

Getting Out Of Dodge

Jule Vigness

IN TOUCH WITH THE HUMAN SPIRIT,
WORLD TRAVELER SHARES HER GIFTS AT B&B POOL AND SPA

BY AUTUMN RHEA CARPENTER

Jule Vigness' passport is marked with travels extending from Morocco to Istanbul and many places in between. She's lived off the land in the Catskill Mountains and in her latest endeavor, Vigness is a bed and breakfast proprietor, sharing a nurturing spirit with guests and relying on past adventures when interacting with visitors.

Vigness grew up one of nine children in an Irish Catholic Norwegian Minnesota family. "Minnesota is a very practical place, and if you're not practical, there are numerous ways that you can die there, especially in January," says Vigness. "Living there taught me to be a survivor. I left Minnesota at 18 years old and never looked back."

After attending college in Florida, Vigness left for San Francisco with a flower in her hair; it was 1967's Summer of Love. "My life completely changed," she says. "I dropped into the alternative culture and became aware of life outside of my own personality. I started learning about ancient cultures and how America was really an adolescent. That's when I really started

traveling."

Vigness moved to the Caribbean. She soaked in that experience and kept moving, next to Europe, then Morocco. "That's when Nixon was elected, and I was convinced that the world was ending," she says. "I planned on never returning to the States, but slowly began missing American pop culture. I missed being able to mention 'The Itsy Bitsy Spider' and having someone know what I was talking about."

As Vigness continued her quest, she met Roger (later the father to two of her sons), and they bought tickets to travel around the world. "We landed in Paris and eventually visited India, Katmandu, Nepal, Istanbul, Baghdad, Tokyo and Hong Kong," she says. "We made the trip in six months, and I wasn't able to inhale the culture as much because we were always moving. I learned more when I traveled alone, as I did from about age 22 until 28."

Those experiences taught Vigness the art of communication, and she says she got in touch with people on a different level. "Without the luxury of language, I often relied on pantomiming and mind reading in order to communicate," she says. "I learned to fo-

cus more and listen to what was going on beneath the words themselves."

During her travels, Vigness also learned that there were many ways to accomplish something. "I saw that there are many different structures that can be called a house," she says. "The same goes for clothing. It was very broadening for me to see that there is not just 'one way' as I had been taught in Minnesota. The experience made me a world citizen and showed me the importance of diversity."

Vigness' travels slowed when, at 28, she gave birth to her first child, a boy she named Sundance, and he was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. A new journey began. "In 1983, we moved from the Catskill Mountains in southeastern New York State, where I hunted and worked the land, grew our food and learned to navigate the woods without getting lost, to Florida, where there was no ice and snow and healing waters," she says. "Soon I realized that I still hadn't 'dropped in' to modern culture and couldn't relate to the community at all. Roger had family in Austin and we decided to make the move here in 1988."

Western medicine was doing nothing for Sundance's condition, and Aus-

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Vigness in the East Wing of Bed and Breakfast Pool and Spa

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tin drew Vigness' attention because of its alternative healing community, Whole Foods and all of the trees. "Austin welcomed us into its arms, and we finally felt at home," she says. "We discovered this big broken house in Tarrytown that the daddy long legs had called home for a long time and started the renovation process."

The design of the 4,700-square-foot attracted Vigness. "The way the house was built, Sundance had an entire wing to himself, where we built a therapy swimming pool and he could finally find relief. We were able to bring in acupuncturists and masseuses and learn more about healing herbs," she says. "Sundance was a spiritual teacher and a shining example to everyone around him. He died at 19 years old, and I decided after a few years to honor the space by sharing it with others."



Jule Vigness with her son, Sundance

from their arrival until their departure. It's amazing what a little time away from the world will do for you."

The B&B offers three rentable areas. The East Wing includes three rooms and the spa. There are antique furnishings, a fireplace, a breakfast nook, an automatic massage chair and a bedroom filled with Old World charm.

The Moon River room offers various luxuries, including a massage chair, hardwood floors and thick Oriental carpets. Also available is a guesthouse among the trees that offers its own architectural details and intimate feeling. It maintains a 'home-away-from-home' feeling and is available for extended stays.

Growing up, Vigness says she lived across the street from the Margaret Barry House. "Margaret lived on the top floor of this great old mansion," says Vigness. "The rest of the house was open to the neighborhood for all kinds of events and classes such as piano lessons, dances and cooking classes.

"It kept us off of the street, and I spent a lot of my childhood there," she says. "Sundance's father once remarked to me that my house is the new Margaret Barry House. I like that idea. It's a place where people can always come for retreat, learning and sanctuary." ★

Vigness began offering her facility to a group of women she called "the women circle spa" and provided them the luxuries of her home, including the sauna, pool and massage tables. "These were women who couldn't afford to spend money on an expensive spa but deserved and needed its effects," says Vigness. "The experience allowed them to feel better about themselves and gave the house a purpose."

She decided that the house should work for her. "We had put so much time and money into the house, and its purpose had changed," she says. "That's when I decided that it should become a bed and breakfast, and I started sharing its magic with the rest of the world."

Vigness' second son, Billy Moon, helps her run Bed and Breakfast Pool and Spa. (She also has a third son, Wyatt River.) "I like to do things from scratch, and this project is no different," she says. "Some local B&B owners have mentored me and that has been invaluable. This is definitely not a 'six-layers-of-lace' kind of place. It offers privacy and seclusion, romance and complete spirit restoration. One of my favorite aspects of running this place is seeing the guests' demeanors change

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