

Poachers, Melons, & Crayons

By Marie O'Donnell

Kentland was posted, "No Trespassing" and "No Hunting." Once in a while someone would sneak in poaching deer. One evening, not too long before sunset, Uncle Otis called and told my grandfather that he'd heard gun shots in one of the fields. Uncle Otis had purchased an old military weapons carrier, and, this incident was not too long after he got it. My grandfather took a truck started off to see who the intruders were. My grandmother and I went up to the mansion to wait for him.



Uncle Otis, not being one to be left behind, and, also not knowing how to drive, talked my grandmother into us all starting off in the weapons carrier to see what was going on. We piled into the vehicle, which was a typical, stripped down military vehicle, and off we went! The seats weren't padded, and, if the darn thing had shock absorbers, you couldn't tell it. This was before the roads were paved, and they would get full of ruts and potholes until my grandfather would use one of the tractors to grade and smooth them out. Unfortunately, our little sojourn happened between scrapings and the road was a mess. To add to that, it's getting dark. So, here we are bouncing down the road, hanging on for dear life to keep from being thrown out of our seats, my grandmother grasping the steering wheel with both hands to keep the thing on the road, and Uncle Otis madly searching the dashboard to try and find the switch for the lights. He found it just about the time we pulled up at the farm truck, where we found my grandfather and Charlie Hughes, who lived at the back gate, and who he had called to help chase the poachers.

My grandmother hit the brakes, and the engine on the weapons carrier died with a sickening moan. The men were laughing so hard they were almost falling over. It seems he and Charlie had seen the poachers and were getting ready to get their license number to turn over to the police, when the sound of our approach startled them and they drove off in a big hurry. Guess they thought the Army was on its way!

One of the other things I always looked forward to was Fourth of July. About three or four days ahead of time my grandfather would buy a big watermelon and take it down to the springhouse that was located on one of the terraces of Inspiration Lake. I'd tag along. He'd put the melon into the cold water running from the spring and leave it to chill for a few days. Then, on Fourth of July my grandmother would start early in the morning frying chicken and making potato salad and other side dishes for our picnic. We'd pack everything up and take it up to the mansion where we would "picnic" in the dining room. (I guess that's why, even today, my idea of "roughing it" is a 40-foot motor home with a microwave and satellite TV.) After we had all eaten our fill, my grandfather would go down to the springhouse and get the watermelon. I don't know if you've ever had a watermelon chilled in cold spring water, but, it is so cold all the way through, but, it's colder that you can get it in a refrigerator. The watermelon was sweet and juicy, and wonderful.

It's funny how strong the bond between our senses and our memories is. There is one memory that still comes back to me over 50 years after it happened. It was my first day of school, and, among the other school supplies, my grandmother had gotten me a new box of crayons. Since I considered myself an artist, I was always drawing, but only had some old

pencils and colored pens at that time. I begged to open the crayons before school started, but, she was adamant. The crayons would not be opened until I got to school. They were the big crayons, made to be easier for little hands to hold. But, they weren't the ones that were flat on one side, like the ones at school. These were "real" crayons...Crayola crayons...in the dark yellow and green box. Finally, the big day arrived and off I went. I can still close my eyes and see the classroom. For a child who had spent her life surrounded by adults and with little contact with other children, school was paradise. I couldn't believe I was really there. I remember looking around the room...at the desks and the other children; at the lights in the ceiling; at the green "blackboard"; at the teacher standing at the front of the classroom. Then, it was time to draw a picture of what we did during the summer. It was time to open my new crayons! To this day, when I smell a box of new crayons, I can close my eyes and see that classroom just as clearly as if I were sitting there. That is something that I don't think will ever leave me.