

Cranberries and Love

It was the kind of crispy, sparkling October day in Northern Wisconsin that stays in your heart and you eventually have to tell others the story six years later. In 1999 I headed the little red Cavalier northward and made the 6 hour trip from my Hardin Avenue duplex in Freeport, Illinois, to the beautiful home of my son, Larry, and his wife, Ellen, on an island on Holcomb Lake, about 13 miles south of Ladysmith, Wisconsin.



We spent a part of the next day at a ski area and rode the lift to the top of a local mountain. Now, mountains in Wisconsin do not begin to compete with the mountains in Virginia but, as far as Wisconsin mountains go, this one was impressive. We dangled high above the mountainside and marveled at the glorious show of color as far as the eye could see in the crystal clear sunshine. There was a brisk breeze and those lift chairs gave us a thrilling ride. Ellen walked back down the hill with Emma, then a toddler, just to wear her out so sleep would come easier, while Larry and I braved the lift chairs again. Ellen's great supper was welcome at the end of the day.

Festival Day dawned bright and clear and the frost in the meadows and road ditches glistened as the morning sun worked its way over the horizon and we headed to Northwestern Wisconsin for the annual Cranberry Festival at Stone Lake, Wisconsin.

STONE LAKE
CRANBERRY FESTIVAL
1999

Friday October 1st Saturday October 2nd

\$1.00 Parking and Free Shuttle Service

Festival Raffle Tickets
Available at
Cranberry Booth
Drawings Hourly
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.
October 2nd

Cranberry Week
• Thursday - September 30rd
Cranberry Week \$1.00 (Adult \$2.00)
• Friday - October 1st
Lunch and Lunch and 10 Home
Bake-Off Contest Cranberry Booth, 3 PM
..... 4 PM (Adult)
Music Stone Island, 7:00 PM
• Saturday - October 2nd
Favorite Breadroll 10:00 AM - 11 PM
Home Show (10:00) Stone Lake High, 10:00
Market Tours And Close at 10:00 PM
Raffle 7 PM
Street Entertainment 6:00 PM
Coke Party 9:00 PM

**Arts & Crafts
Food Booths
Flea Market
Farmers Market
Street Entertainment
Children's Games**

Join in the **FUN**
GOOD FOOD!
GOOD FRIENDS!
GOOD TIMES!

• **CRANBERRIES** •
• **CRANSAVES** •
• **BAKE GOODS** •

This little village boasts just over 500 residents but 30,000 people arrive for the one-day festival. They actually divert traffic around the town and all the streets are filled with craft displays, food vendors and throngs of happy festival guests. The pastures bordering the town serve as parking lots. Thousands of pounds of cranberries and craisins are bagged and ready for market.

Little Emma happily rode her daddy's shoulders as we roamed the town and visited most of the booths. A few purchases were made, then we arrived at a building where folks were selling chili in bread bowls. I had never seen chili served that way and it was **SCRUMPTIOUS!**

Next stop was the tour staging area where school buses were loading for the trip out to the cranberry bogs. We paid the five dollars each and hopped on board. It struck me that the buses seemed much smaller than I last remembered them in 1961....or maybe there just was more of me than there was in 1961. We drove through back roads, and then turned into the bog area. Oh, such a sight! The squared-off ponds of water were ruby red with berries and we were given detailed information on the cultivation of cranberries. We stopped for a tour of the sorting sheds and watched as workers, seated along a moving conveyor, picked out the defective fruit. These ruby-red jewels were destined to become cranberry juice.

Cranberries, in bulk, were for sale at a very reasonable price and this gramma took advantage of the opportunity. Thirty five pounds later, we again boarded the bus for the jaunt back to Stone Lake. Once back in town, the problem was how to haul all those berries to the car out in the far end of the pasture. Emma, once again, rode her daddy's shoulders and her stroller was loaded down with goodies. We left the Cranberry Festival tired and happy with a car full of aromatic fruit.

After I returned home to Freeport, I gave some of the berries to friends, but froze most of them in smaller packages for later use. Three months later I moved to Virginia and you better know I brought along my berries. They are used often for a special cranberry cake and, each time I bake that cake, my mind drifts to a happy, carefree day in Stone Lake, Wisconsin, with some of the people I love. I try to convey that love to the people who eat my special cranberry cakes now in Virginia. There are only enough berries left for a few more cakes, but there are more than enough "cranberry" memories floating thru my heart to last a lifetime.

Cranberry Cake

3 eggs
2 cups sugar
¾ cup softened butter
1 ts. salt
2 ts. vanilla
1 ts. Almond extract
2 cups flour

2 ½ cups fresh or frozen cranberries (a 12 oz. package)

2/3 cup chopped pecans or walnuts

In a mixing bowl, beat eggs with sugar until slightly thickened and light in color, about 5 minutes. Add butter, salt and extracts; beat 2 minutes. Stir in flour, just until combined. Stir in cranberries and nuts. This will be a VERY stiff dough. Spread it into a 13" X 9" greased baking pan.

Mix ¼ cup soft butter, ½ cup oatmeal, and ½ cup dark brown sugar and sprinkle this over the top of the cake. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 to 50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Serve with whipped cream if desired. Actually, a big dip of vanilla ice cream plopped on top of a still-warm hunk of cake is especially yummy.