyarders*, and those who visit or rent part time are *Weekenders*. I am unhappily lumped into the latter group – but neither label truly fits.

While a Vineyarder is like the steadfast spouse, working in good weather or bad, managing the sometimes-tedious day-to-day chores of the home, a Weekender is the fickle party girl. She's the first date, flirting and shiny, unapologetic in her belief that the weather forecast is critical to her happiness. Next thing you know, she's slurping oysters with someone else, sending you post cards from Nantucket. *I would never do that to you*. People like me are somewhere in the middle. We're the ones who'll go to the museum fundraiser with you last minute when your date gets sick, and when others ask who I am, you whisper, "Just a friend." Even if you scrunch up your nose when you say it, we don't mind, really: *We just want to be with you*.

Ironically, I am a Massachusetts native, though I moved to Maryland about twenty years ago. I never visited Martha's Vineyard until my Baltimore husband

and I discovered it together. On that first visit, sitting on the beach in Menemsha waiting for an ocean sunset, he cracked open a Larsen's lobster with fingers groomed on years of opening Maryland crabs. Dipping the heavy meat in warm butter, he sighed with contentment as he leaned back on the blanket, saying, "We should come back here." And we have, adding three children (and a lot more sand) to the blanket over the years. To me, each shared Menemsha sunset is like renewing our wedding vows – without the cluttered pageantry. No pomp, no fussy party favors, no lists of RSVPs.

On the deck of the Governor, I was forced to reflect on my thirteen-year relationship, however tenuous, with the Island. I had come on that particular trip to grieve my father's recent passing and needed to be where I knew I'd gain comfort and strength. Perhaps questioning my misfit status stemmed from a place of reciprocity; the Island was home to me, but was it an unrequited love? Then it struck me. Solving this identity crisis could be as simple as creating a new name to wedge between the two existing categories. Since last year's election lingo is not far from our minds, maybe *Delegate MV* or *Super-Weekender* – in which case, I wouldn't be taking calls from Block Island or being wooed at a luncheon in Newport.

If middle-tier candidates first must take a test, my family and I would pass with flying horses: We visit regardless of season or the seven-hour commute; we ship Murdick's Fudge at random; my

husband buys his clamming license even before we've checked into our rental; and my high school son just about stalks the Martha's Vineyard lacrosse coach each summer hoping to play with the Island team.

Besides keeping up year-round online, via the Vineyard Gazette and WMVY radio, trivia matters to me too: like the fact that Irene Tewksbury, who used to be the children's librarian at the Oak Bluffs branch, has a sister, Jana Dillon, who writes children's books; or that the whoopee pies from the Stop and Shop in Edgartown cure multiple ills (okay, that's not technically a fact). One of the strangest twists – after years writing a biography on painter Elizabeth Sparhawk-Jones (1885-1968), without knowing she ever came to the Vineyard – I learned her final paintings were completed in a barn in Chilmark (circa 1960, and since sold to a private collector with the understanding that they never leave the Island).

Finally, for the dissertation part of the test, I would explore the impact of *Fever Pitch* – specifically the dangers of overdosing on fan accessories (in the movie, it was everything Red Sox). I would quickly come to the conclusion, after buying the cutest, red, Black Dog pajamas, I am done shopping for a while.

Until that time when a middle designation exists for people like me, all my best to you Vineyarders and Weekenders alike, and no hard feelings for my campaign I hope. And for now if you need me, check Menemsha around sunset. ♦

– BARBARA LEHMAN SMITH