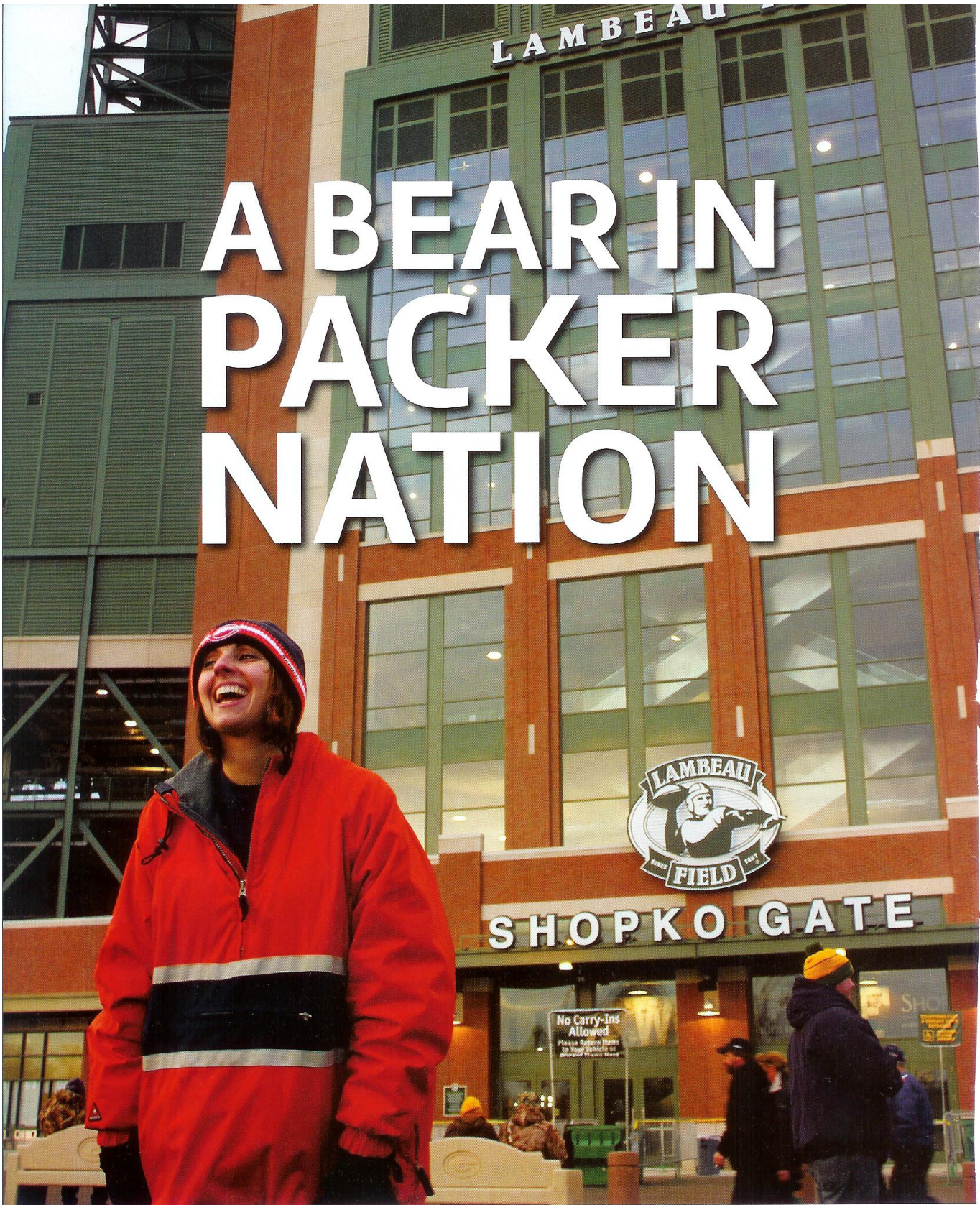
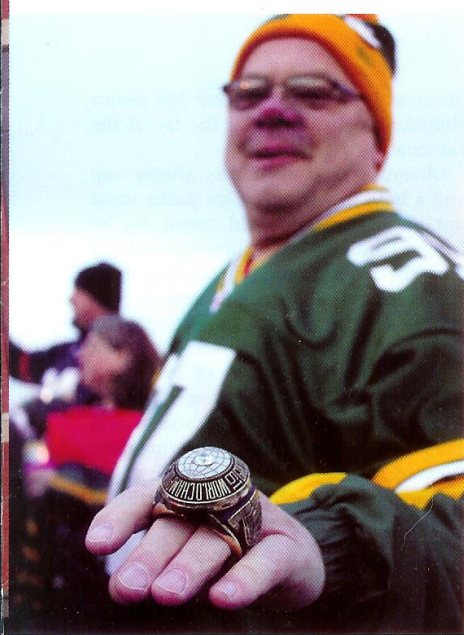
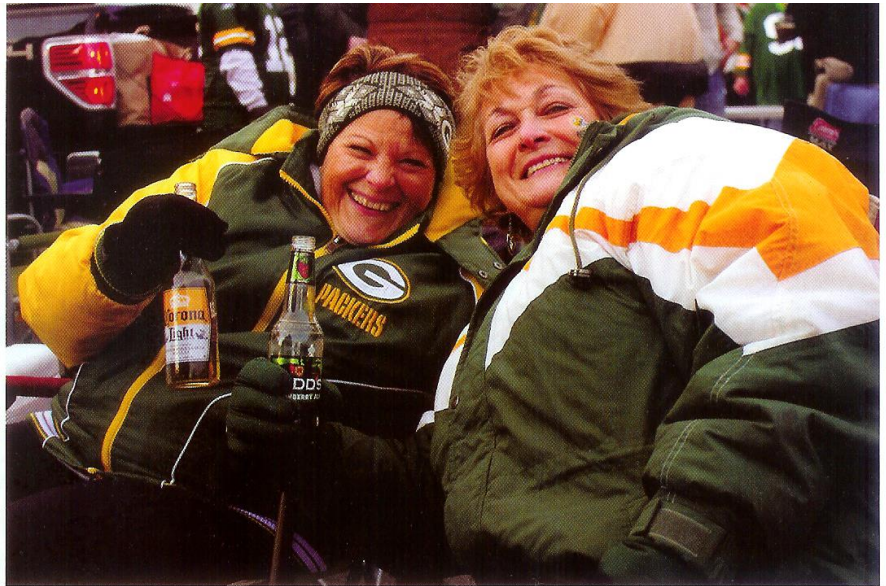


