

WEST ENGLAND

NORWICH → PLYMOUTH

IT SHOULD NOT BE DENIED... THAT BEING FOOTLOOSE HAS ALWAYS EXHILARATED US. IT IS ASSOCIATED IN OUR MINDS WITH ESCAPE FROM HISTORY AND OPPRESSION AND LAW AND IRKSOME OBLIGATIONS, WITH ABSOLUTE FREEDOM, AND THE ROAD HAS ALWAYS LED WEST."

-WALLACE STEGNER

I REMEMBER ARRIVING AT THE PORT CITY OF PLYMOUTH THINKING IT WAS ONE OF THE UGLIEST PLACES I HAD SEEN IN MY TRAVELS YET. AS I SAT, WAITING FOR MY TRAIN WHICH WOULD TAKE ME 10 MINS TO MY DESTINATION, I PULLED OUT THE PICTURES OF THE COTTAGE PROPERTY WHICH WOULD REMAIN MY HOME UNTIL I ONCE AGAIN FELT THE URGE TO LEAVE ONCE MORE.

THE GREEN HILLS AND WIDE RIVER IN THE PICTURE LOOKED NOTHING LIKE THE GREY CITY I WAS IN, AND I WONDERED IF THE PICTURES HAD BEEN SOME TYPE OF FAKE 'DATING SITE PICTURE' SCAM. HOWEVER, AS THE TRAIN CROSSED THE BRIDGE OF THE HARBOUR, THE WHOLE SCENERY CHANGED INSTANTLY. STRAINING MY HEAD TO LOOK BACK, I COULD SEE THE SMOG OF THE PORT CITY IN THE DISTANCE, WHILE ROLLING, GREEN LUSCIOUS HILLS SPRAWLED OUT BEFORE ME.

WHEN I ARRIVED, I WAS MET BY 9 OTHER VOLUNTEERS ON TOP OF THE TWO HOSTS. THE PROPERTY INCLUDED THE MAIN HOUSE, TWO COTTAGES, STORAGE SPACE, AND AN OLD BARN WHICH WAS RUN DOWN AND WAS TO BECOME OUR SOURCE OF WORK WHILE WE WERE HERE. COUNTLESS OF EMPTY FIELDS LAID IN EVERY DIRECTION, AND A RIVER AND HILL DIVIDED US FROM THE CLOSEST NEIGHBOR. IT WAS SOON CLEAR OF HOW MUCH FUN, LAUGHTER, AND ENDLESS FREEDOM WE WOULD ALL EXPERIENCE TOGETHER. THERE WAS NO CABLE, HARDLY ANY WIFI AND SO OUR NIGHTS CONSISTED OF LONG CONVERSATIONS, DVD MOVIES, AND ENDLESS HOURS OF CARD GAMES.

I LEARNED SO MUCH OVER THE COURSE OF MY STAY HERE, AND WHEN THE CONVERSATION OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ECO-LIVING (AS I REALIZED NOW WAS A TOPIC MUCH DISCUSSED IN THE COUNTRYSIDE VS THE CITY LIFE WHERE PEOPLE SEEMED TOO BUSY TO CARE OR GIVE IT ANY THOUGHT) THE TOPIC THIS TIME RESOLVED AROUND FOOD.

IF SOMEBODY HAD TOLD ME I WOULD HAVE TO BE VEGAN FOR OVER A MONTH, I WOULD THOUGHT IT IMPOSSIBLE, HAVING GROWN UP IN A FAMILY WHERE STEAK WAS A WEEKLY MEAL. BUT AS THE VOLUNTEERS AND HOSTS PRACTISED THIS LIFESTYLE RELIGIOUSLY AND MADE SURE ALL OTHER PRODUCTS WERE ORGANIC, I LEARNED OF THE SERIOUS SIDE- AFFECTS OF EATING TOO MUCH MEAT (FOR US AND THE ENVIRONMENT) THAT I HAD BEEN COMPLETELY IGNORANT AND BLIND TOO BEFORE. SUBTRACTING MEAT FROM MY DIET TURNED OUT TO BE INCREDIBLY SIMPLE AS I LEARNED OF ALL OF THE VARIETY OF VEGAN MEALS WHICH DIDN'T SIMPLY INCLUDE VEGGETABLES, AND THAT SALADS COULD BE GOOD- IF NOT BETTER- WITOUT GRILLED CHICKEN ONTOP OF IT.

NOW I MUST ADMIT THERE WERE TIMES I CRAVED MEAT, AND SINCE I CAME BACK TO THE USA, I HAVE SLIPPED BACK INTO EATING MEAT. BUT NOW I AM MUCH MORE AWARE OF THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENSES, ESPECIALLY BEEF, HAS ON OUR OZONE LAYER AND I HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE RESTRICTIVE OF HAVING MEAT FOR EVERY MEAL, ENJOYING IT ONLY ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK.

