



Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town

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Years ago, Chris Bohjalian and his wife traded their Brooklyn co-op for a century-old Victorian house in Lincoln, Vermont (population 975). Bohjalian, a bestselling novelist, began chronicling life in that gloriously quirky little village with a wide variety of magazine essays and his newspaper column, "Idyll Banter." These pieces, written over the course of twelve years, are honest, funny, and deeply affecting reflections on the unique idiosyncrasies of small-town life (annual outhouse races) and the universal experiences (our hunger for neighborliness) that unite us all.

Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town Details

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Author : Chris Bohjalian

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From Reader Review Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town for online ebook

Anne says

This collection of newspaper columns written by Chris Bohjalian is a wonderfully enjoyable read. Bohjalian's only direction from his editor was to "write something that would make Vermonters smile." I'm not from Vermont, but these short essays made me smile and sometimes get a tear. Treat yourself to a few of these one or two page tales before bed or work. The author's descriptions of life in New England and his quirky but loving neighbors will brighten your day or help you have sweeter dreams. Of course I loved the beautiful story about his town's love and appreciation of their small library.

Reading these tales made me wish more than ever that I could be half this good at expressing my thoughts and describing my surroundings. Even if you're not a fan of Bohjalian's fiction, you will find this collection of musings delightful.

Lila says

A light easy read. Made me laugh out loud. Sharing his humanity with everyone, life in a small town.

Kate says

"We are a place in which the ladies' auxiliary of the volunteer fire company still holds a bake sale with cream cheese brownies at the polling station each election day, and we vote there with number-two pencils on paper ballots twice the size of diner place mats. We have a preschool that teaches the kids to sing 'I Am a Pizza' in French and brings in a justice of the peace to marry the children's stuffed animals. And every year on the Tuesday after Memorial Day, our elementary school walks en masse to the local cemetery to remember family and friends and, perhaps, find a few rusted G.A.R. stars beside the tombstones of the town's Civil War veterans. We share certain universalities with small towns in Nebraska, New Mexico, and New York: a powerful feeling of kinship; a tolerance for human eccentricity that is often unappreciated; and a glorification of neighborliness for the simple reason that it is easier to be civil than ornery."

~~back cover

Doesn't this sound like a wonderful place to live? Doesn't this sound like a charming book about a wonderful place to live? I thought so too from the description, but reading the book didn't "take me there". It was more like an outsider looking in, and despite the author's assertions that he & his family had lived there long enough to become a part of the town, I suspicion that they may still be "outlanders". Or else his writing just didn't capture the essence of the little Vermont town.

Katie says

I have read many of his novels and I like his writing, so I wanted to check out this book. It 19s a compilation

of his writing from the newspaper contributions he 19s made over the years. He wrote an occasional short story for the Boston Globe, and he had a regular column in the Burlington Free Press. The short stories and columns in this book are all about the simple life he 19s experienced in small-town Vermont. I didn 19t grow up in a big city and while Fallston certainly has a quaint rural feel to it, it 19s nothing like what Bohjalian experiences in his town of Lincoln, Vermont, population 900. This is a quick read, and it 19s easy to pick up in spurts because the chapters are two to six pages long and don 19t carry over into one another. While it 19s a cute book as light and easy reading, it wasn 19t all that great. I much prefer his novels.

Stewart says

Chris Bohjalian and his wife moved from New York City to Lincoln, Vermont, population 975, in 1986, and he wrote a weekly column for the Burlington Free Press from 1992 to 2004. This book compiles some of these columns and longer feature pieces he wrote for the Boston Globe.

I have a special interest in small towns in New England because I lived in four small towns in Maine between 1965 and 1974. I visited Vermont several times -- driving through the spectacular White and Green Mountains -- because a good friend was going to college at St. Michael's in Winooski, near Burlington. The subjects of these pieces range from the community effort to replenish the book supply for the severely flooded town library in Lincoln, the technique of getting maple syrup, and the all-enduring Boston Red Sox fan -- written before the Red Sox finally won the World Series in 2004.

An especially interesting column is called "Why the Green Mountains Turn Red," about the justly famous brilliant leaves of the New England autumn. Bohjalian points out deciduous trees shed leaves because the leaves will be ill-equipped to survive the upcoming cold. "That is, in essence, what we are watching when we gaze at the annual autumnal fireworks in the trees: We are watching leaves die."

Elizabeth says

We know Chris is an empath and a wonderful author from his works of fiction. These short, personal, biographical vignettes give us insights into his home life. They are witty and funny, introspective and full of commentary. I enjoyed the insights. (*I listened to Chris read his own work. He has a good reading voice, too.) This book catches a segment in time of when Chris was living with his wife and daughter in Vermont. They have since moved back to New York City.

Priscilla Herrington says

Chris Bohjalian is one of my favorite authors so that fact that he wrote it is enough to sell me on a book. *Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town* is somewhat different from his other novels - it is a collection of essays, written originally for his small Vermont town's newspaper. And the CD version is read by Bohjalian himself.

