This Idaho B&B offers more than just creature comforts

BY MELANIE D.G. KAPLAN

My beagle Darwin was no stranger to cross-country drives and adventures. During her decade of life, she and I drove from East to West and back multiple times. But one promise went unfulfilled. It was during her final days in 2011 that we sat on the couch and I realized we'd never made it to the big beagle.

Frances Conklin and Dennis Sullivan bought the 30-foot beagle in 2003. Dennis is a chain-saw artist whose big piece — a dog — two decades ago when QVC sold his canine carvings for 18 months. In 2011, he moved his studio to the back of the room, and a dry breeze entered. The smell of varnish, 18 floors, kitchenette, microwave, hair dryer, etc. — the usual amenities — microwaved, hair dryer, etc. — but we couldn't forget for a moment that we were inside a dog.

As we walked into the lobby, we were greeted by Dennis and Frances in the shop. The girls plopped down on the floor and read Heidi's text. "I'm kind of in a daze. I'm in the dog world for the first time."

"Travel well," Dennis said. "And live life for him." Frances talked about the beagle's adoration of beagles and appetite for smiles. The front door was propped open, and the beagle stamp on the rearview mirror and the beagle stamp on the girls' hands. I asked for my own stamp and they gave me the ink dry. We all hugged goodbye.

"Travel well," Dennis said. "And live well." He and Frances stood in the doorway, waving. As Heidi and I hugged, tears streamed down her face. "Thank you for sharing this time with us!!"

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"I asked, after Frances gave us our room key. "The beagle is the most beautiful artistically." Dennis said. "If I did a black beagle, it would just be a black dog."

Heidi, her girls, my own inimitable, pleasing dog and I walked across the property to the beagle and ascended near the hind leg. Steps led us to a balcony in the rib cage area, where we opened a door into what in many ways looked like a typical mid-priced motel room. We found the usual amenities — microwave, hair dryer, etc. — but we couldn't forget for a moment that we were inside a dog.

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TOP: Nicknamed Sweet Willy, the Dog Bark Park Inn was built in 2003 by two artists in northwest Idaho. A smaller wooden dog, Toby, was built next to it. ABOVE: The author's dog lounges in Sweet Willy's snout.

If you go
WHERE TO STAY
Dog Bark Park Inn
2421 Business Loop, Hwy. 95
Cottonwood, Idaho
208-962-3647
doggarkparkinn.com

Season runs April 1-Oct. 31. The inn consists of one room with a kitchenette and loft, and can sleep up to four. The giant beagle fills up quickly, so book early. Double occupancy $98 plus tax, including continental breakfast and WiFi. Pet fee is $15.

— M.K.