

Summer with the Boys

by Kenita Gibbins

I'm an only child, but I never felt like one. Nolan lived across the street. We acted like brother and sister until he became a senior and fell in love with Pat.

Our parents worked. His parents had a little grocery store next door to their house and across the street from my house. I had permission to charge food there. In the winter we cooked in our kitchens. Our specialty was fudge. Sometimes I went to our furniture store and roller skated up and down the sidewalk.

Come summer Nolan and I were out in our backyards early in the morning. We tried to make clover wine. That means we gathered sheep-shire buds, smashed them and added yeast and water. (Sheep-shire buds are not in the dictionary. It must be an Oklahoma word.) Then we dug a hole and buried our glass jar. Unfortunately we didn't have a recipe or a clue about making wine. We dug up our creation long before it might have fermented and gagged ourselves on the taste. We also liked to lie in the grass and see faces in the fluffy cumulus clouds. Nolan's backyard was a hill that went down into a holler. We would sit on the porch with our BB guns and shoot down persimmons or aim at a nasty blue jay. Yes, we did talk about the birds and the bees when we got to be teenagers.

We also grew up during the polio scare. Our parents would not allow us to go outside in the heat of day. One night we had an electrical outage. We were 12 and 11 years old, but we were old enough to know what would happen when Shirley's iron lung lost power. We wanted to help her parents and brother keep the pump going. Fortunately the electricity wasn't off more than a few hours. We lost Shirley the next year. Her funeral service was the first one I attended. My parents closed their furniture store and we all joined our neighbors. To this day I can't listen to "You'll Never Walk Alone" without crying.

After supper the neighborhood boys and I flocked into the street to play kick the can. The ornery boys also wanted me to go on a snipe hunt. I had enough sense not to fall for that joke. I vaguely remember playing hide and seek.

Nolan and Pat did get into trouble. I was at a youth meeting at our church when we were told their baby boy arrived. To their credit they did get married and both graduated from college in addition to raising two children. When I married George, Nolan sent me a rolling pin and said I could protect myself with it if need be since we didn't live close.

Pat never liked me even though Nolan and I quit acting like relatives. He ended up as an overseer of the Mexican border guards. Pat did call me after he was killed in the line of duty. I was devastated, but appreciative to hear the news from her. I will always remember my summers with Nolan and four other boys.