

Saturday, 7 May 2011

Love in the Ayr, Fat Nans, Castles, Scarborough, Yummy York, Roald Dahl's Magical Garden & Dave's Denmark Days



As roadtrips seem to be in my blood - but I usually go on them alone - it felt right and exciting to do my first one in a long time with someone else: Amy. We've been together for two months and are now relaxed in each other's company enough to go on our first trip away.

I won't deny the fact I was slightly worried about spending 24/7 with Amy on a trip across the UK (as was she with me, no doubt), but I didn't need to be. Amy and I had a wonderful, hilarious, magical time...in many different ways.



I'm used to exploring my feelings, thoughts and adventures in this blog. These have sometimes helped me sort my head out, these have sometimes amazed me (and others) at my achievements and these have sometimes got me into deep trouble. It feels strange to be writing a post that is about me and someone else, but this is a **VERY** good thing. After being "officially single" for almost two-and-a-half years I am ridiculously happy to be with Amy and to, finally, be sharing adventures with someone who is so wonderful.



As Amy's Gran originally came from Ayr, Scotland, we decided to kickstart our roadtrip here. She had never been before so it was a treat to explore the many shops, restaurants and - because

it was so sunny - have some lovely beach walks.



One beach walk in particular was more special than the others because it's when I realised I am completely and utterly in love with Amy.

Luckily for me (otherwise it would have been slightly embarrassing), Amy is in love with me too. And, without going into too much detail - as this moment was personal to us - we had a beautiful time on the Ayr promenade next to the beach. It involved morning sunshine, romance, hand-holding, kissing, hugging and laughing.

This was followed by a lovely cup of tea in a greasy spoon cafe by the beach: romance personified...perfect for us both. Love was truly in the Ayr.

And, no, I'm not passing you a sick bag because I think I'm allowed a little bit of cheesey, loved-upedness, okay.



Following this special moment, we spent the day at a windy, rainy Culzean Castle just south of Ayr. After a tour inside the austere castle, with its many huge paintings, we went for a cliff-side walk amongst the bluebells and trees as the sun came out. At the end of the walk was a Swan Pond (with just one swan in it), a deer park and a mini-forest.

That evening we had an unforgettable, hilarious evening meal at a place hidden amongst the backstreets of Ayr called the [Grumpy Chef](#). If you're ever up that way, then please give it a try. Their chicken stuffed with haggis is the tastiest thing that side of the Scottish border.

Before leaving Scotland, we paid a flying visit to my wonderful, talented writer-friend and her family, [Cathy Cassidy](#). Cathy lives south of Ayr and - as her, Liam, Callum and Caitlin were meeting Amy for the first time - we all went out for a posh afternoon tea at [Kitty's in New Galloway](#). The cakes were amazing, but it was Callum and Caitlin's choice of a "Fat Nan" to eat

that was the most memorable moment of the visit. With inappropriate visions of an overweight Nan coming out of the



kitchen to be their meal, Amy and I got on the road again.



We headed on down through the beautiful Yorkshire Dales - with bright, illuminous yellow fields of rapeseed flowers on either side - to our next destination: Scarborough.

We quickly wished we hadn't.

For a long time, I've had a vague romantic notion that I'd like to sit on the seaside of this northern UK town and eat some old-fashioned, proper fish 'n chips. But, after discovering our B & B - The Palace Hill Hotel - was an oppressive, miserable little joint (run by a money-grabbing "wheeler-dealer" guy who served a disgusting, triple deep-fried, artery-clogging breakfast of sausage, egg, bacon and lard-infested crap) which embodied the seedy, depressive nature of this sorry little town, my romantic notion was quickly pummelled into submission by harsh reality.



Don't get me wrong, many of the people we met in Scarborough were lovely, but Amy and I made a quick decision that there was no way we could handle this place for more than one night. To me, it felt like a battered and bruised Blackpool; I had the same soulless, unnatural feeling in Scarborough as I'd had when I visited Las Vegas in America last year.

So, even though it meant I'd lose the money I'd been forced to pay upfront for two nights at the B & B, I was very glad to leave the horror of "Scarb-Vegas" behind. And I was even thankful that I never got to eat fish 'n chips on the seafront too.



Amy and I drove onwards from north to south, stopping off for a short time in the gorgeous, ancient city of York. As it's one of the northern English lands close to where the Vikings first invaded, York became a peaceful settlement for many of them. With its tiny, twisting streets, and its overhanging and skewiff houses in the corner of the city known as The Shambles, this place was oozing with history and character. It was a very needed remedy for the Scarborough experience.

After York, we ended up in a small town called Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire. This may

seem random, but the reason was clear: both of us love Roald Dahl (well, Amy loves his illustrator Quentin Blake more as she is such an amazing artist), and this town is where this ridiculously - or redonkulously, as he might say - creative children's writer lived for most of his life.



We stayed in a magnificent converted barn for two nights at the [Rickyard Cottage](#) near Great Missenden and enjoyed a PROPERLY cooked, beautiful, organic English breakfast before spending time exploring the local countryside and [Roald Dahl museum and Story Centre](#).

The museum was a small place but rewardingly quirky enough to be a delightful experience. We had some BogTrotter cake in Twit Cafe and then walked to Dahl's house to visit his stunning garden.

Roald Dahl's widow, Felicity Crosland, still lives in Gipsy House in Great Missenden and opens the house's gardens around four times a year to the public. With the famous writing hut Dahl created all his stories in exactly how he left it, there is an avenue of lime trees leading to it that gives the place a potent air of magic and creativity. I felt very honoured and overwhelmed to have been lucky enough to visit the home of a master storyteller and a great man.



Following our departure from Buckinghamshire, Amy and I went our separate ways (temporarily, of course) because I flew to Copenhagen, Denmark the next day to stay with my friend Dave. I hadn't seen Dave for over six years, since a stag weekend we went on for our mate Chris back at the beginning of 2005. But I'm very glad we stayed in contact because I had a fantastic "boy's weekend" full of gossip, laughter, eating, drinking, mischievousness, putting the world to rights and a generally great time.

On the Saturday, Dave and I went out for a great night with his friend Peter. We did a bar crawl across most - if not *all* - of Copenhagen and got in at 4am. A brilliant evening and I don't think I've got in that late from a night out for many years. Then we had a trip to the beach and had a chill-out BBQ at Dave's house on Saturday.

Dave is married to the lovely Marlene and they have two children. It was a pleasure spending time hanging out with them and, bizarrely, also great to see first-hand what it was like dealing with two very young children. Stressful, yes. Rewarding, yes. I think Marlene was very surprised when I said that staying the weekend with them hadn't put me off wanting children of my own at some point in the near future.

We had a great final day out at the wonderful Tivoli park eating pizza and the biggest icecream in the world (the cone was bigger than my head and I felt as if I might need an extra seat on the



plane home for my newly-enlarged belly), watching children's theatre shows and wandering around Tivoli's gardens. I'd like to thank Dave and Marlene for having me to stay.

And that, dearest friends, is a round-up of my latest adventures and stories. What will come next, I wonder? Well, whatever it is, I'm very pleased to be sharing the next part of my life with a very special girl.

If you'd like to see all the pictures from our roadtrip then click [here](#).