

Step away from the rush, to solitude at Quiet Corner, and be serenaded

By Jody Grismore Vance

Off a country road and down a lane and into the woods – go there and you will find a tearoom. In the middle of the dining area with curving walls full of windows, under the wooden-beamed roof that reaches up toward the sky, you will find a scaled down baby grand piano. It is a rustic place with a feel of casual elegance.

This tearoom – The Quiet Corner Tea and Coffee Room – is a personal place of relaxing atmosphere that the owners – **Richard and Shirley Rinker** – want to share as much as it is a business. In fact, after talking with Dick Rinker, the argument can be made that it is more a labor of the heart than an economic enterprise.

Why do I begin this piece with gentle talk of mood rather than the specifics of teas and coffees available and sandwiches on homemade bread? I think I do because it is the mood of the place that is actually the chief item on the menu. Sitting in the tearoom in March with the end-of-winter woods stretching outside the windows, a warming fire in a stove and the big comfy rockers that sit outside in summer sitting in storage between the tables, Dick Rinker talks of how he and his wife see the tearoom.

Maybe this is the time to note that the tearoom is not just a place inside walls. It is the environment, and mulched paths run through the woods that in the summer are carpeted with blue wildflowers and, at intervals, are places to sit. So, if you come at a busy time, but want to linger after you have eaten, that's all right. Continue your conversations and visits outside, with the songs of 28 varieties of woodland birds as background.

And speaking of background, maybe this is as good a time as any to talk about how the tearoom came to be. Medical missionaries for eight years in India, Dick and Shirley joined other missionaries during the hot season for a break in the mountains. Dick says, "Visualize sitting in a rocking chair, reading and looking out over the mountains and valleys," and he remembers Shirley's question to him when she read an article about a tearoom that had been started elsewhere: "Dick," she asked, "do you remember all the fun we had at teatime in India?"

Well, with the openness to spontaneity, the tearoom is a place where fun happens. Dick recalls, "We've had ladies come in, sit down at the piano and give us concerts ...and people just love it. One lady who comes up here, we cannot stump her with a song she does not know."

And there is this story: "We had a couple come for their anniversary and a whole group of Polish singers (who were performing in Fort Wayne) had come in as well. They sat and serenaded the couple, even though they had never met them."

Dick talks about how total strangers will start interacting and that almost every day "someone runs into someone they know but haven't seen for years."

Senior groups come and about a thousand "Red Hats" have visited the tearoom – and Dick laughs and says, "They found us." They encourage writers, photographers and artists to visit. **Dailey Fogle**, retired from a city newspaper comes out. Dick says, "He is still going and comes down and walks out on crutches and photographs things."

Dick says they tell everyone that the tearoom is not a fast food place and announce, "You are entering a slow food zone." The menu instructs you to ask about daily specials, but you can count on a choice of tuna, ham or chicken salad on homemade bread. Dick says, "I have baked every loaf of bread (from an original recipe) that we have served here."

The house specialty when it comes to tea – the signature tear, if you will – is Authentic Indian Chai—grown in the Nilgiri fields in South India. Dick says it is the special chemistry of that soil which gives the tea its special flavor.

In addition to bagged teas and loose leaf teas, including Formosa Oolong, which is described in the menu with the phrase "to go where no man has gone before," there are regular coffees, hot chocolate, steamers, espresso, latte, and cappuccino.

Summer specials include Coffee Freezes with flavors like toffee and fudge and chocolate and cookies-n-cream. The other selection features Fruit Tea Blasts in peach, mango, berry berry or strawberry.

And, of course, you can get pastries.

Dick says that the waitresses are drawn from a group of girls who have a service attitude – one that goes beyond just putting food and drink on a table. He says, "Almost every kid that is working for us this summer is going to summer mission somewhere. So customers (through tips) are actually helping to send them over. One of girls from last year is going to China this year and some this year are taking 2 or 3 weeks for a summer mission—that's the kind of girls that work here."

Quiet Corner also has hosted wedding receptions and anniversaries and special tea parties for mothers and daughters. They also have a special night with a special menu and special movie – "Somewhere in Time"—which was set in the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island where the Rinkers enjoyed tea in the lobby to the music of piano and violin.

This evening is a special nod to the idea of the tearoom being a couple's ministry – a place for them to come out and relax and get re-acquainted.

On another evening, they showed the movie "Shadowlands" – the story of C.S. Lewis' marriage and Dick says he asked a local fan of Lewis', **Dr. John Ramsey** from Albion, to give a talk about him. "People loved it," he adds.

The Rinkers have been kept very busy but Dick says, "It's been so much fun we don't look at the work. We've met so many neat people—we have met people from as far away as Japan and people in Fort Wayne keep calling us up and saying 'So and so is visiting from out of state and we want to bring them out...'"

The phone number for Quiet Corners is 260-693-2202 and the hours are Tuesday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Okay, that was the easy part – now how to get there. They have a map on the back of their cards, but it tells you to turn at a certain church – and it burned down last year.

I looked the address 3242 East 500 S -57, Churubusco, IN 46723 up on the Internet and decided to do this: I went to the intersection of 205 and Hwy 3 and turned west on 205. I passed on through LaOtto and turned onto 500 South. You then go until the road ends at a "T" intersection – do a quick dogleg, turning left, then right and continue on to 3242.

Or you can travel on U.S. 33 north, out of Churubusco until you come to 300E, where there's a small sign for Quiet Corner. Turn right and go to 500S, then turn right again, to 3242.

It's also on the county map in this FUN Guide. I would suggest looking it up yourself, from where ever you're coming from.