



Wwoofing across America

(top left) Krystal and Tyler Wares experienced a picture perfect fall evening on one of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes.

(top right) Krystal Wares helps pick the last berries of the season – elderberries.

(left) Tyler Wares helps Honeyberry Farm owner Jim Ingvaldson put up a deer fence (photo by Krystal Wares).

(right) Tyle Wares pulls in his first Northern Pike at Leonard Stinar's favorite private fishing spot (photo by Krystal Wares).



By Bernis Ingvaldson

It might sound a bit like a Tom Sawyer trick – persuading others to whitewash your fence, but there actually are people willing to pay the initial \$30 sign-up fee and drive half-ways across the country to pull weeds and put up fences! Several organizations exist to match short-term workers with willing hosts and Wwoof.org (Willing Workers on Organic Farms www.wwoof.net) specializes in matching volunteers with farms or any project, for that matter, that uses organic methods in sustainable agriculture. Wwoof gives people a work experience that they might never have had before, as well as an opportunity to tour local sites, all at a reasonable cost to both the worker and host, whose only obligation is to provide meals and lodging.

From September 28 – October 2, 2013 The Honeyberry Farm (orchard and mail-order nursery) hosted its second woofers of the summer, Tyler and Krystal Wares from southern California. Along with Jim, my husband and co-owner of the farm, we asked the Wares if they would like to share their impressions so far, in a Question and Answer format.

Q: Why are you doing this (wwoof work across the country)?

Krystal: We wanted not only to see our big beautiful country, but also meet the people in it. We drove cross-country last summer in a hurry and didn't get to really experience places and cultures, so we figured by slowing things down a bit and staying with kind strangers we would really gain more love for our country. And we knew working for them would be a fun way to learn new things. It has been very fulfilling so far!

Tyler: Because we wanted to learn about other lifestyles and get away from our normal surroundings to experience new ways of life. It helps us to have a different perspective of what kind of life we want for our future.

Q: What have you learned through wwoofing?

Krystal: A lot! We have learned to milk dairy goats, to make soap, to cook some dang good food, and a lot about gardening and self-sustenance. We've lived in a hand made straw bale house and a hand made log cabin so far. We've never lived in any type of self made home before, so it is exciting for us to see that it is possible and people live so differently than how we have in our twenty-something years of life.

Tyler: I have learned that you don't need to eat dollar McCheese burgers in order to survive. I knew people before the modern fast food craze had survived and thrived with out it. To see families completely sustain themselves off

their own gardens is very inspiring and essentially what we wanted to learn while doing this. Farming where we're from in California is mainly huge corporations or non-existent. So seeing it on this level is very helpful.

Q: How did you hear about wwoofing?

Krystal: We were in Italy last summer and we met an American couple who had been in the area for a month! And we of course wanted to know how because we knew this was a very expensive part of the country. They told us all about work exchanges and the several websites that allowed workers to contact willing host farmers in countries all over the world. From that moment at that Bed and Breakfast table I knew this was something that I had to do in life. Preferably soon, while I was still young!

Q: What made you decide to become a wwoof worker at this time?

Krystal: The stars pretty much aligned for us in kind of a funny way. We thought all was lost when we didn't get into the school when we were expecting to in the fall. We had planned our lives so that we would be ready to fly off to Hawaii in a month. So when we got the news that we would have to wait 'til January, we were devastated. But that devastation quickly turned to hope and opportunity. When one door closes another one opens! Soon we were making plans on where we would work and what route we would take and packing our car up with camping gear, food and lots of warm snow clothes. I can't think of a better way to pass four month's time ('til school) than to take time out to see our country in a more intimate, slow way. I'm actually really thankful for our fall rejection letter now! It was definitely divine intervention. We are having the time of our lives.

Q: Do you feel safe wwoofing?

Krystal: Yes! Absolutely. Everyone that we've been lucky to meet has been warm and welcoming to us. We have felt instantly part of the family everywhere we have gone. Plus most workers and hosts have reviews from other people on their profile pages, so that helps too! But realistically, we've found that 99% of the people in this world are good kind people, and we really have nothing to worry about.

Q: Where have you visited so far?

Krystal: We left our parent's homes in Southern California and drove straight through to Utah, where we stayed with friends for a week. We enjoyed Yellowstone and the Tetons in Wyoming while on our way to Montana, where our first work exchange was with another organization called Help Exchange (*helpx.net*). Spending time with 70 cashmere goats and 3 dairy goats was a blast on Pine Needle Farm in Kila, Montana. We were back on the road before we knew it, seeing Glacier National Park and the prairie lands of eastern Montana and North Dakota. Our last night in Montana got down below freezing, and I didn't so much appreciate waking up to frost outside our tent, so arriving in Minnesota on Jim and Bernis' farm was highly anticipated!

Q: What have you done at the Honeyberry Farm this past week?

Krystal: The wwoof arrangement is for half a day's work at the host farm, with half a day free time. Bernis' cooking has been out of this world good and the workload has been perfect. We took time out on Sunday to see Itasca State Park, which was beautiful with fall colors coming in slowly. We loved learning about gardening, plants, cooking, and knitting from the Ingvaldsons. We even learned how to work a 1920's sock machine! We have tried berries that we didn't even know existed - our favorite being the honeyberry for sure. One of the highlights of our whole trip so far was fishing on a private access lake with a local man named Leonard. Ty was in heaven when he caught three pike - his dream fish. Leonard gutted them for us and Q: fried them up for dinner.

Tyler: It was fun being apprenticed to Jim, the fencing engineer. We have mule deer in the wild in California, but no whitetails to fence out. It's very uncommon to find deer in the suburbs.

Krystal and Tyler: The kind people of Bagley have touched us and made a special place in our hearts for Minnesota. On Wednesday we'll be off to see the Great Lakes shoreline on our way through Canada to Maine. But we will keep in touch with our Minnesotan friends and cherish our time here. We will spend a week in Maine, working on a farm in Pownal before going to the New York countryside for 3 weeks to spend time with family there. In November we will start our journey south to Florida, and back across to California. We have been very blessed on our trek and have met some admirable people in our beautiful country. We look forward to meeting more new friends throughout the rest of this year.

And a word from the hosts...

Bernis & Jim: We have really enjoyed meeting people from across the country who are so eager to learn new things as well as share their skills. Our first wwoofer, who was from Vermont, had worked in a bike shop for a year, so we asked him to tune up our bikes. Krystal does photography, so we asked her for a few shots we could post on our website, and we got some questions answered from Tyler who had recently worked for a solar company. We very much enjoy the stories our guests have shared about their lives at home as well as tales from their travels. It also gives us an opportunity to see our world fresh through their eyes. As for good food, we simply feed our guests what we eat - fresh produce from our garden and orchard, local grass-fed beef, fresh milk picked up from a local farm, and we make a point to prepare some Minnesota wild rice chicken soup which has been a real hit. Finally, we are grateful to those in our community who helped give our guests a broader taste of the local area and culture.