

Dog Days of Summer
first published in Newswest July 27, 2018

Once the novelty of summer vacation faded, the weather had the boiling humidity of a rain forest and the light was a constant sharp glare. The soft green landscape of spring had baked into golden dryness and the lawns were looking like shredded wheat biscuits before they went over Niagara Falls.

Our moms were all the same. As soon as they noticed a few kids gathering in the house, they would yell, "Get out and play, it's a nice sunny day." They wanted us out of their hair so they could get on with their day, making jam and pickles in the steamy kitchen, and starting dinner. We were happy to oblige, and made sure we were out of sight in case our mothers thought to make us weed the garden or cut the grass.

A favourite pastime was to sit on our flat garage roof with the hose pointed up to the sky. When someone walked by we gave them a little sprinkle. They would look up, mystified, then figure out where it came from and bark at us. That quickly turned into a water fight with everyone battling for control of the hose. Then the next obvious thing to do was to put on our bathing suits and run screaming through the sprinkler, giving the parched lawn a much-needed drink.

In a couple of hours we were starving. If we happened to be at my house, my mom would bring a tray of sandwiches, (a choice of peanut butter or bologna) and a pitcher of lemonade or Freshie out to the backyard. We loved having a picnic, never realizing every mom's secret motive was to keep the kids out of the house. Another favourite lunch event was to wrap the sandwiches up and bring a thermos of cold lemonade to the park, climb a tree and have lunch sitting on the branches.

We loved the old high wooden slide with the stairs worn from thousands of feet climbing to the top. Of course the first person to slide down forgot how hot the metal could be in the sun. After they let out a screech of pain, the rest of us slid down on our backs with our shirts to protect us. After a turn on the swings, sailing as high as they would go, we collapsed under the trees to observe the clouds and cool off before heading home.

The neighbourhood pool was only two or three feet deep and usually filled with spashing, fighting little kids, so for five cents the Plant Bath was a better option if we felt like taking the bus down Somerset Street.

The library was always a cool attraction. Some days we would bike over and spend an hour browsing through the stacks and picking out a few books to bring home for a rainy day.

Judy's mom usually didn't mind us playing records in their basement. We loved Connie Francis and Lesley Gore, but the boys said they were too "sappy" so they brought over a few records of their own.

They liked the old Johnny Horton songs like "North to Alaska" and "The Battle of New Orleans", and almost anything by Johnny Cash was also a favourite. We played them all with no objection; the basement was cool and it was another fun way to spend a hot afternoon indoors but still just out of the reach of a scolding mom or an outside job assignment.