# A BEAR IN PACKER NATION

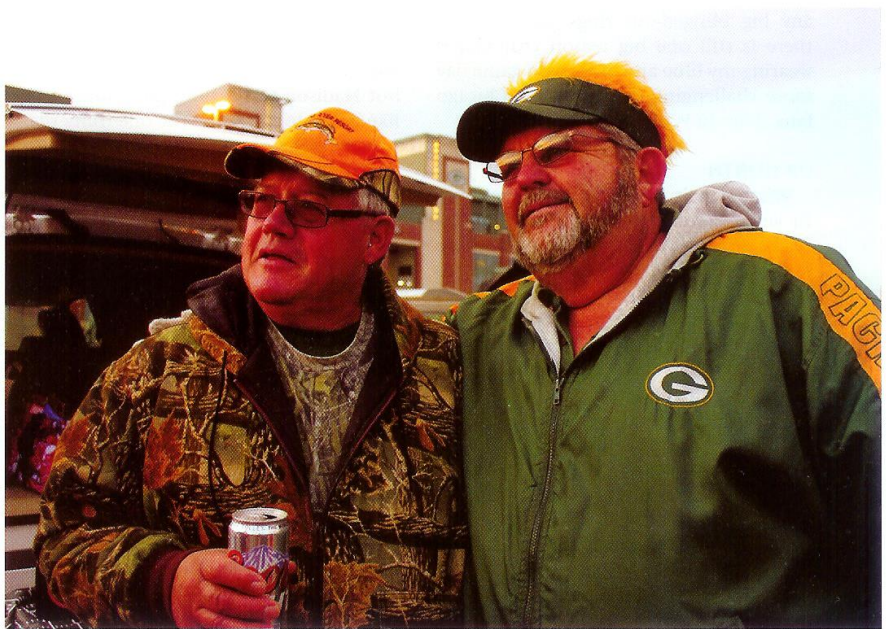
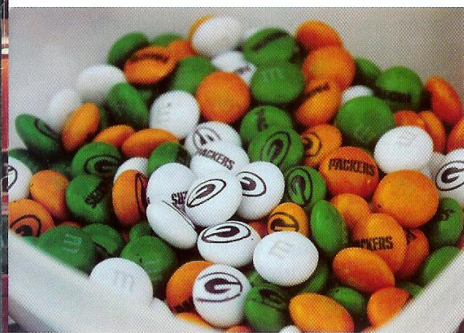
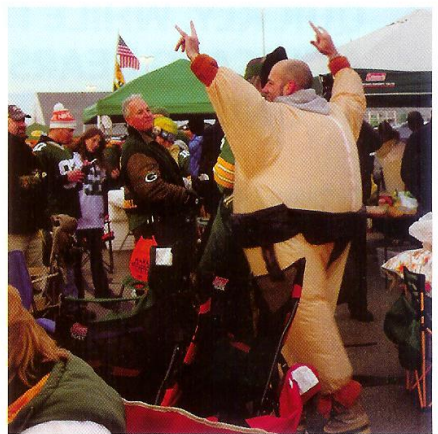






