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Travel



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SUN-TIMES



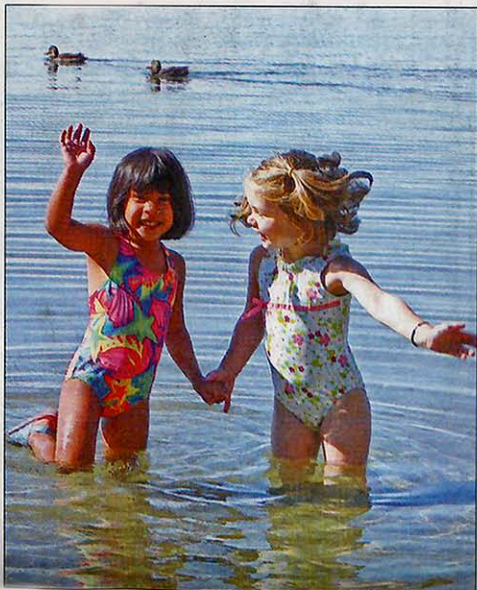
Summer guests gather on Margy Long's front porch in Hessel, Mich. Margy runs an informal B&B at the family home, furnished in casual mid-20th century furniture.

LITTLE HOUSE ON THE LAKE



Avery Point, on Lake Huron, is named for early summer resident and millionaire businessman Sewell Avery.

Lisa Pelkey and Aria Sutton splash in Lake Huron on a beach in Hessel, which is part of the Les Cheneaux Islands. Summer visitors can enjoy a traditional vacation on the beach or take advantage of the burgeoning tourist area's other activities.



REUNION | Old friends relive childhood memories on Michigan's Upper Peninsula

BY ANNE Z. COOKE

HESSEL, Mich. — Margy's summer cottage looked just as I remembered, though it was years since I'd been there.

The same rural lane turned off the highway through a stand of tall pines, a forest so quiet and cool it seemed lost in time. Lake Huron gleamed through the undergrowth, silvery streaks winking between the branches. As the road ended, the Raymonds' turn-of-the-century log cabin, enlarged many times since, appeared.

Margy, our host for this impromptu high school reunion on Michigan's eastern Upper Peninsula, met us with smiles and hugs. The years dropped away.

If you're born and bred in the shadow of the North Woods, you know what HOMES stands for. The ultimate test for any true son — or daughter — of the Upper Midwest, it was one of my dad's most predictable riddles, usually produced toward the end of a long car trip.

Where's home with an s? he'd ask, grinning at the three of us, squeezed together in the back seat. Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior! we'd chant.

To us, living in Evanston, most of those lakes were just names. But not Lake Michigan, a few blocks away. Its sandy shores and gentle waves were our personal inland ocean. Many's the hot summer's day we spent at the beach, ignoring the boys and splashing in the lake. Even better were the sunny August weeks we spent with my grandmother at Loon Lake near Cecil in Wisconsin. Her green-roofed cottage, shaded by birch trees, had a screened porch, a cold-water pump that wheezed when you cranked it, a two-seater out-house and a narrow pier that ran out into the lake.

Eventually I discovered that thousands of lakes spangle the great North Woods, like city lights on a dark night. But Lake Huron was a mystery — until Margy joined our circle of friends.

When school let out for the summer, Margy and her family headed for their cottage in Hessel on Lake Huron. Here, deep in the woods and with few neigh-

FROM THE COVER



Woods & Water Ecotours leads outings through the Les Cheneaux Islands, Mich. | PHOTO COURTESY WOODS & WATER ECOTOURS

HESSSEL | Residents have adapted to growth in tourism

bors, the Raymonds changed their skins. They lived in their bathing suits. They picked blueberries. They cruised the bay on their speed boat. They water skied straight off the dock, a stunt I envied.

Mr. Raymond, an enthusiastic fisherman, kept the frying pan sizzling. And the Raymonds were generous to a fault. Each June after school closed, they invited the bunch of us to join Margy for a week on the lake.

What better place, then, for six high school friends to meet once again, laugh over the past, update the present and, for me especially, see how Hessel had survived the decades?

A little less simple

Thirty years ago, summer in Hessel was a simple affair. Adults dunked in the lake, sunned on the sand, picked flowers in the meadows and read fat novels on the front porch. Kids were free to roam the woods and play in the lake.

But as tourism has grown here in Clark County, population about 2,000, residents have felt — and adapted to — the change. Both Hessel and neighboring Cedarville, now called the Les Cheneaux Islands, cater to summer visitors with restaurants, snack shops, motels, cottages, B&Bs, gift stores, boat docks and sports rentals.

The most recent trend is especially timely: concern for the environment here in what the Nature Conservancy has dubbed a last-best place. The Oliver and Edna Birge Nature Preserve, with its winding nature trail, occupies former land owned by the Birge family, long-time summer residents. Oliver Birge, a friend of Margy's mother, donated it for public use, protecting it from future development.

