

Going with the grain

Corn Maze is in full swing

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GABRIELS - "Aunt Carla, can you move out of the way so Uncle Tom can take my picture?" asked my 8-year-old niece, Alanni Cabrera, after she found out I would document her inaugural trip through the Great Adirondack Corn Maze for posterity. "I want him to follow directly behind me so he can take lots of pictures."

And just like that, a star was born. Heaven help us.

As soon as I found out Alanni and her 3-year-old sister, Melina, would be in town for the afternoon Sunday, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity for us to visit the Great Adirondack Corn Maze at Tucker Farms Incorporated. Given the blue skies, sunshine and mild temperatures that greeted us at the farm Sunday, it turns out I was right.

When we arrived at the maze, the girls were captivated by the aerial photograph of this year's design, "Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head Vacation in the Adirondacks," the Tuckers had placed in front of their ticket counter. We were given a game piece and told that eight mailboxes were hidden throughout the maze containing one puzzle piece each, along with some Scotch tape. If we collected each of the puzzle pieces and affixed them to our game piece, we would have a complete map of the corn maze with which to find our way out. Although I'd heard of other, more advanced games associated with the maze - like wall-follower, pledge algorithm and random mouse - I figured we'd stick to the basics for our first trip, which turned out to be for the best.

Alanni and Melina both had a chuckle when they saw the rock labeled "Buttcheeks" near the maze's entrance, given its clear resemblance to its namesake. We told Alanni to lead the way while Melina held the game piece and followed, and we would bring up the rear. Alanni hurriedly darted ahead, exploring the maze's winding branches in an effort to find the elusive eight mailboxes containing the pieces of the map. She was a good leader, slowing down when necessary to allow the rest of her party to catch up and stopping to pose for the camera every couple of feet.

"Uncle Tom, take my picture in front of this cornstalk," she said. "Uncle Tom, get a picture of me standing in the middle of the path.

"Uncle Tom, let's ask somebody to take a picture of all of us because you aren't in any of the pictures and it's not fair."

Melina, though much younger, clearly got a kick out of the attention as well, smiling and giggling whenever she noticed the camera on her, although she was more fascinated by the random ears of corn dotting the landscape than anything else. She must have shucked six or so ears along the way, and she seemed a little surprised and delighted each time she pulled back their leaves to reveal a corncob inside.

After about an hour-and-a-half or so of walking, we had found four pieces of the puzzle. That was when the girls announced they had to use the bathroom. We walked along the edge of the maze

until we found one of its built-in "escape paths" and returned to the parking lot, where the bathrooms resided.

We then treated ourselves to a little snack at the concession stand the Tuckers operate, and Alanni and Melina began playing with a few of the toy dump trucks situated near a large dirt mound by the maze's exit. I figured we were done for the day, but Alanni was determined to find the rest of the game pieces and complete the puzzle. We entered from the exit this time, as Alanni wanted to see something new, and we resumed our search.

After another hour spent navigating the maze's labyrinthine paths, we managed to locate one more puzzle piece, but time was not on our side. We had started at about 4 p.m., and the sun was rapidly setting. Although it was one of the maze's special "flashlight nights" in which people can navigate by flashlight, we hadn't planned for that and figured it was best to call it a day while we could still find our way out.

"Well, ladies, I think this adventure has run its course," I said. "You both did a great job, and I'm proud of you."

We exited through the nearest "escape path," and I told Alanni I was going to interview her for the newspaper, just like a movie star.

I opened with a softball question, asking, "What did you think of the maze?"

"Fun," Alanni answered.

I hadn't expected a one-word answer. She was good, I'll give her that. I redoubled my efforts.

"What was fun about it?" I asked.

"I liked running around and picking up the corn," she said, adding that her favorite parts were seeing a giant rock with "Rock 105" painted on it and another boulder with a flower painted on it.

"Which one did you like better?" I asked, intrigued.

"The flower rock," she said.

"Why did you like it better?" I inquired.

"Because it had a flower on it," she answered, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

While I was busy conducting Alanni's exit interview, Melina was busy eating a blue ring pop. In the interests of writing a balanced article, I decided to ask her the same questions I had asked Alanni, but she seemed more interested in the ring pop than in answering my questions.

"What did you think of the maze?" I asked her.

"Corn," she said. Corn indeed.

"Did you have fun?" I said, trying to redirect the course of the conversation.

"Mmm-hmm," she answered.

"What was your favorite part?" I asked, but her only reply was a short burst of laughter. "That ring pop is pretty cool, right?" I asked, but it was clear the interview was over.

Not even in double-digits yet and already stonewalling journalists - these kids are going to go far, mark my words.

All in all, the great Adirondack Corn Maze is a wonderful place to take children who enjoy exploring the outdoors. Families with younger kids will probably want to give themselves a good three or so hours to find all of the mailboxes, especially if they're adventurous enough to let the youngsters take the lead. Tucker Farms will operate the Great Adirondack Corn Maze through the end of October.