

NormalcyMag

Exploring American Culture



The All-American Summers *A Means to Live and Recall*

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Cover Art

Photo by Roger Panek

"Wood River"

Location near Grantsburg, Wisconsin

Editor's Standard

Welcome back to NormalcyMag!

Ah, summertime! Ugghh! Summer will soon transform into autumn. Summers come. They never stay. They come again, but always next summer. How do we recall the best summers? In order to promote some of the normalcy we encourage in this magazine, let's start with the following challenge, by doing some old-school things. Follow these directions, as closely as possible. Hopefully, readers will get the concept of normalcy and make it more a part of their own daily lives.

The challenge: Write a brief (or long) memoir on the summer just now fading. Include highlights of both the successful living everyone does, as well as the low points. Find ideas and subject matter from the notes on calendars, email bulletins or correspondence, or from that lost art of American life, i.e. a diary or journal. Look at the photos in the phones or faceware, but leave them out of the memoir (for now). Instead, describe the people and the places and the things in the notes, scraps of paper, or the photos—just use words, actual words, of that all done, seen, heard, or felt about that space and time. Try to recapture (or liberate) the events and feelings of this passing summer. **DO NOT USE** a computer to write this memoir (not yet, anyway). Use an actual pen or pencil (or crayon or marker, if anyone so desires).

Find the words inside the mind to match each and every memory. Put the words to match each and every meaning of the writer in that context of location and day. Use the handwriting instrument and give each person, place or thing its proper name, or its most unique or useful attribute. To these nouns, add adjectives that describe that attribute. Give these nouns verbs to give them action. Use real verbs, perhaps, but not lazy ones. Once in a while, use an adverb, but not too many. Make the living summer **LIVE** and make it special for everyone. Write the meaning of life in a word, if possible, but write all that makes sense on reflection (at this point). If any of these events connect, connect them with words.

When done handwriting this life of summer, from memory or from evidence that did not have meaning beforehand, then consider this: **YOU** the writer have just written the best story about your life this summer! It did not need posting, or venting, or whipcrack or wingnut emotion. (At this point,

digital transcribing or scanning, with photos, becomes acceptable; share it!). The story written should tell more, mean more, and have more depth than even those artificial vanilla Christmas newsletters (BLARG!). My best advice to anyone who actually will do this modernist existential challenge: Stay honest, enjoy it, feel it, share tears, and share laughter. These elements all make good stories in the end. In the end, make it your story about this summer. Check back for another challenge.

Summer and this Issue

Friends, readers, and fellow humans, my own summer had its very peculiar challenges. Unfortunately, these prevented the publication of the June issue (our “blue cover” issue). Here, we offer only a much abbreviated August issue (our first one with a yellow cover, in fact). My sincere apologies, for events can have their own victories over our lives and best intentions. Getting this issue produced proves no small victory for NormalcyMag. Please, consider this as only a bridge between the last issue (April/“green”) and the upcoming one in October/“orange” of 2018. Unfortunately, we only included in this issue the “Sub Terra Vita Chronicle” (#52) and one “Versing” selection, a poem by the pen-out-of-the-grave-hand of Pi Kielty, his “Rose: Untitled.” Also, sincere apologies for not including in this issue the next in the series of “Low Adventures.” As perhaps the most liked selection in almost every issue, “Low Adventures” will return in the next issue in October, and it will return with extreme vengeance in length and, hopefully, laughs. Thank you so much for all the good things said about our publication. Please, enjoy reading this issue. And, as always: Please read with open mind!

Sincerely,

Tim Krenz
Publisher & Editor
NormalcyMag



Sub Terra Vita Chronicle #52

Lake of Booms and the Eternal Youthful Summer of '76

By Tim Krenz

Looking back to my then-five-and-half years of age, some summer memories may meld into one. Yet, the details of the specific summer of 1976 might not matter too much. Still, though, 42 years later, I remember quite a lot. Other things I see in old family photographs, and I can honestly say, “Yeah, I remember that!”

In the summers growing up I can remember going to Big Lake, only several miles east of Osceola, Wisconsin, to spend summer weekends at my Granny Kietly's old cabin. Before my uncle purchased the property to build his house over the old site, that old, rough, dark brown building of stripped and painted log poles had that vintage look. It also had a vintage feel inside, where the logs sheened in a polished glow like thinned, golden maple syrup. The kitchen always smelled like coffee cooking fresh on the gas stove. That smell permeated the entire four room interior wrapped around the stone and mortar fireplace and chimney. (Around that chimney, my uncle built his entire new house).

