



Bed Hopping

by Nicola Burnell

There's nothing better than a comfortable bed. Except a REALLY comfortable bed!

So when I prepared to leave the soft sheets and blankets of my king-sized nest to spend the Holidays with my family, I was disappointed to find I couldn't get a good night's sleep for almost two weeks prior to my departure.

Pre-vacation lists and anxieties stole my peace. None of my usual calm-me-down routines worked; trading red wine for Sleepytime tea, drops of lavender on the pillow... I knew I'd be bed hopping for the entire Holidays and wanted to clock some Zzzzz before I left.

With less than two hours sleep the night before we flew to London, I staggered onto the plane looking like death warmed over. Excuse the gruesome simile but it was that bad.

I got no sleep on the plane (that's another story) so when I arrived at my sister Sue's house in Surrey, around 9 a.m., I almost cried when she suggested I stay awake until 9 p.m. GMT to face down jet lag. I stared into my coffee mug. My circadian rhythms had gone up the spout weeks ago and I just wanted a bed – any bed.

"I can't do it," I groaned. "I'm going to fall over if I don't get some sleep."

"Then just an hour," Sue warned. "You have to get your body clock in synch or you'll be jet lagged for a week."

My nephew's bottom bunk bed had never looked so good. I flopped under the comforter and was immediately unconscious. When my alarm woke me to the melodious tones of Apologize I felt better, until I stood up. The room started spinning and I wondered how I'd ever make it through the rest of the day.

Coffee, wine, British biscuits and not-seen-you-in-four-years catch up conversation did the trick. Before I fell back into my nephew's bed at 11 p.m., a melatonin melting in my mouth, I took a few moments to stare at the luminescent stars he'd stuck on his ceiling and walls. They were truly relaxing. I felt grateful to him for rolling out his sleeping bag on the floor next to his parents' bed so that I could have a bed to sleep in.

I spent two nights in his single bunk before heading North to my mother's house in Shropshire, where a full sized bed awaited me, until Christmas Eve. My mum had bought a memory foam topper earlier that day and we flopped around like fish trying to unroll it, then cover it with fresh sheets.

"What's that smell?" I asked.

She glanced at the freshly painted chest of drawers beside the door. "I had an onion in here earlier but it smelled awful so I took it out."

I opened the window and hoped the smell would be gone before bedtime. After too much wine I didn't care about the gloss paint aroma that filled the bedroom. It was only when I lay down that I discovered another, more pungent smell. It wasn't the lavender I'd generously dropped on the pillow – this was a chemical concoction.

"Allow foam mattress to air out for at least 24 hours before using," stated the instructions.

I swung open all the windows, loaded up the blankets and tried to ignore the howling winds swooping through the trees. I felt like I was in Wuthering Heights. Around 3 a.m. I gave up trying to sleep and turned on the laptop my sister Jackie had loaned me. I answered emails, designed layout pages for this Winter issue and synched photos from my cell phone to an external hard drive that contained ALL the docs I didn't want to lose should my house burn down while I was away.

"Did you sleep well?" my mum asked when I shuffled into the kitchen to get coffee.

"Bit windy," I replied. "Do you still have onions?"



After three nights the smell began to clear up. My sister Sue was arriving to take over the room so I packed my case and wheeled it around the corner to my sister Jackie's house.

As her bedrooms were already full with family my bed for the next two nights was in the middle of the dining room. I unrolled the brand new Aerobed and plugged in the pump.

"Charge pump for 24 hours before using." Seriously?

The Aerobed fit snugly between the wooden desk and round dining table. I soon surrendered to its surprisingly solid comfort. When I woke up Christmas morning it was almost 9:30 a.m. and not a soul was stirring in the house. By 10 a.m. the living room was crowded with family scarfing down croissants and sipping Bucks Fizz.

The festivities flowed into the night and right through the next day with a family meal at Atcham's historic Mytton and Mermaid. The River Severn had busted her banks and was charging just below the roof of Atcham Bridge outside the windows. The whole country was flooding, but inside we were warm, loud and very happy to be together for the first time in years.

One more night on Jackie's dining room floor then I was wheeling my case back to my mum's house. Eau de gloss paint still lingered in the air but the foam mattress smell was gone. I fell asleep thinking about the family gathering scheduled for the next day. It had been eight years since I'd seen my dad (he was still living in Africa the last time I was in England) and we'd planned a pot luck family reunion.

The afternoon with my dad and his Nigerian side of our family was loud and heartwarming. We took photos and promised to post them on Facebook. Tears flowed as family began to disperse to their homes across England. I couldn't believe it was over.

My case was packed for a night at Bramble Cottage, also in Atcham, where my brother Steve was staying with his family. The drive from my dad's house to the cottage was terrifying as Steve had inherited my dad's need for speed along the winding country roads.

After sharing hilarious tales over Jagermeister served in egg cups (no shot glasses to be found), I set up the Aerobed mattress in the conservatory, one of the 'newer' quarters of the ancient building. I tried to sleep but the walls were creaking. This was the only night sleeping over with my brother's family and I was already missing them. I was woken up at 4 a.m. by a strange sound. I peered into the darkness and saw nothing but a red EXIT sign.

Seconds after I lay back down a long sigh was exhaled about two feet over my face. I screwed up my eyes, ducked under the quilt and hid from whatever was hovering over me. I didn't come up for air until daylight.

"Of course the place is haunted," my brother scoffed. "It was built in the 1700's."

After our goodbyes I settled in for two more nights at my mum's. I spent much of the day designing pages for this Winter issue. It felt good to be reconnected with my American world while sipping tea under the thrashing rain on the roof of my mother's ghost-free conservatory.

On December 30th I packed up again and headed North to Scotland for New Year's Eve with my long-time friend and U.S. traveling companion, Arlene.

I had a choice of beds in Edinburgh. My mum, my sister and I had rooms at Arlene's mother's house while my sons were staying with Arlene and her two much younger boys.

I ended up staying at both places over our four-night visit because while I appreciated the quieter option of Betty's home, I also wanted a night to catch up with Arlene. This meant a conversation marathon at her kitchen table until 3 a.m., resumed over coffee by 9 a.m. the next morning.

I slept on a futon at Arlene's house, nestled in the middle of what had been her sons' bedroom until the day before, and was now in transition to becoming the home office.

I stared up at shelves crammed with books, files and papers, my head inches from a large wooden desk (déjà vu). The only remnants of the children were found in the seasonal mural still claiming the top half of the twenty-foot high walls.

My last night in Edinburgh was spent at Betty's house with my mum and Jackie, after a wonderful bonfire in Arlene's garden with fish and chips for dinner. The perfect way to end our trip.

As I sat in my seat on the plane from Edinburgh to Gatwick, I thought about all the beds I'd slept in and how different they'd been. No matter how little room a family had, they'd rearranged their own nests to make room for us. I was content to lie down wherever I landed, grateful for the hospitality and the company of so many familiar faces.

No matter where I was, I was home, secure in the bosom of family and friends that I don't see enough of.

The first night back in my own bed was amazing. I'd become so used to twin beds and mattresses on floors that I didn't move an inch all night. I woke up to my cat, Travis, stretched out next to me.

Welcome home!



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Nicola has been a Reiki practitioner and Personal Empowerment workshop leader for over fifteen years. She is a member in Letters of the [National League of American Pen Women](#) and is Historian of the Cape Cod Branch.

Nicola is now offering a variety of FUN Events and Writing Retreats on Cape Cod. She is currently developing Writing and Artist Retreats to be held at [Casa della Quercia](#), an historic villa in Northern Tuscany.

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