**TALES FROM A  
CHICAGO BEARS  
FAN WHO CALLS  
WISCONSIN HOME**

BY CARRIE ANTON  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA NORDSKOG





## BORN AND RAISED IN THE SUBURBS OF CHICAGO, IT'S HARD NOT TO BE A SPORTS FAN. THE CITY HAS EVERY BIG LEAGUE TEAM INCLUDING BASKETBALL, BASEBALL, SOCCER, HOCKEY AND MY FAVORITE, FOOTBALL. GROWING UP WITH A FATHER AND BROTHER WHO WERE BOTH SPORTS FANS WITH A CAPITAL F, THE LOVE FOR ALL GAMES RUBBED OFF ON ME QUICKLY. WHILE IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT I'M A CHICAGO BEARS FAN, IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO ACTUALLY BE ONE.

Things have most certainly changed since the Bears football glory days of my 1980s childhood. While I still wear my Bears gear just about every time they play, it can feel like questionable attire at times. Continued losses, constant quarterback interceptions, and overall frustration with the franchise are part of it. And let's not forget that since 1985, the Bears have only made it back to the Super Bowl once, and that sadly didn't end with any big blinged-out rings. But for me, there is still one big reason that makes wearing my blue and orange on game day more challenging than for most Chicago fans...I live in Wisconsin.

### UP NORTH

Wisconsin is home to the Green Bay Packers, also known as Chicago Bears' rivals. Be it Beloit, Bayfield, or anywhere in between, you can't go far in this state without seeing the team colors of green and gold. The love runs deep here, and the fact that the city of Green Bay has a small population of less than 105,000 people—compared to Chicago's more than 2 million—has very little effect on the team's large following.

I moved to Wisconsin in 1998, after transferring to the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Go Bucky!) to finish my education. While Madison has its green-and-gold moments, the city is veritable sea of red, thanks to it being the Badger's dominant

team color. Since students come from all across the country to attend school here—bringing with them their favorite home NFL teams—Green Bay Packers mania isn't as prominent on campus as the rest of the state—though I wouldn't call it extinct either. For the remaining two years left in earning my degree, I could be a Bears fan in Wisconsin with very little repercussions.

After graduation, my now-husband and I decided to stay in America's dairyland, moving just outside of the campus we so much loved. Yes, we'd miss the windy city and all the sports life that comes with it, but Madison was feeling more and more like home to us. While the one thing that was obviously absent was my fellow Bears fans, I figured a visit to Lambeau Field on Bears-Packers game day would fill the void, reuniting me with other fans wearing blue and orange in Chicago's neighbor to the north.

