

FUN AND GAMES ...

Growing Up in Clinton in the 30s and 40s

Part one of a two-part story by Carolyn Talleur Lawatsch

My grandson asked, "Grandma, what did you do for fun when you were young?" He had just heard me mention that there was no TV when I was growing up in Clinton Corners, where I was born in 1934. He was waiting for a believable answer to what to him was an unbelievable statement. The question set my mind racing—not because it was a hard question, but because there were so many answers. I was hoping to keep it short and simple, but when I started thinking about those days, the memories went on and on.

First of all, there were very few playmates in Clinton Corners in that time period—just my schoolmates, my two brothers, our parents and grandparents, and an occasional visit from our cousins. Our activities were largely seasonal. In early spring, we celebrated the end of winter with a family walk down Hibernia Road to a sand bank where pussy willows grew. We gathered arms full of the fuzzy catkins and made bouquets with forsythia and the earliest daffodils. Another spring walk was to the Sitzer farm on Salt Point Turnpike to see the litters of newborn piglets. We could scarcely believe how many each sow had, all lined up getting fed. Sometimes as we walked we saw calves, foals, or lambs when we passed the Lovelace farm pastures.

In March, the wind was often up and it was time for kite flying. We made our own kites using newspaper

or brown paper, light flexible sticks from our trees, and rags from torn cloth for a tail to keep the kite steady in the brisk spring breeze. There were several school activities in springtime. May 1st was the Maypole dance, in which the girls dressed in their prettiest dresses and wove colored streamers around a pole to celebrate the arrival of spring. I don't remember what the boys did, or how the pole was erected. Maybe one of the readers of these remembrances will recall. Arbor Day was a time for tree planting and a walk to one of the local farms for a picnic.



We kids knew where to find the most wonderful assortment of wildflowers: hepaticas, mayflowers, violets, lady slippers, Dutchman's britches, dogtooth violets, and others. We picked them in bunches throughout April and May, and in June we found wild strawberries. There

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is nothing so sweet, so lovely to the taste buds, as the taste of wild strawberries!

My brothers and I brought home a variety of little creatures and birds, trying to make pets of them all. One field mouse lived in a discarded teapot for a while. The most glorious creature we found was an enormous green bullfrog with amber eyes that we placed in the family bathtub—much to the dismay of our mother Dottie Talleur, who frowned on our choice of bullfrog habitat. Spring was also a time for collecting frog's eggs so we could see them grow and hatch into pollywogs, then eventually into frogs, when we would let them go in nearby ponds.



Our grandmother, Florence Carner, had a green thumb. She grew and preserved most everything we ate. She also grew an amazing array of flowers, that she displayed and won ribbons for on Community Day. You cannot blame her for being sad when we kids picked the long stems from her peony bushes and had "peony bopper" duals, trying to knock the bud off our opponent's stem.



She must have been horrified but she never raised her voice as she corrected us.

Grandma also had petunias in her flower beds, which my brothers

and I picked and filled with syrup made from sugar water to feed the hummingbirds. We sat quietly in the garden for long periods of time holding a petunia blossom in our hand so we could watch the little "nature's jewels" drink. We also kept track of nesting birds, all of which we knew by variety, color, and calls. We checked the nests daily, following the babies' development as they hatched, feathered out, and learned to fly for the first time.



In spring we helped in the garden our grandmother tended so expertly. We picked peas, sitting in the rows often eating some of the sweet pods raw as we filled the basket. We pulled weeds, picked beans and corn, pulled carrots and beets, gathered melons and squash in season. It did not seem like work, at least not to me. We picked cherries, pears, raspberries, blackberries, and grapes, all of which our grandma made into jams and jellies, or preserved for family use. I have tried to find, in my adult life, even one tomato like the ones my grandmother grew in that Dutchess County soil, but I have never found one so delicious.

Summer evenings brought other activities—catching bats, for one. We used 12-inch squares of white cloth with a small rock tied in the middle for weight. These lures were thrown up high in the air and bats would dive on them, making it possible to pop a net over them when they got near the ground. Since we had no real use for bats, we always let them go, but it was fun to catch them anyway. We also caught fireflies in glass jars and watched them glow in our hands for a

while, before letting them go.

Another summer activity involved the long, sturdy wild grape vines dangling from trees in the woods. We climbed up on a tall rock, grasped a vine, and swung way out, fast and far, hollering the Tarzan yell as we flew through the air. Besides the woods, our Dutchess County lakes, streams, and stream banks were wonderfully entertaining as we learned the habits and habitats of creatures that lived there. Fish, frogs, turtles, snakes, and various rodents—none escaped our attention.

The annual Community Day in Clinton Corners included a clambake, pony rides, games for children, and a flower show. Sometimes we decorated our bikes with crepe paper and rode in the parade. Several groups made floats, and one year our teacher, Mrs. Ruth Wooden, helped us make a float that represented the First Thanksgiving. I was dressed as a pilgrim, one of my brothers as an Indian.

TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR FALL ISSUE.

Carolyn and her two brothers, Dick and David Talleur, grew up in Clinton Corners. She currently lives in Florida and welcomes the reminiscences of others from the town of Clinton. Carolyn can be reached by phone at (954) 942-3751.



Jeff Burns (left) and friends in the 1953 Community Day parade