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Summer's at Memes’

When I was a little girl, my summers always started the same way; a phone call from my father's mother, who we called Meme. No one, not even my father, was sure how she had gotten that name, but to me, at least, Meme was always Meme. In any case, she would call my mother in late May or early June to make sure we would be coming down to Virginia. We were not the only call she made at that time. Meme also made these calls to our aunts and uncles. By the time school let out, my brothers and I and our dog got packed up in the back of my father's truck to spend the summer with Meme and our cousins! Now, you need to know that Meme lived in a four-room shack, with no running water and an outside bathroom. The younger kids slept in the bed, the older ones slept on blankets laid on the floor, and Meme slept in a recliner by the potbelly stove. Looking back, I can't fathom how we thought

this was comfortable in any way, but we were kids; we made do with what we could.

Meme would wake up the older kids around 6 am to catch the truck going to the field to pick cucumbers, tomatoes, and potatoes. We would pick crops until noon because the sun made it too hot to stay out in the area. We didn't work for free though, we were paid 75 cents a bushel. By noon we would have earned between $20 to $30 per child. When we got back to Meme's house, she would take the money and give us around five dollars each.

Later in life, I laughingly tell people that my grandmother was "pimping us out," and we never even realized it. We never did see the rest of that money. Looking back, it's even funnier how picking crops was almost a lucrative enterprise. In today's USD, we would have made close to $100 a day, but we were only left with around $15. We never really worried about the money because you could buy about three bags full of any junk food you wanted for about $2.50. So, we always had plenty of money on us, even the little ones who were too small to go into the field with us. We also got home-cooked meals from Meme every night, so that made it all worth it.

From noon on, we would ride our bikes or visit with our aunt Gertrude. We loved hanging out at her place because it was big, and she allowed us to do just about anything we wanted to. Another reason we loved going to her house was that she let us play in and around all the old cars she and her husband had sprawled around her front yard. She was the "cool" aunt. Honestly, I don't

remember too much more about those summers, except there was a lot of laughter, bike riding, barbeques, and wandering all over the place.

Reading "Rave On" brought back memories of riding in the car with my Aunt Gertrude; we used to beg her every day we went to her house to take us for a ride, most of the time she would say no. Then one day we'd show up, and She would stand up and say "I am tired of you kids begging, so get in the car and let's go for a ride." There would be eleven of us, ten kids, and my aunt. We tried to get Buddy, the dog, in the car too, but there just wasn't enough room for him. So, he had to stay behind and miss out on the ride; he would have loved it. Those rides were life-changing. The feelings of danger, yet excitement, the feel of the wind blowing through every coil of my hair; moments like those are the ones you write about in your college English classes 30+ years later.

My aunt, who, by the way, wore glasses so thick that they looked like the bottom of coke bottles, would pack us into the car like a game of Tetris. The three smallest would be in the front, strapped into the one seatbelt, and the rest of us in the back. There were no seatbelts in the backseat, so we would sit on each other's laps, holding on for dear life. She would then turn onto the dirt road and hit the gas. I am convinced to this day that she hit 100 miles an hour. It felt like I was taking off in a rocket. We were pushed back into the seats, screaming at the top of our lungs for her to go faster. Aunt Gertrude gave us an excitement that you couldn't find at just any amusement park. We rode like this for what seemed like forever until we came to this clearing, then she would start making circles at high speeds, kicking up so much dust you could hardly see. In the back of her car, we slid into each other like pinballs at the arcade. It was so dangerous, but we were kids. We didn't know any better, and if we did? We probably would've still hopped into auntie's car. It was like being on a carnival ride, till this day, the best ride of my life.

I don't think Meme knew about the joy rides we took with Aunt Gertrude. Meme was old-fashioned and believed we should all act like little ladies and gentlemen; on the other hand, we wanted to run wild. Like Meme, our mothers were overly protective, so it was fun to let loose with Aunt Gertrude in the summers. It was nice to get our toes wet, catch a joy ride, and make new memories all

summer. So, we kept a lot of things we did from her. There was no reason to upset Meme. Besides, Meme did not play all of that. She always carried a belt with her.

Those summers with Meme were almost perfect. The only thing I hated about spending the summer at memes was the bathroom situation or the lack of a bathroom, that is. Meme's house had no running water. She had a well out front that we had to pump water from so that we could use it to wash up and clean dishes. She also had a tiny outhouse. It was just a hole they dug out and put a wooden box over top of. Having to use it in the daytime was terrible enough, but I refused to even go near it at night. I was afraid that a snake would jump out of the hole they dug and bite my butt.

I preferred to sleepover at Aunt Gertrude's house. No one down there had running water, but she at least had what they called a slop bucket. It's a bucket you put in the corner of the room behind a curtain you would use as your bathroom and emptied into the outhouse each day. I would volunteer to do that job for as long as I stayed there.

We spent the whole summer there. From the time we got out of school until at least mid-August, this is how I spent my summers until I was a teen. Thinking back on it now, they were the best summers of my life and profoundly affected me. My cousins and I are still very close, something I don't think would happen had we not spent our summers together. Four lived in upstate New York, and two resided in Ohio and once lived in Delaware. My family rarely traveled to see them. Now we are spread all over the United States. We keep up with each other on Facebook or the phone. I doubt I would have gotten to know them so well had it not been for the summers at Memes'.