### PARTYING IN PACKER NATION

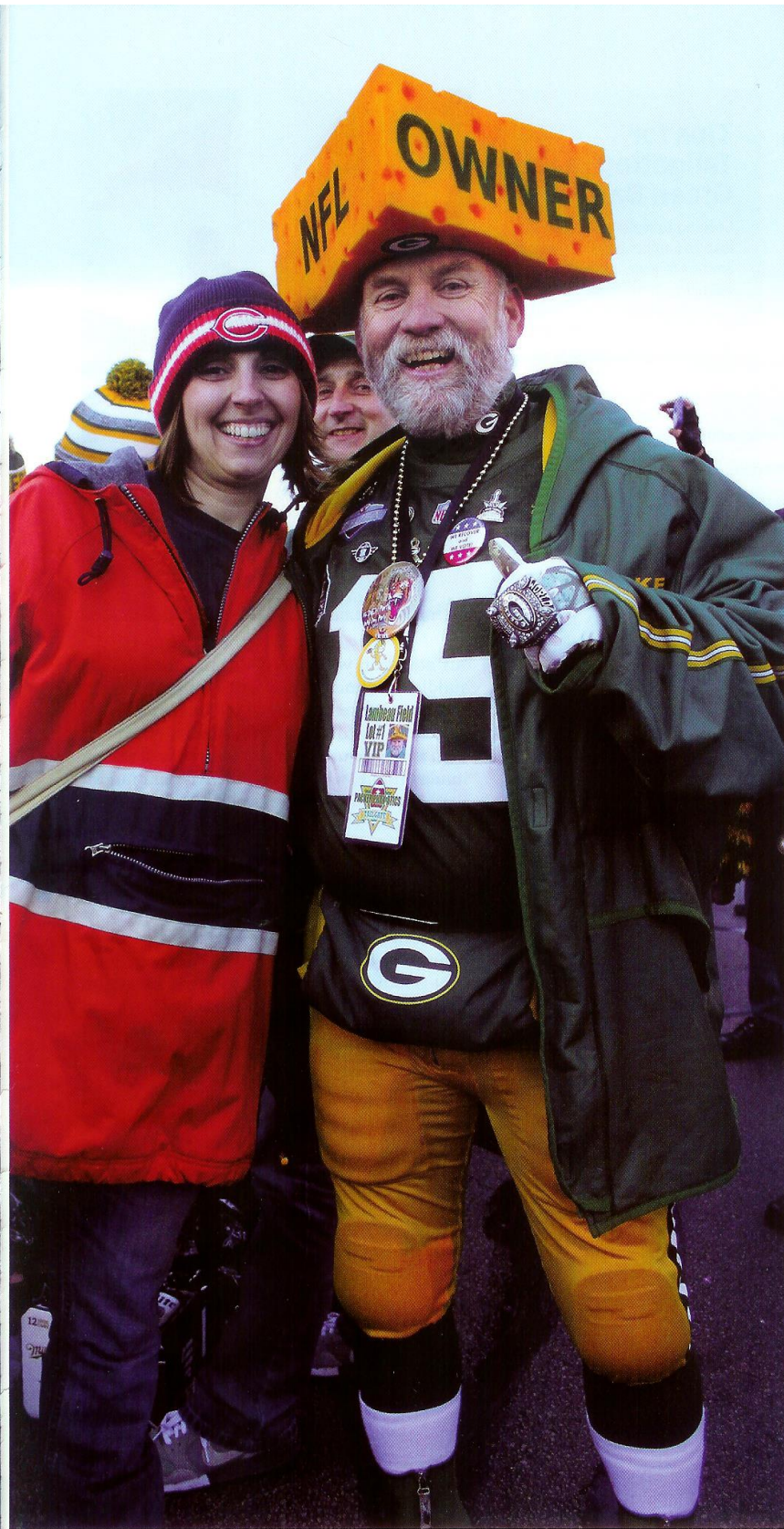
The plan was to take a self-guided tour of the tailgates, eating other people's food and drinking their spirits along the way—yes, a very good plan. Social media posts about the agenda to party in my team colors within Packer Nation had some friends asking if I have a death wish. Meanwhile, my Chicago pals warned me not to let any of the cheesehead cooties rub off on me. For the sake of safety (as well as photos), I brought with me my pal,

business partner, and Packer fan Jessica Nordskog to help explore the lay of the Lambeau land.