The Bohjalian family move to Lincoln VT, a town of fewer than 1,000 people, from Brooklyn NY. This collection of vignettes (and one short story) display his appreciation for his town and its inhabitants. And, for a reader of his novels, there are bits and pieces - interesting incidents - which may have been appearances in one or another of his novels.

It is always interesting to hear what an "outsider" thinks about our small New England towns. And it is especially nice to hear his opinions expressed with love and appreciation.

For anyone who has enjoyed Bill Bryson's books - especially his accounts of small American towns, and his own New Hampshire town in particular - *Idyll Banter* would undoubtedly prove enjoyable. And for fans of *Idyll Banter*, Bryson's *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small Town America* might be a good next read.

Greta says

Being a Bohjalian fan made reading this collection of short essays easier to read. His descriptions of what it is like to live in a very small town are heart warming, largely innocent observations of the neighbors. Back to a full length story by him next, and more adventure.

James says

Enchanting glimpse into the magic of small-town life:)

Bridget says

This is not an especially quick read - mostly due to the fact that it's a compilation of articles that Bohjalian has written in a Vermont newspaper over the years. So while there is some story line, it's not as though you can't put the book down because you need to know what will happen to the main character.

I would describe this book as quiet and gentle. It helped to provide insight into an author that I've read quite a bit of over the past year and a half. While he says his books are all fiction, you can see clear instances in his articles where he's pulled real facts from his town and placed them into his books. You can also tell how much he loves his town and his life and why they consistently play such a large role in his books.

I'm glad I read this but I look forward to getting back into some fiction now.

Eglizard says

Part of my study of newspaper (to which I don't subscribe) columnists.
I wrote a weekly column in high school.

Robert Isenberg says

I am a native Vermonter and am compiling a very similar book about Costa Rica, and I wanted to see how Bohjalian described my home state. Bohjalian has earned a mythic reputation in Vermont and around the world, and although I was less interested in his many novels, this collection has intrigued me for years.

Unlike Bohjalian, I was born and raised in the Green Mountain State and come from a very different demographic. Instead of the New York "flatlander" who moves to Vermont to begin a new life, I grew up as the child of that generation. When Bohjalian moved to Lincoln in the early 1980s, he saw an opportunity to blend the traditional farmers with the influx of urban escapist, and he seems to have succeeded. I appreciated his humility in the face of centuries-old rural families, but I particularly admire his skepticism: He repeatedly notes that the face of Vermont changed rapidly in a few short years, largely due to arrivals like him. Those people (like my parents) often came with pure intentions and have merged gradually into New England culture. Bohjalian is upbeat, but he recognizes many of Vermont's problems. He does not, to my mind, romanticize the hardscrabble lives that many Vermonters live.

That said, Bohjalian's tone is often neurotic, hyperbolic and twee, like a deep-country Dave Barry. He makes absurd comparisons for comic effect, which indicates that the anecdotes aren't really all that funny to begin with. It's a style, and a popular one, that has become worn over time. Many of his topics are of the aw-shucks variety, with tired Boomer references and a shiny life lesson at the end. If Bohjalian were to describe what I'm talking about, he'd probably say something like, "The perspicacious prose nevertheless forced an occasional groan, and as if to reverse the process of boiling maple syrup, he often starts sugary and ends up with sap."

Still, his introduction is wonderful, and his essay about a child with Down's syndrome is both earnest and beautifully observed. (Even if the message is basically just "teens with special needs are people too.") Eighteen years after I left Middlebury for Pennsylvania, I feel that I understand where he's coming from better than I ever could have as a 17-year-old. I will not be modeling my on work on his, but I enjoyed the excursions.

Dianneb says

This book is a series of columns that the author wrote for the Burlington Free Press and The Boston Globe. About his transplanted life from New York City to Lincoln, Vermont. I thoroughly enjoyed it & think anyone from a small town could relate to a lot of these columns. My favorite column is "Why the Green Mountains Turn Red"!

Mary Jo says

I originally checked this book out from our local public library. The essays were so delightful I decided to buy a copy of the book so I could share it with my husband and friends. I have read some of Chris Bohjalian's fiction in the past, loving some and hating others. I may have to revisit some of his books and give him a second chance.

Donna LaValley says

I read a review somewhere describing this as a charming and funny collection of this writer's work as a local columnist. The author has written popular novels, including one chosen by Oprah for her book club. Since I really enjoyed similar collections from Carl Hiaasen, Bill Bryson, Mary Roach, and Garrison Keillor, I fell for the hype and made an impulse buy.

But I didn't fall for it at all – for the “charm” that is. The dozen or more entries I read were very place-specific, and many paragraphs are loaded with the names of local people, alive and dead. Of course a columnist will include the names of local citizens who should be thanked for leadership or participation, so they can see their names in the local newspaper, but this is not compelling reading for someone outside the community.

I spared myself the task of finishing it.

In other words, I would take a pass on this unless you once lived in Lincoln, Vermont...or if you are a major fan of the author and want to read every single thing he published.