The big yard stretched from the cabin out to the woods behind it, next to the old ox-cart path that served as the cabin-owners' road around the east and north side of the lake before the construction of the newer road on the other side of the woods. On the north side of the property, sat the old-fashioned, old-school, old-scary wooden outhouse. In the front side of the cabin, facing the lake, the hill down-sloped to the water, quite steeply, so that it required the construction of cement steps to the cement block storehouse off where Granny put her dock. Off that dock, we had a nice swimming area, without weeds and with a gravel bottom near the shore.

To go to the cabin always meant plenty of family and family friends, the whole kit, kith, and clan of the tribe. I had a lot of cousins, and the gatherings, though large, remained very familiar, intimate, and fun, especially

the one very special day every summer. For every Independence Day, nothing seemed out of place in life's young order of things. That particular holiday always took its place as the highlight of any summer, at least in the grandeur of my memory. And the grandest time of all, I think, of my life in any summer, came that Bicentennial year of 1976, the nation's two hundredth birthday.

The entire year until that July 4th anticipated the event we celebrated. Bunting and flags appeared almost everywhere, especially as the weather warmed and the holiday itself approached. I may not remember much of anything to do with the Vietnam War, or Nixon's resignation over the Watergate burglary. Some news from that era I do remember, and those events and the people I clearly recall: The Montreal Olympics; Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State, and his news making. Even if not so much in context, I remember those things. In that time, about which I know more from the study of history, things seemed a little strange—macromae hanging crafts, bell-bottoms, the start of disco—and the entire decade of the Seventies—had strange things about them and very odd, different vibes.

On the other hand, I remember that Independence Day of '76 quite well. My family explained the holiday to me and related it to my purpose of awareness for its very importance, that somehow the nation survived two hundred years and the recent turmoils. Reflecting now, we perhaps felt lucky to have made it so far, as indeed our luck and hard effort keep holding it together. If anything, I remember this: We celebrated, everyone, and everywhere. I could see it and hear it, all of it for gratitude and joy, and pride. And that year, 1976, inevitably becomes entwined in the one place that meant family, friends, feasts, fun, apple pie, huge gas-guzzling automobiles, and the Old Glory of the flag. At Granny's cabin, Independence Day, July the Fourth, 1976, it all came into one.

The holiday always started with picnic food, whether grilled or cold, and with homemade sweets and bakery desserts. Feasting went on throughout the whole day. But to a kid, the hardest part about the afternoon of Independence Day came when waiting for the light to fade—for a dark night sky—and for the fireworks. But first, we had swimming to do, which we could not do for an endless hour after we ate, something unfathomable to our incredulous minds. It had something to do with getting cramps in the legs when swimming too soon after eating. The older adults said that could cause us to drown. It did not matter that I wore a crappy, orange-colored life-vest, the type no one ever wanted to wear, because I had not learned how to swim. It never made any sense to me to have to wait after eating to swim since I could not swim without that life-preserver, anyway! The “ugghh” of children toward adult logic. Eat a couple of potato chips. Wait one hour. Beach time blasphemy!

When swimming around the dock, my sisters, brother, and cousins and I all had great fun with my uncle's canoe. Often we would flip it over-side, half submerge it and we would come up from beneath it into the air pocket of its shell. We did this, of course, while Granny's pontoon boat cruised the lake several times a day with a pick up of adults for regattas with lake neighbors. Sometimes, the kids would go along to swim or fish off the pontoon farther off the shore. That gave us a treat, but it freaked me out even wearing a life vest.

Swimming never came naturally to me. As the youngest, by six years, of my own family of seven children, and with many older cousins, it never posed a fright or a danger unless in deeper water. Everyone watched out for everyone, especially for my younger cousins and I. I loved playing in the water, like most kids on hot, hot summer days. But growing up, I heard the story of how my brother learned to swim off Granny Kielty's dock.

Some days at the lake, my one uncle, Francis (married to my mom's sister), would bring his SCUBA gear. As a fire-rescue diver in the big city, he knew the craft well. It purely fascinated me. He would gear up like the Creature from the Black Lagoon, enter the lake, look at some type of compass, and disappear for a long

time. He would visit the neighbors and family friends on the north side of the lake, he would report after coming back from his excursion.

