

## Door County, Wisconsin

When we lived in northern Illinois more than 30 years ago, we made a number of trips to Door County, sometimes with the Siewerths, our best friends in Crystal Lake. The county is the thumb that sticks out from the eastern part of the state, pointing to the northeast, bordered by Green Bay to the west and Lake Michigan to the east. To us, fall is the best time to visit, with the colors at its peak, a time of harvesting of apples, cherries, peaches, grapes, etc. New England may claim to have the best fall foliage, but Door County certainly rivals it. You witness some life cycles, such as lake trout spawning to create new life, before dying. Door County is a very unique place, an area I would call one of the last slices of Americana. Not having stayed there for a while, we made a sentimental trip in early September.

Here's a few things unique about Door County. There are no fast food chains in the part of Door County that I consider its heart and soul. Maybe the local variety, but not any of the most popular. The top three franchises, consisting of a hamburger chain, a sandwich shop and overpriced coffee total more than 50,000 just in the USA. But mercifully, Door County has been spared, with the exception of Sturgeon Bay. Sorry, I am not including Sturgeon Bay as part of its uniqueness. Take Czarnuszka, a soup bar in Ephraim, one of a string of villages on the Green Bay side of the peninsula. The proprietor is a tall fellow named Paul, who serves home made soup and sandwiches. He has limited hours, makes only a given quantity of four soups, which frequently runs out. The place is tiny, with two tables inside and three outside. As the name implies, it has a Polish connection, with pictures, painting and mementoes from Poland. We recognized some pictures of Krakow's Market Square. Paul indicated that he lived in Krakow, but I found it odd that he didn't have any kind of accent. It turns out that he is originally from Green Bay, but had fallen in love with everything Polish, learned the language, lived there and came back to open Czarnuszka. By the way, the soups are very good. TripAdvisor gives it 5 stars. Where else but Door County can you find a soup establishment with a rating of 5 stars?

The fish boil is another of Door County's traditions. The story is that during the early pioneer days, the Scandinavian lumberjacks had to be fed copious amounts of cheap, nutritious, easy to prepare food. Since the surrounding waters of Green Bay and Lake Michigan were flush with fish, what could be easier than boiling enormous amounts of freshly caught fish? No culinary skills are required, throw the fish, potatoes and vegetables in a large pot of boiling water. Fifteen minutes later, the lumberjacks had a meal. Call it Scandinavian Mulligan stew. Today, it is a tourist attraction, just like the Hawaiian luau. Of course, someone had to add a colorful flair. When the fish is done, the chef cum guide throws a can of kerosene into the fire. A huge ball of flame envelopes the pot, some of the water overflowing to quench the wood fire. I doubt that the lumberjacks required this step, but it is a nice photo shoot.

Sister Bay is another one of the villages. There is a Scandinavian restaurant there with a sod roof. To keep the grass trimmed, the owner has four white goats on the roof. It is a traffic stopper. You are driving along and all of a sudden you see these goats munching on the grass. Like any tourist, you do a double take and try to find a parking space so you can shoot a cellphone camera moment. The grass looks like an advertisement for Scott's lawn fertilizer, lush

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and green. The goats serve as trimmers and fertilizers. We didn't have time to try the Swedish cuisine, but will make sure we do, next trip. TripAdvisor reviews are all effusive.

There is no lack of eating or drinking establishments in Door County, But here's what you won't find - Chinese buffets and pizza parlors. These two seem to be the backup meal providers for much of America, but not in Door County, thank goodness. There are numerous orchards and at least six wineries in Door County. Their products, from wine, jellies, jams, dips and spreads, etc. are made from local fruit. Even their mugs are homemade, not made in you know where.

Besides fast food, hotels and motels define the American landscape. With an economy dependent on tourism, Door County has its share of places to stay. But the similarity ends there. Again, there are no chains. Ok, Sturgeon Bay is the usual exception. Every hotel is unique in its size and shape. There is some commonality, reminding me somewhat of New England. They are typically wood, painted white, with steep roofs, often with a porch. Some look like a scaled down version of the Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island. The grounds, even when small, are immaculately groomed, lined with colorful perennial and annual flowers. Breakfast is usually included, but it is not the cold cereal plus food service plastic eggs and rubberized meat you'll find at even the better chains. Everything is homemade, from the muffins to the omelets. The owner is there to greet you, providing pointers for the day's excursions. Our host Mike told us about Czarnuszka, then made reservations for us at the Fish Boil. There is an afternoon snack, also baked in the kitchen.

Don't ever change, Door County. If I may, I'd like to borrow and paraphrase a popular song from the 50s.

*"Lovely.....never, never change  
keep that perfect charm  
won't you please arrange it?  
cause I like you  
just the way you are today"*  
Please.

Mario E. Orosa  
September 8, 2016

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Door County Hotel



Sunset on Eagle Harbor, Ephraim