

All That Matters

June, 2013

Gail Balden

Summer is upon us, that three-month break between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next when all kinds of things can happen. At least that's the way we looked at it as kids. Days of endless summer held endless possibilities.

Growing up in a small Michigan town, summer was when ordinary life was suspended. It meant time to ride my one-speed bike to Huron River Park with a baloney sandwich wrapped in wax paper squished into the wicker basket. Paired with a ten-cent bottle of Coca-Cola from Sinclair's Gas station, I was set for the day. Riding past the A & W drive-in at the edge of town, I'd smile at the girls delivering Coney dogs and mugs of root beer on roller skates. Constantly outside in summer, my friends and I drank water from the garden hose, played softball until dark and rode our bikes everywhere, mostly to the Dairy Queen for hot fudge sundaes.

It was a time for my best friend and me to sleep on our screened-in porch underneath scratchy wool blankets while June bugs flitted around the front porch light, and the sound of crickets assured us summer was here. The glow of lightening bugs captured briefly in a Mason jar made summer nights even more magical.

Summer was also a time to laze about and read. By the time I was 14, I'd read almost every book in our small town library. I entered the library's summer reading contests to try and win a new Webster's dictionary. One contest was called the *Inchworm*, which required filling in each section of an inchworm drawn on a page whenever another book was read. My scrapbook of that summer shows I filled in every inchworm available.

Sixty years later, after a long wet winter, the beauty of summer on the Oregon coast reminds me to try and hold on to that summer feeling. I cherish happy moments. High on the list are visits to the coast from grandsons, which invariably include scavenger hunts, picnics, kite flying and sandcastles. What better way is there to find laughter than through the antics and eyes of a child? A recent visit by 18-month old Amelia whose entire face crinkled up when she laughed was sheer joy. Wet sand between her toes at the beach, a wave that washed over her chubby legs knocking her down, and a stripping down to nakedness for a dunk in the ocean to rinse off all made her laugh. I also relish the moments I spend with my borrowed dogs, Tillie, Leche and Tillman who drop by regularly for dog biscuits and a few pets.

Summer is a time for potato salad and sliced tomatoes from the garden, strawberry shortcake and peach juice that runs down the arm. One friend tells me what brings her joy is seeing the garden grow after her tireless efforts; another says it's all about making strawberry jam and seeing the gleaming jars sit on her shelf; still another says she felt joy again when after a long hiatus, she climbed on a bike and sailed off, the breeze blowing through her hair.

When I think of cherished moments, I think of Judy Allen, a dear spirit whose example to us was to live life to the fullest. Her death, a loss to our community, reminds us that life is short. As we age, and as my sister says, "more wheels fall off the wagon," I do my best to attend to what really matters and let the rest go. Life is too short to be negative, spend time trying to keep up with the Jones or worry about what others think. However we spend our summer, whether it's snoozing in the hammock, reading all of our inchworm books, or sailing on a bike or boat, let's remember to enjoy each moment

and hold on to that summer feeling. An excerpt from a song by Craig Richards, *All that Matters*, says it best:

*“The only treasure in the life we live
is in the measure of the love we give.
All that matters in the end will be
the love in you and the love in me.”*