

Swinging Into Summer

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Remember when every backyard had a swing? All you needed was a length of rope, a board or tire and a dad who was willing to shinny up a tree. Now that kids are out of school and the 4th of July is upon us, I'm reminded of my small town childhood summers in Michigan.

Not much worry from parents in those days as to where we were. They knew. We were in the backyard on the swing, in the clubhouse under the maple tree or in a blanket tent thrown over the clothesline. Or we might be at the church playground on the merry-go-round or riding our roller skates around the block on sidewalks whose cracks and crevices we knew like the back of our hand.

No one seemed concerned we'd hurt ourselves. About the only time I saw a doctor was when I cut my leg on the raw edge of a coffee can and had to be hauled off to Doc Wylie to have it sewn up. All I could mutter through my blubbering sobs as we traveled the two miles out of town in my aunt's Plymouth was, "What color thread?" If we scrapped our knees in a fall from our bikes or roller skates, our mothers, who were always home, poured iodine on our wounds, tore up clean rags to bind them, and sent us back outside to play.

Swings held the promise of the most fun at my house. One of ours hung from the horse chestnut tree and was in direct view of the kitchen window where my mother always seemed to be washing dishes or preparing one meal or another. I preferred the big swing my father hung from a post and pole contraption he'd rigged up next to the garage. Pumping higher and higher as the ropes creaked and the pole groaned, I swung up into the leafy purple lilacs that draped over the garage and was transported into the heady perfume of the gods. I loved being pushed by my friends, shrieking "Higher, higher!" Sometimes the swing buckled and seemed about to propel

me into the heavens. I also loved twisting round and round, then watching the world whiz by as the swing unwound. Sometimes I leaned over the seat on my stomach and watched the ground moving slowly beneath me as I swung to and fro in a daze. Once, I cut the back of my thigh on a piece of metal my father had bound around the edge of the seat. The lingering scar is a reminder of my swinging days.

I still get a chance to swing when I return to my hometown each summer to spend time with my childhood friend of over sixty years. She asked Mr. Clapperage to weld together steel pipes from which to hang two swings reminiscent of the 1950's in her backyard. When she and I go out each evening to see who can swing the highest, folks driving by on their way to the Dexter Dairy Queen honk and wave. I like to think it takes them back to their carefree days of summer.

At a recent workshop at a retreat center in the Northwest, part of the weekend activities involved 'The Big Swing' in which we could test our trust factor by swinging out over a wide chasm midst the leafy forest. In the past, we'd climb on the big swing held for us by two friends who then pushed the swing over the abyss. My scream on that first ride could be heard two counties away. Now, in our libelous society, we have to wear a harness, be tethered in and 'Big Swing' time has to be monitored by paid staff. Takes the fun out of it.

Today we have proper swings in our parks and probably more safety regulations than we care to know. Kids have rubber mats and sand to land on, slides with sides and climbing bars with walls for protection. Regardless, our kids can still enjoy swinging in the neighborhood parks of our community.

Summer is here and for however long it lasts, it means one thing to kids out of school, and the 4th of July only serves to remind us—Freedom!