The holiday proceeded in those endless hours after lunch swimming my body to cold, clammy, pruned, fingers, toes, and blue lips. As night neared, the fireworks show approached. Before that time came the ordeal of the mosquitoes. They would get quite fierce. Fighting, slapping, and deterring nature's little kamikazes took effort before ingenuity prevailed. Until the advent of the better “blue light special” zapper lanterns that cooked up a “zzzzttt!” every second, a fire ring in the back yard would keep the bugs away by smoke, light, flame, or whatever it did to them down. Of course, we used obscene amounts of aerosol bug spray, which never seemed to work too well. Later in life, we learned that it worked best of all at killing the vital atmosphere that protected the earth. Hmm. Though even on warm July nights, hooded sweatshirts became the norm to keep the 'skeeters from biting. The bugs did mean one thing. Darkness approached deeper and with it approached the fireworks show on the lake.

The fireworks always started around sundown. First, came the minor ordinance, some of it the old-fashioned type that could have blown off a hand, and somethings of similar power. And, surely, we had the smokejackets, the sparklers, and even the hand-held Roman candles. While still partly light after the sun set across the lake, the sparklers marked time with the irritated patience running out of us. The big bonus of the holiday came later, but first we had the sparklers. As every child learns, one has only to touch a hot metal rod after the chemical material cooks off BEFORE it starts to cool in order to never do it again. Ouch!

For the fireworks on Big Lake, the Big Show came in spaced timings. A few cabins would light off one or two big rockets, then some more cabins would do the same, and then a whole bunch would come. The best fireworks on that lake I saw through my whole youth came at the Bicentennial celebration. It marks a lifetime highlight for the Spirit of '76. Fireworks have their dangers, and it takes special care to do it both safely and properly. At least at Granny Kielty's cabin, we had my uncle the fireman, who brought some of the best fireworks on the whole lake. It helps to have a trained

professional on hand, in addition to his role as a SCUBA diver. That night, I knew I would see something special. In my life, although I often forget it, I lean on the practice of “safety first.” With a full-time, professional fireman, we had that covered. Light 'em up!

The world may make, sell, buy, and light bigger and badder fireworks, but except as an adult at private shows with friends, the fireworks craze today seems to miss the meaning of a true Independence Day, and reducing it to a display of shooting wads of money for the curiosity of gawkers. Curmudgeon me, I avoid the larger gatherings of crowds, of thousands of people, who waste a special family time for picnics and fun just to run and go watch a rather useless spectacle without context. It has, in my opinion, become a holiday of hollow meaning in that way. I feel the impersonal gathering of strangers does the modern “fourth of July” a dumbing down of a senseless “day off.” I say too much, perhaps. Keep a pointless number on the calendar if they want. Give me my Independence Day! I will allow people to disagree with me, but I ask others to give me my own feelings about that matter. It all goes back to the Spirit of '76—of 1976, I mean. For me, this applies in the strongest principle.

Now back to the story with less digression, the fireworks of that youthful summer's eve solidified my wonder and gratitude, my pride and my joy at the fortunate time I witnessed. Everyone sat on the hillside, on the concrete steps, on the wood benches half way up the hill, or at the top near the cabin. The day went past twilight enough to start the big show. In the northwest, a crest of blue-green horizon closed the day light like a window blind. It lowered to darken the big, outside, temporary theater of the country. No television tonight. Just an operetta of quick sights and thrilling, shrilling sounds, the aria to the Bicentennial. At the right time, the orchestra started with the overtures.

My uncle, with his handheld gas torch of blue flame, started lighting fuses at the back end of the pontoon, the end facing away from the shore. Almost foreseeing the moment, we had seconds to the first whoosh of red-orange flaming streaks that marked the flight of each rocket. The glowing embers trailed skyward to the blue

and black space above our heads, toward the white stars which always backgrounded the wonderful canvas of the holiday.