Obviously, a bulky Bears winter cap and a bold orange and blue parka stand out in a green and gold crowd. I'd be lying if I didn't say I was nervous, so I just dove right in, approaching the first truck conveniently parked right next to our vehicle. It was a simple tailgating to-do with a back-opened SUV filled with gear, a grill searing a boatload of brats, and fold-out tables topped with a spread of cheese, deer sausage, crunchy snacks, and a bevy of adult beverages. Following plan, I introduced myself and, through slight wincing, waited to see what would ensue.

First up: razzing. I had lived in the state and experienced my fair share of this form of hazing—it comes with the territory. And in my work life, co-workers were top offenders. Once they got word that I was a Bears fan, the work days sandwiching a game were the worst. I'd get verbally beat up (playfully, of course) about how bad the Bears were going to do thanks to any number of (*likely valid*) reasons. If luck swung my way and the Bears won, it meant a quiet Monday (or Tuesday). However, when a losing streak was alive, it's quite possible my sick days might've been statistically higher at the beginning of the week during football season than when compared with the rest of the year (although I admit nothing).





At this first stop, tailgater Keith took one look at my Bears' attire and zinged me by asking if my parents had dropped me on my head as a child. Not the worst razzing I've ever taken, but what had me more concerned was the look on his face. It wasn't menacing per se, but it wasn't exactly inviting either. It was, however, one that I'd come across before.

On a summer road trip a few years ago, I was sporting a Bears logo baseball cap at an off-the-highway Wisconsin diner. Halfway through my meal, I noticed a table of people tsking and shaking their heads while giving me the evil eye. One woman at the table went so far as to say, "That's so rude," while looking at my hat. At first, I thought the offense was due to me wearing a cap inside a building, but as I reached up to remove my head cover, I realized all the men in her company were each wearing hats of their own. That's when it hit me: I simply was on enemy territory, and my attire wasn't that of the natives.

That incident was more laughable than the least bit scary, but I can't say it wasn't in the back of my mind while traversing the Frozen Tundra tailgating scene. I figured Keith would next ask us to leave—or at least I'd hope that would be the worst of it. What I didn't expect was the shot...a shot of liquor that is. But not just any shot of liquor; this imbibe came delivered courtesy of a shotski—a literal ski with four or more shot glasses attached that four or more people drink from in unison.

Having never heard of a shotski, let alone drank from one, I was a tad hesitant. However, I was told by the group that if I wanted to party in Green Bay, I had to start with a shotski. So as the say, "When in Rome." With Jessica by my side, we lined up with two other women from the group for some synchronized shooting of the cinnamon-toast taste of RumChata. Delicious doesn't even begin to describe it! We stayed and chatted with the Green Bay group for a while, sharing lots of laughs, a few good-natured ribbings, and hearing about memories of tailgates past. Not wanting to overstay our welcome, we thanked the group for their hospitality and headed off to the next party.



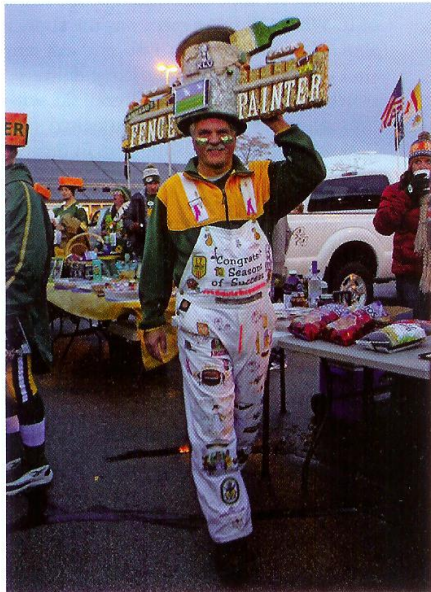
## THE GB SCENE

Having been to my fair share of tailgates over the years, I have to say, Green Bay knows what they're doing. The city may not be big, but there are certainly plenty of places to park and share a few drinks before the game begins. The Lambeau parking lot is definitely the central party zone, but the businesses, streets, and even homes surrounding the stadium allow the party limits to stretch out a bit.

Making our way to the stadium, I was high-fived by passing Bears fans who also decided to brave the land of our foe, as well as was told my team sucks by those who favored the hometown heroes. Elaborate costumes paraded up and down Lombardi Avenue, including a Green Bay Packers pimp walking side-by-side with his pal "Saint Vince," an almost pope-like character. Standard headgear for the area are foam hats made to resemble a wedge of cheese—hence, the term "cheesehead;" however, any number of shapes are formed from foam fromage and sold on site, including baseball caps, cowboy hats, fireman helmets, tops hats and even bras.

