*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic)* Inter-County Leader

**Finding friends was easy**

My biggest fear in moving to the Northwoods from Milwaukee was not knowing anybody.

We lived in our neighborhood of Milwaukee for 13-plus years and hardly knew any of our neighbors. The first time we struck a conversation with the neighbors across the street was on the day that we were moving out. Lo and behold, we have more friends now than we ever had. In the two years that  we have lived here, we’ve met so many great folks that we consider friends in such a short period. We’re very fortunate indeed. The good Lord has been kind to us since the move. It is really a blessing indeed.

I’ve met 20-some barbershop brothers since I joined the Indianhead Chorus. The cooking classes that I taught have many new students whom I am still trying to match their faces with their names. Then, our friendly neighbors. First, it was Irene and Robin across the lake; and then Paul and Janet down the street from us. My wife and I are beyond words. How come the folks up here are so warm and friendly and so accommodating? Whatever the reason, we are totally enjoying the hospitality of the local folks. Most grateful indeed.

We met Paul and Janet from the Petal Pusher, down the road, the summer that we moved in.

My wife was planning to have a garden in the front yard and was looking for different ideas. We followed the tiny green signs on the roadside that led to their home. My  word, we were totally taken aback by the beauty of their garden. There were different colors of gorgeous flowers, with different plants with names that I didn’t know. We introduced ourselves to the owners, Janet and Paul Supplee, and we just hit it off immediately.

Paul is a pastry chef and I am in the culinary business; we started to talk shop, just to find out that he has more award-winning medals than I. My wife, Colleen, loves flowers and plants, so she and Janet started chatting. Later, Paul revealed that he is also a potter, owning a studio named Bog House Pottery. Colleen is a potter too, besides being a painter and jeweler. Don’t remember how long we were there, but we left with our car loaded with flowers and plants. I think I paid for some of them and the rest were housewarming gifts.

Goodness, we hardly knew those folks.

Colleen started to tell me why their flowers/plants are different than those in the nursery/market. They are cheaper and healthier. Don’t know much about plants, but the word ‘cheaper’ sounds wonderful. Then she started to tell me that Janet has a passion for what she does, and she loves to share her knowledge with anyone and everyone. She actually dug out the plants from her yard to sell them to strangers, hoping they would find a good home. She would plant  a mother plant, just being able to give or sell the baby plants. Colleen was so excited about the plants that we were going to have in our garden — hepatica, trillium, bloodroot, wild ginger, jack in a pulpit ... all Greek to me.

It was interesting to find out that besides all the medals that Paul won, he also worked in the White House during the Clinton administration. Oh my! He was trained in Switzerland in the ‘80s and a graduate of CIA. No, not the spy agency, but the culinary institute. Being a pastry chef, you’ve got to be creative, love working with your hands, and enjoy baking. That’s why he is a potter too. He makes all kinds of pottery — coffee cups, birdhouses, water pitchers, just about anything. There is a certain trace in his artwork with his signature on it; yet every piece is different. I can relate to that. Even though I created the recipes for my students, I never cook the same meal twice. All depends on the ingredients that I have, and what mood I am in. Paul told me that baking is an art as well as a science. You would follow the procedures, yet each batch is always unpredictable. One thing that hits me, he said, “I do what I like, I don’t worry about what other people think.” Is that a statement from a true artist? I play piano and sing with my guitar. When I sing, I just close my eyes and sing what I feel and how I feel, couldn’t care less what the audience thinks of me. Never knew that baking can be of the same principle.

Being in the corporate world all these years, Paul found his freedom and passion in doing his own thing. Same with me, I enjoy teaching cooking classes, doing something I enjoyed in my past life. I was a chef, a restaurant consultant and an adjunct professor. But now, I can combine all those passions in just being a cooking instructor.

Paul loves to play chess, and so do I. We have had our friendly battles. This is indeed a great game. How else would you be smiling, seeing your opponent being destroyed and on his knees? We still remain friends. Amazing.

Where have all the flowers gone? Go to their yards and find out.