



Joyce Marcel
Author, Writer

Photo Credit: Jason E. Henske

Here is my ideal summer weekend: First, it wouldn't be a Saturday morning without an early-morning trip to the Brattleboro Farmers' Market, on Rt. 9 in Brattleboro.

The market is held in a packed-dirt clearing enclosed by tall maples near a small brook. It's a place where children play in a large sandbox, musicians play under a tree, neighbors greet neighbors, and people buy from stands heaped full of colorful flowers, fruits, vegetables and crafts. The market was founded by farmers, of course, around 25 years ago. Now it's a 50-member, bi-weekly, six-month, nonprofit organization of farmers, craftspersons and chefs. The rule is that everything sold in the market—and that includes furniture, masks, hand-painted silk scarves, honey, beef and pork, croissants, fruits, vegetables, goat cheese, children's clothing, jewelry, stained glass and "the best homemade from scratch chicken-on-a-stick"—has to be local.

In the past few years, the food at the market has gone international. On any Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., you might find cooks from Thailand, Cameroon, Turkey, Italy, India or France serving up their specialties.

After a tasty breakfast, I'd fly down Rt. 30 to the Townshend Auction Gallery. I'd get there a little late, but they usually run from 9:30 to after 1 p.m., so that's okay.

This is a real country auction where you can buy everything from antiques to used cars. But it's also something more—it's auction as theater. Auctioneer Kit Martin is a born performer, and he's been in love with auctioneering all his life. There are older folks in town who remember him as a kid of 8, going about his chores while practicing auction chants.

Martin loves to pour on the emotion. He's alternately witty, clowning, teasing, gossipy, seductive and insulting, but he's never boring. I once saw him bring up to the block what looked like a stick of wood. He called it "a rare wooden blade from an old-fashioned lawn mower," and he auctioned it rapidly up to \$150. Then he admitted he staged the whole thing with a couple of friends. "That was fun," he said, as the runner took away the piece of kindling. "Let's do it again sometime."

On Sunday, I religiously attend the Church of the Newfane Flea Market, also on Rt. 30, in Newfane.

I like to watch the vendors unpack their wares. The first aisle tends to be full of weathered, bearded men who put out rifles, antique snow shoes, shotguns, traps, stuffed animals and—in a touching tribute to eternal boyhood—marbles. In other aisles you can find white-haired women laying out patchwork quilts, decorated plates and costume jewelry. A witty Scotswoman who came once to empty her closets has become so enamored of flea market life that she now scours Glasgow in the winter for things to sell at Newfane in the summer.

In recent years, eBay has decimated most flea markets, and Newfane's no exception. Sadly, it shrinks more every year. But it's still an important social scene for the vendors, dealers and customers, and I can still find enough to see and, occasionally, to buy. Mostly, I like watching the people and collecting overheard dialogue. My favorite? Two men were walking by a crowded table when one noticed a pith helmet for sale. He told his friend, "You know what a pith helmet is for? It's so monkeys don't pith on your head."



All photos on this page by Jason E. Henske



Photo Credit: Jason E. Henske

A Thousand Words or Less
Parade October 2006 - 2009
by Joyce Marcel

Joyce Marcel is a columnist for the Brattleboro Reformer and a journalist who writes for Vermont Business Magazine and Vermont Life. Her first book, A Thousand Words or Less, a collection of her Reformer columns, came out in 2006. Her book can be ordered through joycemarcel.com. She lives in Dummerston.

Brattleboro Farmers' Market, Whetstone Plaza