

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July in northern Illinois was so exciting when I was a kid. It was usually time to make hay and my parents often spent the day baling and hauling hay to the barn. Mom claimed that we had to get all the hay in that day because all those fireworks did something to the clouds and we would certainly have heavy rains on July 5. Ah, but as soon as the evening milking chores were done, we headed for Freeport to watch the fireworks. Well I remember standing between the front and back seats of Dad's '38 gray Buick as Dad was rocketing that car west on River Road toward the east edge of Freeport. It was beginning to get dark and the first bursts of color were skimming over the distant treetops. "Hurry, Daddy! We can't miss the fire crackers!"

The grassy banks of the Taylor Park lagoon were covered with at least 50 kazillion people (Ok, maybe 500), all sitting on blankets and munching goodies brought from home. The obligatory "oohs, ahhs and lookee! Lookees" followed each and every flash of color.

Some years the weather was stifling and all the ladies brought along their fancy, hand-held "church" fans. Of course, situated beside a stagnant lagoon, it was Mosquito Heaven and the whole crowd reeked of whatever they thought would repel those nasty critters. (Deet did not yet exist so the rub-on preventative solutions were pretty varied and creative.) We all came home with a mass of welts. Other years the area was blessed with a cold spell and folks were bundled up in heavy coats and blankets. I remember Dad wearing his long johns one year.

After several years of floods, the "powers that be" decided it was time to move the celebration to higher ground and property was purchased from the Albertus family a mile south of town. (The county fair was also moved to the new location.)

Fast forward about 20 years. The Fireworks were being launched from the new fairgrounds (Albertus Park) and my beloved 5 were little kids. Their Great Uncle John Faist lived on the very south edge of town and his home became the gathering place of family and friends as we all sat on his south lawn and watched

the show. Everybody brought snacks and it was a jolly gathering. The little kids loved Uncle John's steep, grassy yard and spent most of the evening rolling (and pushing each other) down the hills. The moms soon learned to dress the kids in very washable garments to counteract all the grass stains. Uncle John was so proud and spent most of the evening hauling old chairs up from his basement.

Fast forward another 30 years and my beloved 5 were adults with children of their own. Each 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend they now gather at one of various locations (personal homes or rental cabins in the mountains) for a family reunion. The original intent of the reunions was to give my grandkids a chance to spend a few days together and get to know each other as more than just a voice on the phone or a picture. Oh, the happy chaos of all those little kids thru the years as they joined together in swimming pools, amateur plays, make-up experiments, and, in later years, zip line thrills, tubing over rapids, and all the things modern teens love.

This year the 4<sup>th</sup> of July reunion was held a few days early as my beloved 5, spouses and grandchildren, extended family members and friends gathered at daughter Cindy's home in Forest, VA. On June 28 the whole troop traveled to Lovington, VA for the investiture ceremony for son-in-law Fred Watson as he was sworn in as a circuit court judge. Thirty family members were in attendance for

the happy occasion.



This picture was taken June 28, 2019 at the Nelson County (Virginia) Court House after the Investiture of Fred Watson as circuit court judge. Family and friends attended from Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin, New Hampshire and Georgia.

Front row: Justin Parsons (son of Sandi); Sandi Parsons (Cindy's sister); Sandra Turel (family friend); Dalton Allaben (son of Jill Allaben); Lori (Cindy's sister) and Jeff McCarthy; Jill Allaben (sister of Jeff McCarthy); Hannah Burnette (fiancé of Ryan McCarthy); Ryan McCarthy (Lori and Jeff's son); Lin Moseley (Cindy's mom).

Second row: Ellen and Larry (Cindy's brother) Faist; Isaac, Monica, Miranda and Randy (Cindy's brother) Faist; Danielle (Sandi Parson's step-daughter), Jax, Tommie and Ace Mariotti; Jim Moseley (Cindy's step-dad).

Back row: Bobby Watson (Fred's brother); Abby, Cindy, Fred and Ben Watson; Nell and Jupe Watson (Fred's parents); Joey Watson (Fred's brother); Lisa Tyree (Joey's gal); Taylor Austin (Lisa's daughter).

As my grandchildren grow older, jobs and other obligations are causing a drop in numbers each year. It will be interesting to see what the future will hold for the reunions. I love this family and, despite its flaws, I love our country.

Happy Fourth of July 2019!