

Porchville

It seems that as soon as Memorial Day is in sight, people start seriously thinking about summer vacation. It was no different back in the fifties when I was a child growing up in Rochester. When the school year still had weeks to go, we kids would start bugging my father about where we would be going on our summer vacation. My father's favorite answer, partly to be funny and partly to stop us from asking, was Porchville. Upon hearing that, we kids would moan and groan because, of course, going to Porchville meant going nowhere at all. It meant staying home and sitting on the porch.

Now keep in mind that our vacations back then were not the Disneyland, Caribbean Cruise vacations that kids are used to today. Vacation for us usually meant traveling in a car with no air-conditioning, crowded into the backseat with an aunt or grandmother who usually tagged along. It meant staying overnight at a relative's house because spending money on a hotel was out of the question. For my family it meant a lot of trips to College Park, Maryland and Sandusky, Ohio, where aunts and uncles lived, although one year we went all the way to Chicago because a cousin took a job there for a few years.

In many summers, though, our vacation consisted of spending a couple of weeks in August on my grandmother's farm in Kent, NY, a small community north of Albion in Orleans County. It was no coincidence that our "vacation" fell during canning season when the whole family pitched in to pick, peel, and preserve tomatoes, corn, peaches, cucumbers and whatever else was in season. For our co-operation we kids were rewarded with a trip to town, a half-mile walk for a swim in Lake Ontario at a rocky beach, or if we were lucky, a day trip to Niagara Falls and Fort Niagara.

The highlight of the Niagara Falls trips for us kids was eating at the Howard Johnson's and crossing the border into Canada. As we would approach the border every year, my father would sternly warn us to be quiet and let him do all the talking. And every year we alternately held our breaths or giggled when the guard asked, "Where were you born?" because every year my father would tell the same lie. "We're all born in the United States," he would say confidently, while my German-born grandmother sat in the back seat with her mouth closed. The guard would quickly scan the back seat, but always wave us right through. In those days, when terrorism was the stuff of fantasy novels and not the newspaper headlines, we were never once asked for proof of our country of birth. Even such modest vacations as these were preferable to Porchville.

Now that I am older and have sipped espresso at a café on the Champs Elysees, straddled the Prime Meridian in Greenwich, and bicycled down a volcano in Hawaii, I'm starting to think more about Porchville. Maybe Dad had the right idea after all. More and more I am content to sit on my back porch here in Walworth and watch my neighbor's corn grow. On a clear day I can see all the way to the Bristol hills some 25 miles away. Western New York is indeed a beautiful place.

It could be my age, but like Dorothy returned from Oz, I am growing in appreciation of summer in Rochester. I have a mental checklist of things that I have to do at least once before Labor Day rolls around. Summer is just not summer without a ride on the Jack Rabbit, a walk on the Charlotte pier, a bag of kettlecorn at one of the outdoor craft shows, and fireworks at one of the firemen's carnivals. And then the best part - returning home to relax on the porch with a bottle of pop. Give me a good book, and I'm in heaven. Where is life better than this?

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