

6/10/08

**“Good Old Days”
by
Tom Holbrook**

I received a lot of comments from readers concerning my account of our recent 50th High School reunion. Seems we struck a nerve of poignancy and sentimentality in many of you fellow seniors out there. Maybe it's our age, do you think, that makes us all mentally drift back to the “good old days” gone by. But gosh, weren't the 50s the greatest?

I know that technologically we wouldn't want to go back to the horse and buggy for our mode of transportation, nor the crank-phone for our mode of communication even if we could, but the civilized attitudes of our neighbors and the public in general sure would be a nice change for that which we have to live with now. Much of our conversations with those classmates returning were on the subject of how simple life seemed back then comparable to the hustle bustle, gang banging, gun carrying, amoral attitudes of the 21st Century.

We drove through our hometown of Belle, WV and thought back to when we tried to ride our bikes on the cinder streets of our little town. No sidewalks and no paved streets except for U.S. Route 60 that split our town down the middle. In our day we kids could run as far and as long as we wanted to for the most part as long as we were home in time for dinner, or before dark, and as long we didn't cross over the “hard road.” “Don't play around the hard road,” or “Don't go across the hard road” our mothers would say as we ran out of the house. The two-lane “hard road” was the main East/West route from Virginia to Kentucky, which made it very dangerous for little squirts like me at the time.

On the other side of the hard road were the railroad tracks that brought in trains of the New York Central, the B & O and the C & O rail lines. Most of them taking coal out toward the east and bringing chemicals in and out for the number one employer in our town, the E.I. DuPont Chemical Plant. 95+% of the men living in our town worked for Dupont and most of the wives stayed home to discipline all us rowdy young'uns.

I can't dismiss the families that lived on the other side of the railroad tracks... they were good folks as well, and their houses were either sitting on the side of the mountain or

strung up Belle Hollow, or Belle Holler as most people called it. The mountain was a great place to go to when you got old enough to cross the hard road on your own and we guys would take off in two groups and have war games with B.B. guns as our main attack weapons. Some who didn't have a B.B. gun would break off a stick and sharpen one end of it to stick through crab apples, and then throw the apples off as if in a sling. Wasn't as accurate as a B.B. gun but sure hurt as badly if it hit you.

Of course there was one other area that was strictly taboo to us kids and that was the great Kanawha River that paralleled the hard road with the majority of houses in between. It was sure death to sneak off and swim in the river. If the chemicals, sewage and deep drop-offs didn't kill you, which it did several of our friends, then your mother would if she caught you... which she did several times. It seems that mothers in town had an unspoken rule that if one saw a group of boys heading in the direction of the river she would telephone the mothers of the boys she saw and next thing we would know was our mother yelling down over the riverbank to the water's edge, "Tommy Holbrook, get your clothes on and get up here this minute. You are in deep trouble young man."

For a boy of 6,7 or 8 years old that was a time you wished the drop-offs had gotten you because death would be better than getting your legs switched all the way home... three or four streets away. Still got the scars to prove it.

Well, my space has gone so I'll leave you with these words... Remember, old golfers never retire; they just lose their drive, and Ken, old bankers never retire; they just lose interest.

#