

LABOR DAY, A DOUBLE MEANING

by Sarah Chamberlain

Labor Day, the first Monday in September, is a creation of the labor movement and is a celebration of the American worker, whether manufacturing, construction, grocery, or a host of other workers, including what, since 911, has become known as the “first responders, police, fire and emergency medical teams. This is their special day.

Forgetting the political aspects of the holiday, it has come to have a double meaning as has Memorial Day. It all depends on whether you are an adult or a kid.

As an adult we hopefully remember what we were taught in school about the true, non-political, non-commercial meaning of these two holidays.

As a kid, Memorial Day means the beginning of summer and Labor Day means the end, at least that is how I thought of it when I was little.

My dad worked for Pepper Packing Company, and his days off were Wednesday and Thursday, right smack in the middle of the school week. Being a lawyer was his hobby.

We had a trailer, in the mountains at Twin Lakes where, every summer on my dad’s weekend, we would go and play games all night, and usually go fishing about 10 a.m. and fish all day.

Memorial Day was just after my birthday (May 26) and I would get new fishing tackle, and when it was required, my fishing license, and tickets to go see the “Indy 500” on close circuit TV at the Denver or Paramount theaters. My dad and I would go to Manning’s café around the corner from the Paramount in the Mason’s Building. I actually learned more about the true meaning of Memorial Day from the opening festivities of the race than remembering what I was taught in school.

As a little kid, Memorial Day meant the beginning of fishing season and Labor Day meant the end of fishing season. (I had no idea that fishing season started on March 1, and at that time ended on October 31.) The day after Labor Day was the traditional end of summer vacation and the beginning of school for another year.

Today, however, kids no longer have their special meaning to these holidays since many schools end and begin their new terms prior to each of these holidays.

If, when I was a kid, the school year had started in August the way it does now, I would not have known the fun of staying at the trailer all week, during the week and coming back to Denver to go to Lakeside for the rides, the time trials, and the races or sometimes the demolition derby (as a little kid) or going to Englewood Speedway (as a bigger kid, no rides but oh my the figure 8 races each week, much more fun because sometimes they turned into a demolition derby. My dad’s vacation was always the last two weeks of August, just before the end of summer (Labor Day).