

Salida in the Summertime

By Marilyn Reeves

Ah, Summertime! The sounds of children shouting, screen doors slamming, music playing in the park.

Stepping gingerly with bare feet, trying to cross the street, then running back through the cool, green grass – watch out for bits of glass! – and putting on the Buster Browns.

Clamp on your roller skates and turn them with a key. Roll lickety-split down the block, then try to stop, grabbing hold of a friendly tree.

I had a Skeeter, which was much like a scooter, but it was wide, had four wheels, and two kids could ride at one time. Squeezing together, down the hill we would fly, my friend, my Skeeter and I.

Playing out in the back yard with my very best friends. Doing back flips and cartwheels and spins. How long can you stand on your hands?

Trips to the park to play on the slide and the merry-go-round. Ah such fun to swing high in the sky in the warm, free days of Summertime.

Riding our bikes to the hot springs pool. The sparkling water not too hot, not too cool. We'd swim and splash and play around, then we'd get back on our bikes and ride back to town.

Parades, carnivals, Saturday matinees. Bugs Bunny, Hop-Along Cassidy. Those were the days!

Sometimes a group of us kids would cross over the Arkansas on the F Street Bridge and go for a hike around the base of Tenderfoot Mountain. It's not really a mountain, just a cone-shaped hill with a big S made of white rocks. If you took the winding road all the way up you could look back down at the town from the little gazebo on top. But we kids rarely climbed it, just played in the hills and arroyos behind it.

On Sundays the family would pile in the jeep, and head up Monarch Pass, then turn onto a dirt road that took us near the top of Mt. Shavano. We bounced and we jostled over the rocks, then we all climbed out at the picnic grounds when we finally came to a stop.

Building a campfire, starting small. Then adding more wood to the pile. Wieners and marshmallows cooked on a stick – black on the outside, yummy on the inside – over the open fire. Crispy fried chicken, corn on the cob, sweet ripe watermelon that dripped on the ground. And then look around for those tiny red strawberries, and once they were found – pop them into your mouth as soon as you pick them, there's no way you could possibly save them – those sweet little rubies from heaven.

Dad in his waders walking upstream to go fishing. Mom in her red Chimayo jacket searching for pretty, purple columbine and those tiny, shy violets near the base of a tree where they might be hiding. My sisters and I dipping our toes in the cold babbling brook and exploring the woods

while we waited for Dad to return with a creel full of trout and take us back home.

Those sweet, fond memories will always be with me of growing up in Salida, a little town in the Heart of the Rockies, in those warm, free days of Summertime.