

COLUMNS

Connell Sanders: New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill is a solid bid

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My husband is fond of reminding me that when I “win” something in a silent auction, it’s different than winning a raffle. “I’m not delusional,” I tell him. “I know I have to fork over the cash to get the prize. Besides, it’s for CHARITY.”

“Just promise me, you’ll only bid on things we can actually use,” he says.

His concerns are not unfounded. My fiercely competitive nature sometimes gets the best of me. That is precisely how we wound up with a drawer full of expired vouchers for services like “30 minutes of closet organizing” and “goat yoga.”

But, my latest “win” was worth every pen stroke. I am proud to announce that as a result of my earnest bidding skills, we are official members of the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, where wilderness and whimsy collide.

A lot of new moms have encouraged me to get out of the house at least once a day. It’s harder than it sounds. When I made my winning bid, I hoped having a destination like Tower Hill would serve as motivation to restock the diaper bag and load up the car. So far, it seems to be working.

My 10-week-old daughter and I explored the Garden twice last week, first with my dad, and then again with my niece and mother-in-law. Both trips lasted a couple of hours and proved entirely unique.

With dad, I brought along my golden retriever and we hiked the gravel trails around the shade garden. We sought out the immersive land art installations of landscape architect W. Gary Smith. Smith’s sculptures are made of organic materials collected at Tower Hill. My favorite work, constructed from willow branches, floats on the surface of the Wildlife Refuge Pond. Smith succeeds in his quest to channel the “power and grace of water.” Most of all, I

relished the chance to watch my dad cradle my infant daughter at the Rustic Overlook in peace.

On our next visit, my 7-year-old niece led us through the pristine Nadeau Garden and into “The Ramble” — a series of statues, fountains and rock formations. She talked me into entering a conical hut made of sticks on all fours where I promptly got stuck and required rescuing. We spent a while searching for four-leaf clovers on the Central Lawn before retreating to a quiet pavilion where I paused to feed the baby. My level of comfort with nursing has increased over the last couple of months, but I try to be cognizant of my surroundings. Tower Hill had impressed me with prominent signage by the front desk that read, “Breastfeeding Welcome Here.”

A variety of classes take place each day for patrons of all ages. On our recent visit, I spotted a group of 3- to 5-year-olds engaging in circle time as part of a Summer Garden Buds session. Across the lawn, in the Secret Garden, we found a serene yoga class in progress. (No goats.)

My mother-in-law treated us to lunch. I devoured a harvest salad made up of fresh and pickled vegetables grown on the premises. We sat at a table overlooking Wachusett Reservoir and the mountain.

I’ve already talked my husband into coming along on Thursday for the final summer evening beer garden. I can’t tell if he’s more excited about the beer, the garden, or the fact that another silent auction victory has not gone to waste. Either way, he’s in for a treat. We’re Tower Hill people now.

You can reserve a pair of passes to New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill for half-off admission at the Worcester Public Library - visit www.mywpl.org/?q=article/museum-passes. What do you love about New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill? Find me on Instagram at @sarah_connell and let me know.