



# The Daily Gleaner

December 18, 2010

## A New Take on the RV Lifestyle

I have spent the past few weeks traveling throughout the eastern and southeastern United States in a camperized vehicle. Essentially we are spending our time for the next little while living the RV lifestyle. I have made a number of observations on our journey, as we stay in RV parks and campgrounds, many of them around retirement living. Since starting our trip it has occurred to me that the RV lifestyle is a very sustainable, economical, and eco-friendly way to enjoy ones retirement years.

In the past when I thought about RV'ing, I was convinced that it was a very inefficient way to live – costly and gas heavy. Now I have come to understand that in the case of retirees, it isn't necessarily all about the journey, but instead more about the destination. Many RV units are now termed “park models” and are not ever meant to be driven a lot but rather to be parked. So once these big rigs reach their final or semi-final resting spot it seems to me that they can be quite an efficient way to live.

Though this style of retirement is not as common in Canada due to the cold climate for part of the year; it is not uncommon to retired Canadians. Many Canadians and Americans, affectionately known as “snowbirds” are living the RV lifestyle at community-style campgrounds all over the southern U.S. for 6 months or more each year of their retirement. In speaking with one RV park owner in Florida, I found out that nearly 70 percent of his clients were living in the park year-round or for the majority of the year.

One of my first observations about these parks was that on a piece of land that would typically hold one regular single family home with a yard and garage, there is space for at least six RV spots. Each unit has a small strip of grass with hookups for sewer, electricity and water; and enough of a strip to park their rig on. And as we have discovered ourselves, because there isn't much space in these rigs, and also because there are rules in place to keep the parks looking esthetically pleasing, your ‘living’ has to be down-sized and much simpler. Additionally, heating and cooling a unit a fraction of the size of an average home is much more efficient. And because the RV is parked on such a small piece of land, watering and mowing the grass is minimal to say the least.

The RV parks are truly small communities. They often have a social or activities committee that plans a full weekly event schedule. I have seen sign-up sheets for everything from volunteers to sort the mail, to daytime outings, potluck dinners, and bingo night. I have even seen units where people have set up services in their RV such as hairstyling. And because most of the desired daily amenities are in such close proximity, RV'ers are able to walk, bike or drive a golf cart to see their friends and attend events very easily. It also makes carpooling much more convenient, and I have now seen several postings for group to travel by bus to shops that are further away. And most, if not all, of the parks we have stayed in so far also have a conveniently placed communal recycling area.

I realize that not everyone lives in a single family home all their lives, and that many live in much more efficient apartments or condos; but I can imagine that many of the people I am seeing on our travels have not lived that lifestyle before retirement. It is actually very eye opening and freeing to realizing that downsizing isn't all that bad! In fact, one of our most striking observations is that people in RV parks are very community oriented. You might

think that the closeness of the RVs and lack of space wouldn't work for you, but you never know. We have found that the folks who have chosen this lifestyle are happy, socially connected, relaxed, and living with a very low environmental footprint to boot!

The next few weeks of the Christmas season should bring some new and interesting observations. I expect that for the many that enjoy their RV home for Christmas, their consumption and waste is likely a fraction of what it would be if they were in a typical home; and that their feelings of inclusion and community are likely just as strong as they would be otherwise. So let's consider that just maybe they are fully realizing and living something that we are trying to make happen in our lives too, at Christmas. The Grinch puts it best:

*It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes, or bags. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas... he thought ... means a little bit more.*

*Valerie Hillier is a Frederictonian who lives with the environment in mind, even when traveling. If you would like to contact the Green Matters team email [greenmatters@fredericton.ca](mailto:greenmatters@fredericton.ca).*