Parties ranged from large venues hosted at restaurant and bars and sponsored by local businesses, to smaller affairs where coolers simply doubled as chairs. Jessica and I were particularly drawn to the creative stylings of ambulance rigs turned into party barges and RVs renovated just for Green Bay game days.

We took a quick walking tour around the stadium, before ending up on the southeast side of the stadium, where a grassy field laid home to even more good tailgating times. One line of RVs, old buses, rigs and caravans caught



## Tips for Tailgating in Green Bay

Looking to make your own leap to Lambeau Field? Here are tips to keep in mind when tailgating in the frozen tundra.

**1** Once November hits (and quite possibly as early as October), it's cold in Green Bay. Like really, really cold. Dress in water-wicking layers and cover up as much skin as possible. Don't worry about what you look like; this kind of layering is fashionable in these parts.

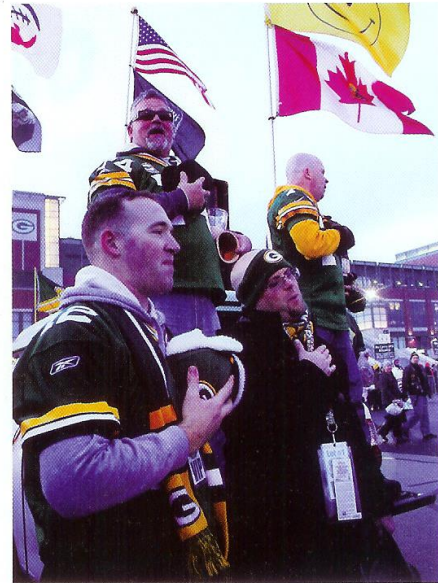
**2** Cold weather often means frozen drinks—as in frozen solid. The locals advise thawing beers and Bloody Marys on the grill to keep them drinkable right through the game. At *Tailgater Magazine*, we advise safety first.

**3** It's never too early to tailgate. For the night game I attended, tailgaters got there anywhere from early morning to early afternoon. However, if you want to party in the Lambeau parking lot, you're only allowed to enter four hours before the start of the game. If four hours is simply not enough time, hit up the local lots to buy more time.

**4** When stepping up to the shotski, don't be short. Or if you are, take the shot with those of similar heights to avoid wearing your shot instead of drinking it.

**5** When taking a tour of the tailgating scene, be friendly with the locals. You'll be amazed at the stories you'll hear and will likely be invited to whatever spread they have to offer. Return the generosity by making a donation for food and drinks, or by lending a hand serving others at the party.

**6** Last, but never least, have fun!



our attention with the mass crowds of people huddled around. Chuck and John, Sheboygan residents, Packer season ticket holders and co-owners of one of the RVs on the lot, welcomed us in and gave us a tour of their football season Sunday home, which they jokingly said ran on beer. Chuck, a butcher by trade, provides all the meat available for the approximate 100 to 150 guests that stop to cheer on the Pack. Donations are accepted, as each year the numbers seem to grow, but both say new people turn into familiar faces, who later become friends.

At each place we stopped, the more it felt the same as the day's first tailgate did: introductions, light-ribbing at my expense, a shotski invitation (with the alcohol changing at each venue), and talk of the Green Bay experience. But it was at Chuck and John's party where the inevitable question hit: "Still clinging to the '85 Bears?"

## GLORY DAYS

The year was 1985, and alongside my brother, dad and grandparents, my 7-year-old self packed into a family friend's crowded restaurant on one famed Sunday to watch the Chicago Bears take on the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XX. Like all of my fellow Bears fans that day, I wore my blue and orange with pride, and despite being just a little girl, I cheered as the Monsters of the Midway brought home the Vince Lombardi trophy.

