

Small Town, Big World: What WILL it Take?

By Britt Bensen Steele

One of the best parts about traveling is getting to know people outside of my own little circle. One of our favorite people is a guy named Karl from Sweden. We met in a yoga class in Bali, and he and his girlfriend came to visit us here in Vernonia a couple years back.

It was blueberry season and we were driving down Highway 26, having just picked blueberries. We were quiet and content in the car. From the quiet, I heard him say in his strong Swedish accent from the back seat, “Are you willing to be happy?”

I sat there, and shot a slightly confused glance at my husband, who was driving. For a moment, nobody said a thing.

Then, he continued. “I mean.... Are you WILLing to be happy?” putting a lot of emphasis on the WILL part of the word. WILLing. Hhhmmmm. Willing. Willing? WILLing. Am I WILLING

happiness?

The power in this statement wasn’t so much about what we are willing to be. Instead it was about the WILLINGNESS. It was about the WILL.

He might as well have been asking me, “Are you willing to be patient? Are you willing to take better care of yourself? Are you willing to be kind?”

The questions are truly endless. Anything that is a struggle... anything that requires a courageous calling up of your WILL. “Are you willing to relax amidst “recent news” (whatever that may be)? Are you willing to make different choices? Are you willing to trust yourself? Are you willing to listen with an open heart? Are you willing to do your job with both feet in—whether or not it is your “dream job?” Are you willing to see beauty everywhere? Are you willing to put yourself in someone else’s shoes? Are you willing to live your life completely, with all of its unique twists, and turns,

droughts, and abundant harvests?
Are you WILLING?



Britt having a conversation with Michael, a man on the street in Victoria, BC.

This is one of the big things we learn when we step outside of our comfort zone—and traveling is one of the ways I do this. You don’t have to go far, really. You can sit in a funky little

restaurant in a nearby neighborhood where you might think you would NEVER go... and start a conversation.

Here’s what I have experienced: when I sit and consciously connect with people who were raised unlike I was raised, with different values, perspectives, and influences, I learn more about our similarities than our differences. It’s when I’m not in connection with others that the differences stand out.

And so, the next time you feel something you don’t want to feel... or find yourself in a situation you’d rather vacate, perhaps you could ask yourself, “are you WILLing to be happy?” You don’t have to do this, of course, but who knows what might happen if you are willing to try it out.

Just a little PSA from someone who lives across the big pond. Thanks Karl.

Another Round: More Words of Wisdom About Beer

By Scott Laird



Time for Pumpkin Spice Beer – Autumn is the season for everything pumpkin spice, including beer.

Although I’m not personally a big fan of pumpkin spice everything, I didn’t really mind taking one for the team and trying out a few of these seasonal brews, and trying to identify a few good ones for our readers.

First of all I picked out several pumpkin spice beers, and also mixed in a couple of Oktoberfest brews for good measure.

Laurelwood Stingy Jack Pumpkin Ale is a dark amber color with a thick white head. It had a nice compliment of

Really big at 8.5% ABV.

Saranac Pumpkin Ale came in a nice jug style container that was just too nice to pass up. Brewed in Utica, New York, these 32 ounce quart bottles are available at Trader Joe’s this fall. This brew was spicy, with strong nutmeg, fennel and anise flavors. It had a medium body and was a bit thin. Not my favorite but the jug (which I saved for apple cider pressing) made it worth a try.

Oakshire Brewing Big Black Jack is an Imperial Chocolate Pumpkin Porter and sure sounded good to me. It was light on the pumpkin flavor, which was fine, with just a subtle hint of cocoa and pumpkin pie spice. A big, dark and rich brew with 7.5% ABV, this was also another favorite of this tasting.

Oktoberfest style beers are traditionally brewed with sweet-and-toasted

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cinnamon and nutmeg with just a hint of hops at the finish. At 7.5% ABV this was a nice ale for those fall days when the weather starts to change. This was an especially nice drinking beer and probably my favorite of the group.

New Belgium Pumpkick was a lighter amber in color, more like a dark lager. It was spicy and sweet, with bit of tart cranberry. Lots of different flavors going on in this one.

malts countered with spicy Bavarian hops and a crisp lager finish.

Sierra Nevada Oktoberfest was a nice and heavy lager, with a bit of a hoppy finish. Golden in color but with 6.0% ABV this offers a little more bang for the buck.

Ninkasi Oktoberfest was very similar, a nice change of pace at 5.9% ABV for lighter beer drinkers who want something with a little more body when the cooler weather arrives.

So there you have it, a small introduction to a few of the many pumpkin and fall beers out there. Make sure to grab one and give it a try, or even grab a few and do your own tasting.