

A Happy Accident

By Marilyn Reeves

When I was a girl, one of the family's favorite destinations was Mt. Shavano. We would take Highway 50 part way up Monarch Pass to the turn-off onto a dirt road marked Northfork. Sometimes we would stop and picnic at the Northfork campgrounds, with all its conveniences – wooden picnic tables with attached benches painted brown like the big ants that always showed up to crash the party, cement fire pits complete with iron grates, and relatively clean “His” and “Hers” out-houses.

But when the weather was fair and we were feeling a bit more adventurous, we would go on up the dusty dirt road a few more miles to a lesser known spot we referred to simply as “The Old Mill.” Dad would make a sharp left turn onto a dirt track that led steeply downhill. At the bottom was a fairly broad but shallow stream, which the jeep forded with relative ease, if the water wasn't running too high. Then up on the other side to a lovely meadow surrounded by fir trees and aspen groves.

No formal picnic ground here. We'd just spread the old blanket out on the ground to eat our lunch, and then go exploring. If the timing was right, we might find some of those tiny red strawberries nestled close to the ground. We'd just pick 'em and eat 'em right there on the spot.

Then we'd follow the path on down the hill until we came to another stream where the old broken down mill sat on the other side. I'm not sure what its original purpose was, but that old mill was probably at least a hundred years old. Its roof was caved in, and many of its boards lay scattered about, some of them having fallen into the stream.

There was also a log spanning the water, a bit slimy with moss, but if you were careful and agile, you could make it across to the other side.

On one particular occasion, Dad went first. Got a couple of feet out onto the log and then – ever the gentleman – reached back to grab Mama's hand. So she stepped onto the log, took a couple of steps, and then the two of them toppled together ... right into the stream.

We were utterly shocked to see our parents sitting there in that freezing cold water. Poor Mom! Poor Dad! And then suddenly Mama let out a howl ... of laughter! Soaking wet and chilled to the bone, she was simply overcome with mirth. I had never heard my mother laugh so hard in my life. And it was catching. Mom, Dad, and the three of us girls laughed and giggled all the way back home. And that happy accident turned out to be one of my best memories of my parents, when they were still young and full of life.