

A Superior View...

by Shelley Russell

The first day I arrived in Michigan's Upper Peninsula my host stopped for gas in Negaunee. Sparkling blue eyes dominated the kindly face that asked us if we wanted the car "filled to da brim?" Had I been transported to some Scandinavian port town or possibly the coast of Wales? The breeze was chilly enough to support my suspicions. It was May, 1983. Teal Lake was living up to its name and the grey rock and evergreens lining the road to Marquette seemed painted by an inspired hand. We drove straight through town to the lake, viewing the bay and still icy shoreline from the parking lot of Thills Fish Market. My eyes took in the ice buildup on the beach, the boats in their protective winter casings, the lighthouse, the old Frazier boathouse and the lake, which was pearl grey, eerily beautiful.

Over the years it's been my great, good luck to view much more of this amazing region. A block away from the bay East Marquette seems eternally dressed for a Victorian picnic, with its lovely, large, sunny porches and wildflower gardens. A walk north offers art galleries, family businesses, marvelous specialty shops, wonderful restaurants, small healthy delis, and peaceful tree-lined streets. A bit further and it's a world of quiet family homes, not-so-quiet frat houses, noisome school yards of youthful spirits, and finally, an impressive array of educational and medical facilities. Continue into northwest Marquette, and you see a community which sprawls with environmentally conscious and distinctive homes with wildly wooded "yards," some so secret you'd barely notice the entrance. Then come full circle to South Marquette and enter an earlier, kinder era, overrun with lilac, honeysuckle and friendly old maple trees, where small parks and a community baseball diamond offer a shy view of Lake Superior, and where most people know the neighbors' kids' hockey numbers, and all the dogs' names and treat preference.

But dear old culturally rich Marquette is just the beginning. The Eastern U.P. is well represented by the Grand Hotel's porch, which faces the great lake with calm acceptance and simple grandeur. The Soo locks, with their great lake boats and marvelous restaurants should be experienced, and then enjoyed again and again. And just when you think you've seen the most impressive scenery the Lake has to offer, you arrive at Whitefish Point, with its craggy beauty, a constant reminder of the region's glorious and dangerous history.

And across the U.P. such rich discoveries await. From Munising's shoreline to Newberry and the Tahquamenon Falls, to Seney's wildlife (very wild, we hear!), the scenery is only outshone by the stories about it. And so the entire U.P. is both home and journey, from the magnificent entrance of the Mackinaw Bridge to the Porcupine Mountains and the Copper Country, our wild and beautiful back yard. The history is rich, the culture varied and wonderful, and the land itself is simply beyond compare.

The area is beautiful, unspoiled, strong, unique. A walk around Marquette is a little like visiting the U.P.'s distinctive and subtly different areas. Take a walk or a ride in any direction. You might find the character slightly different, like the geography. But in every corner you will hear a strong, living pulse. It is the Native drum, a heartbeat which remains strong in every corner of this proud region. It is a human impulse, which maintains life during harsh winters and unpredictable summer months. It is a respect for nature, a real connection, not just words in an urban marketing plan. It is faith in the human ability to become better, to grow wiser, to learn from each other. It is love of all of these things. It is the U.P.