

Wayland Town Crier: June 14, 2007

Enjoying a summer treat

Sarah Banse

As June comes barreling on to the scene, we parents of the suburbs are crazed, running from end-of-the-year picnics, ice cream socials, concerts, plays, open houses, playoff games, jamborees and field days.

As I drive from one celebration to the next, I long for the unstructured days of summer. I picture a day of bare feet, bathing suits, sandcastles, rubber rafts, Frisbees, sea gulls, aqueducts constructed and sisters buried up to their ears in sand. As the sun starts to retreat in the west, hooded sweatshirts are donned and a hole is dug for dinner. Wood is gathered by all parties big and small.

When the coals are ready the barbecue begins. Waves lap quietly on the shore. Their rhythm echoes the sentiment on the beach. It has been a long, full day.

At the sandy pit, men gather around the wood with lighter fluid and discuss the best way to get things burning. Talk turns to boy scouts and summer camp experiences. The men stand shoulder to shoulder, secretly hoping that the other's flame won't ignite, so that they may step up to the plate and show off their fire building prowess.

The alpha dog who secures the coals is generally the one who gets to cook the meat. Hamburgers by the pound are placed on the grill commingled with hot dogs and all nature of sausage. The end result is more often than not, burnt wieners and raw burgers. That's what makes the day so magical. The iron-clad rule, no dessert until you eat your dinner, is thrown out the window.

The perfect summer treat without a doubt is the s'more and you can't have a s'more without a marshmallow. The key to a perfect marshmallow is in the stick. Find one that's too short and you end up with smoke in your eye. Too long and you lose interest. The sticks are best secured before dinner and compared by all during the fire building. Stick envy is quite common and every

experienced roaster knows to hold on to their stick until it is time to use it. Many fights have erupted over a deliberate or inadvertent stick swap. A good stick does not need to be pointy. Marshmallows are sticky enough to hold on. Leaves and branches must be removed. You need a clean stick for proper roasting.

The marshmallows are doled out, while stacks of graham crackers and slabs of Hershey chocolate are lined up ready for construction of the ultimate, perfect childhood meal. Kids and grownups alike line up ready to savor the sweet, hot goo of summer. There are many types of roasters – the burners, the flickers, too-close toddlers, the methodical browners and those who eat as many raw marshmallows as they can when no one is looking.

In the dead of winter you may be tempted to replicate summer's bounty by placing your marshmallow in the microwave on a cold January day. Don't. The consistency of the marshmallow changes, the chocolate doesn't melt right and the end product is a disappointment.

I myself have roasted a marshmallow over an electric burner longing for the dog days of summer and my youth. It comes closer to the real thing but you cannot duplicate the smell of burning embers. Forget indoor imitations, you've waited this long. Summer's almost here so perhaps I'll see you at a cookout. I'll be the one with chocolate and fluff on my face.

Sarah Banse is a writer and mother of four. She has been a Wayland resident for 10 years.