

THE LAST WORD

BY JOE MURRAY



Wannabe Townie

In Tahoe City, California, it's easy to forget you're from somewhere else

IT IS ANOTHER gorgeous afternoon in Tahoe City, California, with the mountain sunlight glinting off the sparkling, glassy Lake Tahoe. Meanwhile, my wife and I are inside a darkened movie theater, watching two buff superheroes cause significant municipal damage during an epic feud apparently rooted in pectoral envy.

My hometown critic mafia in New York City has derided this film as a “zeppelin crash,” among other creative insults. So don’t tell them we enjoyed it, even if it mostly was because Tahoe City’s art-house theater has comfy couches and serves beer.

The plot holes and weird monologues give me the time to visit the popcorn spice bar and chat about cinematic flops with the bearded, cowboy-hat-wearing owner of the theater, who not only hypes every showing with a spirited, Hitchcock-style introduction but also pours beer refills.

It doesn’t take long to feel like a local in Tahoe City, the mountain-nestled hamlet on the California side of the lake. (Nevada shares joint custody of Lake Tahoe, playing the role of the anything-goes stepdad to the hippie mom that is California.) Combine the disorientation of skipping multiple time zones and the fact that residents here are so friendly it feels like a Disney movie in which the characters drive mud-stained pickup trucks and can use the word *gnarly* properly, and one long weekend has us feeling like townies.

Given that the Tahoe area is singularly inviting in both winter and summer and just a Tesla drive away from Silicon Valley, it takes some determination to

afford living here, even part time, if you’re not still flush from your last initial public offering.

So perhaps it’s not surprising that people we’ve met this weekend have provided a master class in *How to Spend Your Life Doing Whatever the Heck It Is You Like*, with a minor focus on Craft Beer Imbibery.

The kayak guide who leads us on a morning paddle on the lake has an advanced degree in business administration but spends his summers living in an RV in a Mexican beach town and fishing for his own meals. The skiing instructor who coaxes us down the bunny slopes at Homewood Mountain Resort is also an airline pilot who splits the year in the south of France.

Indeed, the rat race seems deeply unimportant when you’re eating a gooey chocolate-chip cookie — courtesy of the Wildflour Baking Company, which provides their cookies free to local Olympian gold medalists and me — while riding a tram up a mountain to sit in a giant hot tub. Or when your feet have been bludgeoned by ski boots and you stomp into the artisan West Shore Market, pull and crack a beer from the fridge, order a sandwich and spark up a conversation with whoever sits next to you.

Of course, the illusion that we live here somewhat conflicts with the tickets in my pocket for a midnight flight back to New York. But until then, the sun’s still shining on the lake outside, and in here the superheroes are still very angry. I sprinkle a little garlic powder on my popcorn and head back in, hoping that the final monologue feels interminable.

*Nevada
shares joint
custody of
Lake Tahoe,
playing the
role of the
anything-
goes stepdad
to the hippie
mom that is
California.*