But if you want to know more about what's happening, talk to Jessie Hadley, said Margy. She's done her best to cultivate and enhance a love of nature, sans jet skis and snowmobiles.

Hadley, 37, owner of outdoor outfitter Woods & Water Ecotours, lives year-round in Hessel. In summer she kayaks and hikes and in winter she explores on snowshoes. The go-to girl for information about local history,

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE: Hessel-Cedarville is on the eastern Upper Peninsula, 450 miles from Chicago. Drive east on I-90, northeast on I-94, north on I-96 (at Benton Harbor) and north on US 131 to Exit 180 (east of Cadillac). Turn east on Michigan 55, north on US 127 and north on I-75 and continue 15 miles to Exit 359 and M134, the turnoff for Hessel-Cedarville. Continue 14 miles to Hessel.

LODGING: A double room at Raymond Cottage with breakfast costs \$125 a night or \$75 for a single, (906) 484-3954; Sunset Bay Cabins, (906) 484-3913; Lakeview Motel & Cottages, (906) 484-2474.

DINING: The Hessel Bay Inn at the harbor, (906) 484-2460. Snows Bar and Grill in Cedarville serves good burgers, (906) 484-1203.

RECREATION: Woods & Water Ecotours, 20 Pickford Ave., (906) 484-4157 or www.woodswaterecotours.com. Ask about camping, available in the general vicinity, near Search Bay Beach and near St. Martin's Point. For the Hiawatha National Forest, west of Hessel, see www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/hiawatha.

MORE INFO: www.hunts-upguide.com/hessel.html, www.lescheneaux.org, www.lescheneaux.net/lodging.html and www.greatwaters.net.

guided sightseeing, wilderness places and conservation on the eastern end of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, she's on deck all year at her tour center and gear shop in Hessel.

The Nature Conservancy saw what was happening, she said. They bought private land and transferred it to local preservation agencies, saving it from development. People who are into wilderness, or natural history or geology, or kayaking and camping, or just sightseeing, can find some amazing places around here.

During the busy summer season when the lake water warms up, Hadley's staff lead guided half-day, full-day and multi-day ecotours on water and land, from kayaking and canoeing through the Les Cheneaux Islands archipelago, to hiking on the Peninsula. Trip themes include birding, botany, geology, cave tours, moonlight paddles, cave tours and biking adventures.

I'm small enough that I can customize an entire trip for a couple or a family, and if they're interested, I'll even book lodging, she said.

Her store and rental shop in Hessel (it's the big red house



GREG GOOD-SUN-TIMES

stove and big enough to seat eight at the table.

Upstairs, seven small bedrooms paneled in fir have twin or double beds, dressers and closets. Some bedrooms share a bathroom; some have a private bath. Family photographs, watercolors, posters and photos of friends and favorite fishing boats of yore recall the Raymonds' early years here.

A covered front porch, running the length of the house, overlooks Lake Huron, with Marquette, Goat and Long islands on the horizon and Avery Point in the near distance. There, and on some of the larger islands, summer residents from Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit have owned family cottages for a century. Some are now operated as seasonal B&Bs; lists of these are available on local Web sites (see related story).

Even if you don't stay at Margy's, pack a picnic lunch and spend a day at her favorite stretch of shoreline: a gently curving arc of white sand known as Sandy Beach. This primo location, ideal for jogging and building sand castles, is about eight miles east, past Cedarville, on Lake Huron Scenic Drive (Michigan 134). While you're there, explore the sand dunes — a popular spot with local photographers.

Our week was gone in a moment but felt like forever. We hiked in the woods behind the house, compared book clubs, talked politics to death, discussed ex-husbands and laughed over the photographs in our high school graduation yearbook. We shopped for presents for family members and swam in the lake. We skipped the water skiing, but we walked on the beach and tossed endless tennis balls to Margy's dog.

Our reunion was a much-needed shot in the arm. So wonderful, in fact, that we're doing it again this year, this time in Colorado.

We've gone our different ways, but it hasn't mattered. Growing up in the same town, with the same neighbors and in the same schools, forged a lifelong bond. As did our long ago summers in Hessel's North Woods.

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with the yellow trim) sells top-quality outdoor gear, clothes, camping equipment and kayaks, and rents kayaks, canoes, paddle boats, wet suits, mountain bikes and other sports gear.

A needed respite

After Margy and her brother inherited the house, they continued to invite cousins and friends to visit. Then, during one especially busy summer, when Hadley was having trouble finding lodging for a tour group, Margy volunteered as a host. Since then, she's run a sort of informal B&B, hosting travelers during some summer weeks.

If you're staying at Margy's, you can swim in front of her house. Below the lawn there's a small beach made up of half rocks and half sand.

The house, furnished with classic mid-20th century casual furniture, has a spacious and comfortable living room with a huge stone fireplace, shelves stuffed with books and a large dining room. The butler's pantry, with shelves of glasses and stacks of dishes, connects the dining room to a large kitchen, equipped with a commercial-size