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

**Beer, brats and fish fry: What's not to love about Wisconsin food?**

For some strange reason, most folks that I know here were born in Wisconsin and have lived in Wisconsin their whole life. Maybe they have moved to other cities in the state in their younger years; or heaven forbid, outside Wisconsin. However, after graduation or after getting married, they moved back and live not far from the house where they were born. Some even live in the same house (or barn) all their lives and have never lived anywhere else. What a blessing in disguise!

Knowing that getting old and losing your senses is part of the game; I could be losing my eyesight one day and without using a cane or with the help of a seeing-eye dog, I would know my way to the closest country store to get my moonshine for the week. With some brats and beers and onions, I’ll be set. Simple life indeed, but what a life!

I’ve moved my family around the country a few times. It was fun and exciting at first, and then it just got old. So, from southern California, we moved to Arlington, Texas, for three years. Then to Atlanta, Georgia, for three years; and finally ended up in Wiss-conn-son, the end of the rainbow.

Before we moved up here, I was told that Wisconsin is indeed a beautiful state, known for its 3 B’s, brats, beer and bowling. And of course, the Friday fish fries, among other local specialties like cheese curds and lutefisk.

Goodness, coming from Hong Kong, I thought I had my share of eating crazy things, roasted water cockroaches, steamed rice worms with eggs, steamed cow brains (ugh!) and whatever my Pao Pao would put on the dinner table, claiming that they were good for brains. Maybe I yam what I yam. I didn’t eat enough “healthy” stuff she cooked. But no regrets. Either I was growing up to be a dummy or to be anorexic. A tough decision indeed. Maybe I should eat more cow brains? I don’t know.

Before the move to Milwaukee, I was told about the Friday fish fry. That it is a tradition here every Friday. A restaurant is not a restaurant unless you offer a fish fry on Friday evenings.

Of course, the main dish is the cod, served either in a beer batter or baked; comes with pancake, apple sauce, rye bread with butter, tartar sauce, and of course, with a double brandy Manhattan. Besides cod, there will be fried smelt, walleye, lake perch, bluegill … and whatever.

Slowly, I learned that it is a tradition back from the Prohibition days. The taverns couldn’t serve liquor then, and on Good Friday, the Catholics weren’t allowed to eat red meat; so, the tavern owners started serving fried fish, which turned out to be fish fry; and it has become a tradition on every Friday.

The supper clubs (or underground diners) would offer them as their main attraction every Friday evening for the locals. I’ve heard that there is a supper club in Sheboygan that if I ever want to eat there on a Friday, there would be a two-hour wait for a table. But no one has ever complained!

While you are waiting for your table, you can wait at the bar and enjoy a double brandy Manhattan at half price! So, maybe that’s $3.50 for the drink? So, the longer you wait, the merrier you get. When your table is ready, you’ll be all smiles. What a happy Friday indeed.

Then we discovered cheese curds. Goodness, I never thought that it would be such a specialty.

Then, of course, we learned about the brats, which is a short term for bratwurst. They are as popular as hot dogs at any baseball game, and I’ve learned to love them. With sauerkraut on a toasted bun with mayo and mustard, that can be the hit at any baseball game. Who needs Cracker Jacks and candy bars?

I learned the secret of cooking brats, with slow heat and lots of patience. Most of all, a pot with boiling beer and sliced onions. Don’t be a fool, drink half the beer first before using the other half for cooking the onions and the brats. After the brats are removed from the boiling water and onto the grill, slowly grill them till they turn brown. Then, on a toasty bun, add mayo and mustard, the grilled brat and top with the sauteed onion. After the first bite, I fell in love with Wisconsin.

There are so many things that we have to learn, living in Wisconsin.

* What’s a stop-and-go light?
* What is a bubbler?
* Is supper the same as dinner?
* Does “hunting we’ll go” apply to all sports?

Regardless, I love living here in the Northwoods.