Turning 50 in grand style without leaving Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Doing nothing is a concept I would like to embrace more often.

A morning bath. That never happens at home.

Reading on the couch while the sun is out. Not a home activity.

Black Bear Inn's lodge from the Snowshoe Thompson cabin. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Ignoring phone messages and emails. More unusual things.

Having breakfast cooked and brought to me. Another rarity.

So, the truth is, I did do things – bathe, read, hot tub, eat, drink and then repeated it all.

Black Bear Inn owner Kevin Chandler called it recharging our batteries. Sue and I both needed it. She much more so because it was her 50th birthday celebration, which means she has

years of recharging to catch up on, unlike some of us.

So often we go out of town to get away from Tahoe. This time we decided to stay in South Lake Tahoe to get a feel for what those millions of travelers to the basin experience each year.

Apparently the Black Bear is a popular place to celebrate milestone birthdays. A couple from Vacaville was staying in one of the rooms in the lodge – it was her 50th birthday.

As a treat for the four of us last Sunday morning, we were brought mimosas to toast the occasion.

I've stayed at the Black Bear once before (bid on the inn at silent auctions) and had eaten breakfast there another time for a food column, so I knew what I was in for when breakfast arrived.

One morning breakfast was brought to the cabin, the next we went to the lodge. It is so filling that lunch was not needed. The plate is full – and these are full-size plates. The flavors are diverse and intense, the presentation spectacular – and neither owner has a background in culinary arts.

They cater to different eating habits – like vegetarians.

The food is so incredibly good that I still say it's the best breakfast in town. The problem is you have to stay overnight to experience it. It's not a bad problem to have, though.

The Snowshoe Thompson cabin exceeded Sue's expectations. It's spacious, without being pretentious. The gas fireplace is visible from the bedroom and living area. TVs are in both rooms. A Jacuzzi tub for two and separate shower occupy the roomy bathroom.

A nice twist in the kitchen is the fresh coffee in the fridge – none of that prepackaged coffee found in most lodging establishments. A full size refrigerator is great. We had snacks that turned into dinner one night. A microwave is the

only apparatus for cooking – which satisfied our needs.

Dinner the first night was at Café Fiore – our favorite restaurant in town. The menu is perfect for meat/seafood eaters like Sue, and the veggie connoisseur like me. Sue loved her lobster pasta dish and my pasta dish was superb.

Besides the entrees, the garlic bread is a must-have. The wine list is one of the most extensive I've seen in the area. And don't leave without having the white chocolate ice cream. Ours came with a candle in it.

There are many things to like about the Black Bear – one is that it's on Ski Run Boulevard. This means it is within walking distance to several really good restaurants. Heavenly Mountain Resort is just up the road and Ski Run Marina, with the Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler, is down the road.

Another thing about the inn is that it makes you feel like you are in Tahoe. Pine trees are everywhere. The woodwork in the buildings is stunning. The décor of each room is different, with many items originating in Texas where the owners came from before opening the inn 11 years ago.

I've been massaging Black Bear Inn guests for years – long before co-owner Jerry Birdwell was elected to the City Council – which means I've been in every room (five in the lodge) and cabin (three, with one a duplex).

This time I wanted to be on the table. My colleague and friend Dawn came to the room to give us each an hour massage. My muscles are still thanking her.

From the table to the lodge we went. It was time for wine and cheese. At 5pm every day it's a bit of a happy hour. It's a great way to meet the other guests, enjoy the large fireplace and ultra comfortable couches.

This area also beckons during other hours of the day because

it is so relaxing. Doors lead to the patio. The sun was shining enough last Saturday to bask outside and read while Sue got her massage.

In the summer the grounds are a spectacular array of color with all the flowers. I remember a couple years ago needing to close the blinds in a room where I was giving a massage because the inn was on either a garden or home tour.

The Black Bear Inn is truly an experience in getting away, even though the drive is only three miles.

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