

Trains, Planes and Frogs in the Greenhouse

July, 2009

I received a card in the mail recently inviting me to the 45th Doletzky family reunion. My mother was one of twelve children in the large Doletzky German/Polish clan. Though I was unable to attend, I relish the invite and what it represents—family. The card tells members to bring:

*1 main & 1 side dish
Drinks, table service, lawn chairs or blankets,
Small table (no table or chairs ordered)
Swimsuits, towels, life jackets for children
Fishing rods & bait.*

That just about covers everything. Summertime seems made for family, one of my favorite F's in life along with faith, friends, food and fun. As a child, summertime was an endless playground that stretched out forever. Summer included a vacation of some sort either "up north" or "out west." It was filled with lazy days, hammocks in the back yard and all the Nancy Drew mysteries I could read. There were tents made from blankets thrown over the clothesline, running through the sprinkler on hot days and biking to Huron River Park with a baloney sandwich and bottle of coca cola in the bike basket. Everything tasted better in summer: vine-ripened tomatoes from the garden, buttered, salted corn on the cob, fried Bluegills my father caught that morning in Crooked Lake.

Now living on the Oregon coast, I've decided that the beach is one of the best places on earth for families to play and recapture a kid's spirit. Dogs race like mad for the water's edge to chase seagulls. Moms and dads help their children build sandcastles; others gather driftwood for fires to roast hot dogs and marshmallows; families lug ice chests full of sandwiches and lemonade down to the perfect spot in the dunes. Almost everyone bends down to examine rocks, shells or seaweed. Kites dance above waves, Frisbees sail through the air, and everywhere you look, people are smiling and laughing. How much better can it get than this?

I was happy to see a float in Manzanita's 4th of July parade of a family celebrating 20 years of reunions at the beach. What a connection for a family to have, year after year coming together to play at the beach.

My 4th of July week included a visit from my 2 and 3-year old grandsons from Arizona along with their mom and dad. My son tells me when the plane landed in Portland, 3-year old Ethan looked out the window and said "Daddy, I see Nana's house." He couldn't see our house, of course, but I hope he could feel the love. Our week was filled with planes, trains, parades, picnics, and parks, ocean play, hermit crabs, skunk cabbage leaves, frogs in the greenhouse and sand in sandwiches. Much to our neighbor's dismay, we set off screaming "Wailing Witch" fireworks in the backyard. We ate ice cream cones at the cheese factory, and took rides on Grandpa's bulldozer. While deer munched on roses and geraniums in my garden, and raccoons dined at the compost pile, we dug in the dirt, planted pumpkins and learned how to make snapdragons snap.

We ate our favorite foods: strawberry shortcake, barbequed chicken, corn on the cob, baked beans, potato salad, deviled eggs and cherry pudding. We roasted marshmallows and gave Manzanita Mudd Dog a good share of our business.

Families, neighborhoods, communities, country—that's what this all-time favorite holiday is about, isn't it? While riding the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad from Rockaway Beach to Garibaldi, I was delighted to see people standing along the tracks, at the crossings, waving at the train, calling hello from their patios and decks. It gave me a warm feeling of pride in this country of ours, a sweet memory of where we've come from and hope for the future, especially for the little ones who'll inherit it.

Too soon, my family pulled out of the driveway to return to Arizona. Little hands waved through the windows, and I heard "Bye Nana" calls fade away. For comfort, I turned back to the wash hanging on the clothesline and buried my face in the sweet smell of billowing sheets on a summer day. Family.