Neither age, nor race, nor creed, or even questionable blood alcohol levels stood in the way of feeling a deep sense of camaraderie with each person in that restaurant or, for that matter, the Chicagoland area, the state of Illinois, or however far-reaching the Bears victory was cheered. That day, just as was true of



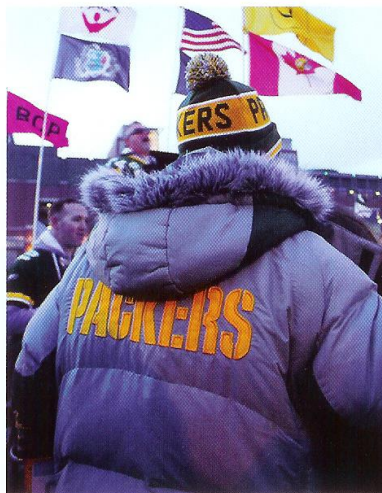


that entire 1984–85 season, was a coming together like no other.

Sure, most fans feel the team love with wins leading up to the big Sunday or when the confetti drops at the end of the fourth quarter and players leave as champions. However, call it nostalgia inflating my memory, but the Bears win felt bigger than that—like much, much bigger. The '85 Bears went beyond being another winning football team, quickly becoming pop culture icons in their own right. Across the roster, the team was larger than life—and in the case of 330-pound defensive tackle William the “Refrigerator” Perry, that was almost literal. The players were like a cast of characters, each with their own personal fan following. You had “Iron Mike” Ditka, Walter “Sweetness” Peyton, “Samurai Mike” Singletary, “The Punky QB” Jim McMahon, and the list went on. Each had nicknames, personality traits, and in the case of Ditka and McMahon, their own signature attire to set them apart.

But with even bigger pop culture cred than the Sweetness Wheaties cereal box, the Black ‘n’ Blues Brothers posters, McMahon’s DIY Rozelle sweatband or Ditka’s iconic sweater vest, was the Super Bowl Shuffle. The rap, performed by various team members known as the Chicago Bears Shuffling Crew, was the stuff of legends. While the music video would obviously be popular in the state of Illinois, it went viral well before such a term existed, having reach all across the nation.

But that was 30 years ago. As much as I and many other fans out there hold



fondly our '85 Bears memories, things have changed. Many teams are constantly in flux, great one year, terrible the next. In Chicago, we can be pretty brutal to our boys when times are tough. While we might not surrender our fan status, we tend to be quick to judge just about everything they do—or when it comes to wins, don’t do. It can make us a difficult group of fans to understand.

Not so when it comes to the Packers. I got the impression that they love their team no matter what, and their tailgating style most certainly supports that thought. I expected to go to Green Bay that day and take a light-hearted beating all while having to defend my side of the rivalry.

While there’s some truth to that, I never expected that the experience would’ve landed a top spot in one of my favorite party places of all time.

Sure, the shotskis at each tailgate played their role. However, when I reflect on how it went down—experiencing the open sharing of food, drinks, fond memories, laughter and lots of hugs—how could I see any of that as negative, regardless of what colors we were each wearing?

#### A RIVALRY BUILT ON RESPECT

The rivalry may be one of the oldest in NFL history, dating back to the 1920s, but it’s important to remember that neither team would likely be here without the other. After first becoming an official professional franchise of the American Professional Football Association (later to be renamed the National Football League) in 1921, the Packers lost the franchise due to illegal use of college players. While it was Bears owner and coach George Halas, who was responsible for bringing these infractions to the league’s attention, it can’t be overlooked that he was instrumental in getting the team reinstated. Later in 1932, Packers founder and coach Curly Lambeau returned the favor, lending money to Halas when he was short on payroll.

On the field, the rivalry between the two teams was intense as ever, but off the field, there was a mutual respect that led to both men lending a helping hand when the other was in need. As fans, we may be relentless when the Bears and Packers face off at game time, and sure we have our way with words when tossing back a few cold ones. But at the core, it’s a common bond—not hatred—that brings us together, albeit on two separate sides of the field.

The Green Bay Packers may have gone on to win that night—OK, they crushed us—which led to more razzing, but I still look back fondly on my first visit to the land of green and gold. I found an unexpected camaraderie in Green Bay that I never thought possible among Packer fans versus my own orange-and-blue brethren. Chicago will still receive my cheers in games to come, but rivalry matchups of the future will now be met with excitement and anticipation instead of fear and loathing. ■