

## **KEEP YOUR SUMMERTIME, I PREFER A SLOWER PACE**

**September 9, 2003**

I have never been a big fan of summer. It is the least favorite of the four seasons we have here in the North Country. So it was with glad heart and renewed vigor that I witnessed the passing of this last one. My aversion to summer started at an early age and nothing has happened to change my opinion except maybe to strengthen it.

When I was a kid growing up in the '30's and early '40's the heat really got to me. With the surrounding elevation in the neighborhood hovering around 300 feet, the heat was often oppressive. Many of the activities we engaged in intensified the problem.

Haying and the activities connected with it were the contributing factors to much of my animosity. It was hard, hot and dirty work - so was planting and tending farm crops and vegetable gardens. There were few youngsters who did not find themselves taking part in some of these activities.

My first job was to trail alongside our workhorse swatting the ever-present horse flies that tormented him. At the end of the day his body would be covered with blood and sweat. One had to constantly be careful not to get stepped on or kicked as he reacted on his own to rid himself of the pests. A swat in the face or on bare arms from his constantly thrashing tail was another hazard the attendant had to guard against.

The job was usually passed on down to a younger sibling when one matured enough to pitch the hay. A haymow in June and July is one of the hottest places on earth. Add the chaff to all of your upper sweating body parts and you soon learn what it takes to be tough.

Kids worked for two reasons - because they were made to, or for spending money if they wanted any at all. There was plenty of time for play, but not as much as the youngsters of today have. Come to think of it, we all have more time for leisure pursuits, including moms and dads.

All of the mothers I knew early on were homemakers, which meant they had very few free moments. My mother had four children, my dad, his uncle and grandparents to care for with few of today's conveniences available.

Canning foodstuffs and food preservation made up much of women's work. My mother had to do it all on a wood fired stove, which added to the intensity of the heat. We had no refrigeration or even the luxury of a fan. Houseflies were a problem, especially with farm animals being nearby. Fly ribbons festooned the ceilings and we kids were constantly being harangued with "CLOSE THE SCREEN DOOR!"

We did have our quieter moments after supper as the sun began to set. The grownups would sit on the front porch relaxing while the neighborhood kids played slope, kickball or hide and seek. Many evenings were spent watching the heat lightning and hoping the rain it sometimes portended would cool the air.

As unpleasant as it seemed at the time, we kids hated to see the summer end because it heralded the start of school. Most of the grownups felt the same way because of the reasons above. Mothers didn't in particular because we were out of their hair for at least part of the day.

I am a lot older today, but I feel especially buoyed because life becomes less hectic after Labor Day. Please do not get me wrong and I mean no offense when I say people are a little like grandchildren: I love to see them come and I love to see them go.

With the grandkids, we get the house back and the tranquility we enjoyed before they came. After Labor Day we get our town and roads back. Neighbors and old friends find more time to kibitz and cajole with each other. The pace slows down noticeably. Summers have just become too busy for me.