

Newsletter287

Keith's Corner/McGill News

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Pine Nut Picking

A recent email, from a fellow McGill heathen, Bonnie Seritc, suggested a Newsletter about pine nuts.

Picking and eating pine nuts was a big part of growing up in McGill. It was a yearly ritual. I don't remember a year without pine nuts. My family liked to pick pine nuts across the valley on rattlesnake canyon or up Moser canyon .

Why do we now

have years with no or slim pine nut picking?? I don't know, but it seems to be the case. There are many theories to explain the difference, such as increased pollution, but, gee whiz our smelter and stacks were shut down. I think it is the slight change in the seasons. Seems like fall lingers into November and winter drags into summer.

Whatever the reason, we old timers have our memories.

During the 1940s,50s, the day after Labor Day was one of intense trauma for McGill heathens. That was the beginning of the painful transition from roaming free for 3 glorious months to 9 months of institutional confinement. The only thing that kept us from going insane, was September was the beginning of the pine nut season.

We could hardly wait for the first frost in the mountains to ripen the pine nuts and open the cones.

The long painful hours in the classroom were hard to adapt to, but we spent most of those hours dreaming about some freshly cooked pine nuts. During the horribly short period called recess, we met in groups and plotted how we were going to pick tons of nuts. We all had our own methods.

Some would wait until the nuts dropped on the ground. This was a neat way to do it, but you had better do it before the first snow.

My family liked to do several different methods. Dad had made a long pole with a hook on one end. If the cones were still green he would yank them off the tree and we would toss them into a gunny sack. We had some KCC gloves to keep our hands from all the pine pitch. The gunny sacks were stored in the garage for a month or two until the cones were fully opened. Then we would smack the sacks on the frozen ground and the nuts would come out of the cones. We saved the cones to put in the fire at the sleigh riding bonfire on I Ave.

If the cones were starting to open on the tree, Dad would shake the branch, thus knocking the nuts out onto the ground. My Mom was very good at picking them off the ground. She would always gather twice as much as the rest of the family.

Some years the cones would all open at the same time. The procedure then was to lay a tarp around the tree, then Dad would shake all the branches. The tarp would then be folded and the nuts dumped into a bucket.

The next big process was cooking the nuts. Everyone did it differently. Mom would put the nuts in some boiling water for a few minutes and then spread them on a cookie sheet, lightly salt them and then bake them for a few minutes. I don't know the exact time she did this, but they come out great. I have never been able to duplicate her recipe. Maybe it was the coal stove oven that made the difference.

No matter what procedure was used we McGill urchins had a pocketful of delicious pine nuts to take our genius and highly developed minds off the drudgery of school.

McGill News



No, we are not pine nut picking.
We are picking a Beautiful
Christmas Tree.

Old Photo



When McGill heathens spent their waking hours playing baseball and thus becoming Champions.