Flash!-Boom! And the loud red-white-and-blue bursts sizzled in the streaming sprays of shapes, constellations of patriotism, whatever forms they would take. I think now of what I would have thought as a child of that time and place, smiling night-ward. More rockets. More flashes. Some rockets held a thunder, an extraordinary piece of explosive salute that echoed around the lake. From around the lake, like every year, more rockets, more flashes, and more booms, swirled around the rim of the shore. To the left, to the right, and to the west ahead. All the neighbors on the lake did not exactly coordinate the festive display, but it worked to everyone's delight to let off the fireworks on their own time and leisure. The spontaneous cacophony of celebrating a big Bicentennial seemed natural and fitting. Everyone had the same idea that night. And as my uncle proceeded to light our supply, he lit a mix of sprays, sizzlers, more bangs, and in colors of blue, green, red, orange, yellow, white, and even some louder ones, and some more sneaky, quicker; or slower, or higher, or the not so high. The lake lit them off that year, like no other year which proceeded or followed. The lake of booms for that holiday night came in its unique and thrilling way. After almost an hour, most of the lake's fireworks tapered in space and time, until just a few went skyward.

Late in the evening, the lake quieter, like every other weekend we drove home the short distance to Osceola. I probably slept in the car. The night finished, the Bicentennial complete, the national celebration over, the summer did continue.

I started school later that same August, my tour of kindergarten in the afternoon half-day of classes. After a couple weeks, the summer in our Wisconsin village of Osceola above the river of the St. Croix officially came to an end with the community fair. Although Independence Day passed months before, my family—my sisters and cousins and my aunt by marriage (who lived near us in town) made an entry for the “Kiddie Parade,” the annual children's costume contest. The very creative aunt took an old wooden barrel, big

enough for my cousin, Chad, and I to stand inside of it, and she wrapped it in chicken wire. We spent the entire week before the Saturday afternoon judging putting red-white-and-blue tissue paper in the wire, and wrapping the mini-float on wagon wheels with patriotic ribbon and bunting.

Chad and I dressed in our costumes the day of the contest. We had hats, a tri-corner colonial hat and a stove-pipe red-white-and-blue one. In white shirts with the red-and-blue Knickerbocker pants and vests, and me wearing the white cotton Uncle Sam beard, Chad and I and the entourage of other siblings, cousins and friends dressed up around us, and received judgment. We won Grand Champion! We rode on the large

flatbed truck in the Sunday parade, throwing out candy, and waving little flags of Old Glory to the crowds all down main street. I had a proud moment, indeed. My Bicentennial celebration in the Spirit of '76 vindicated, the memory remains complete.

No one can recreate anything to the exact way it happened, of course. And like the year-long festival 200th anniversary of the birth of the country, it will not probably happen again in my lifetime, or at least not the same way. As a diamond jewel in the memory of a now grown up adult, it has no parallel for what it means to me. It defined in a true time as a measure for what I hope every day—my freedom to recall it as I like.

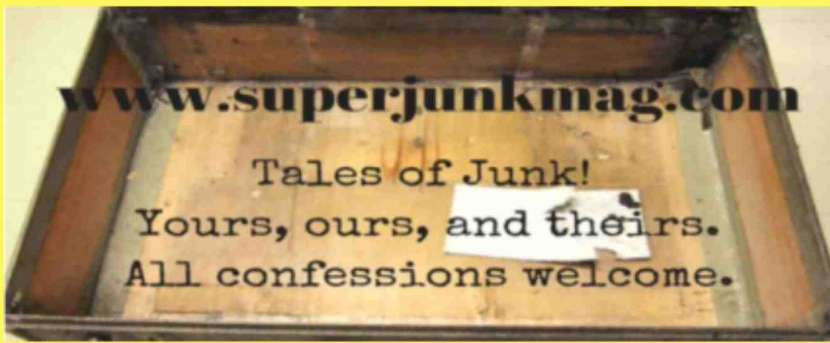


Versing

A Rose: Untitled

By Pi Kielty

*A tender tuft, from garden earth, the rose, for the sorrows,
that it may heal. And when hearts exclaim their head-filled
reigns, a rose that day may seal. Though from its depths, or
in zestful climb, a rose may sway divided minds, the sorrow
comes because that flower has so little, life-full time. So, let
that cupped rose blossom, honored and spirit-fed. Yet from
the soil, on those roses, with petals pink, purpling, or
fantails of yellows, or the reds, the brown stem, a stick with
green leaves, will hide a thorn, wedged, pointed from its
greaves. From the rose bush, fear not the meaning with
unseen dread. Do accept, petal and thorn, like everything, a
rose may come, doubled in its edge.*



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