

Sandra Day O'Connor Visits MW

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, is said to have enjoyed her visits to the Northwoods, including Manitowish Waters. Above, Justice O'Connor (left) is with Audrey Voss Dickerson and Ruthie Dickerson Gardner at Voss' Birchwood Lodge for breakfast. "She was gracious and liked to talk with my mother," says Ruthie.

But, the real question is, how did a Supreme Court Justice find her way to Manitowish Waters? Well, for the story behind the story, we turn to John McFarland:

"We met Justice O'Connor some years ago through mutual friends. Justice O'Connor and her husband John were visiting Jay and Kathy Brentlinger, friends of theirs who lived in Lac du Flambeau during summers and Phoenix during the winters. Jay and the O'Connors had been friends for many years, and when Jay and Kathy married, Justice O'Connor performed the civil ceremony for them.

"On the occasion of their visit up here, Justice O'Connor happened to notice a portrait Kathy had which I had done. The Justice was quite taken with the portrait, and Kathy said she should meet the artist. So, she arranged for the six of us to get together at our house, and that is how we met.

"When I do portraiture, I look for a certain type of face, one that shows the character and life experiences of the subject. I do not do commissions nor do I do young people as, for the most part, the imprint of life isn't very evident yet. When I met Justice O'Connor, the impact was immediate: this was a face that defined what I look for in a subject. During our visit that evening, I asked Justice O'Connor if she would allow me to do her portrait, explaining how I worked and what I looked for in my subjects. She quite readily agreed, however, with a caveat. She said we must read her early autobiography, and we had to come to Washington D.C. where I would do the photographic studies I would need to do the portrait.

"The Brentlingers, Barbara and I flew out to D.C. about six weeks later and spent four days there. Justice O'Connor had our stay planned out, and we were royally treated. On the last day, we met in her chambers at the Supreme Court Building, and we did the photo session there. Ordinarily, when I do a portrait, I keep the original, and the subject is given several "giclee" prints; however, this was a Justice of the Supreme Court, and a print wouldn't do. So, the original went to Justice O'Connor, which she hung in her chambers, and I got the print."

And, here is John's portrait of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.