

Summers in Cragsmoor

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Cragsmoor may be a little slower than other areas around here when it comes to dressing up for spring, but once she gets going, it is so beautiful.

The pink on the tops of the hardwoods have turned to a light green as I write this on May 14th and here and there are fruit trees in bloom. Our tamaracks, the prettiest of pines, that are not evergreens, have their new soft needles out. The daffodils are finished, but the irises are puffing up and ready to show off.

I have seedlings on the windowsill, but it's still way too cold to put them out. The law around here is to wait until Memorial Day to put out house plants or young plants. You might think that it will never get too cold again, but oh, boy, it can still go down to 35 at night. We walk the dogs down into the woods as much as possible and in the morning, you can hear every kind of bird, announcing his territory. We make sure we never let the dogs go too far into the woods in this season, as fawns may have just been born.

The other day, a Great Horned owl kept flying from tree to tree to make sure we did not get too close to his owlets. A good-sized garter snake startled me on a very warm day, so we know that species is abroad already. I saw a unique woodpecker today. He looked like the ivory-billed one rediscovered in Arkansas. You know, exactly like Woody Woodpecker with the classic head and very big.

Warm weather also brings back memories of games we played as kids. We never had a television until I was eight years old in our winter house and in Cragsmoor, our summer home, we never had one until I was 30. So we had books, radios, records and our imaginations for entertainment. There were always people visiting in the summer, picnics and dinners, so we never missed it.

We also played a lot of games made up by my sister and her friend.

They were older and had willing pawns to boss around.

One game was called Body. It starts with two kids who were the parents and then the rest were the kids. The mother would say, "Now there is a dangerous body hiding in the woods, but we still have to go to the store for our daily bread." Now, one kid was the body and would be hiding somewhere along the driveway. We had to walk to the end, touch a tree and run back to the porch. At some point the body would jump out and grab a kid, take him back to the woods and it would start again. The last kid caught was the next body. It was lots of fun and so scary when we played it after dark.

Another game was called Gascoigne. In this game kids would stand in a circle. The one in the middle had to keep his eyes closed, would be turned around and then have to identify whomever she or he touched, by feeling their face.

We also played Sardines, where one kid would hide, and the others would try to find him; when he did, you would squeeze into the space and the next kid would try to find them and so on.

We played Charades and cards, too.

Once a year, the older kids would make up a funhouse in someone's attic. Grapes were eyeballs and spaghetti was brains.

What is strange and sad to me though is I have no photos of those days. I know we had a camera, but no photos remain.

Our mother also took us to Yankee Stadium once a summer and we got to see the original "West Side Story" and "Destry Rides Again" on Broadway.

We never missed not having TV in the summer and learned to love books. Even today, my sister and I are reading the classics. I feel sorry that most of the children won't bother with Thomas Hardy and A. J. Cronin. But then, why should they? Most people don't live in a place that is so close to the settings of Hardy. Since Cragsmoor is so like Egdon Heath, I would hope all Cragsmoor kids would read, at least, "Return of the Native" and "Far From the Madding Crowd." You have to be prepared to really get into these stories as they are big books, but it is worth it once you're committed.

In the day, we went on hikes or to the swimming pool on **Henry Rd**. I never heard anyone say he or she was bored or had nothing to do. Of course, we were fortunate in having a lot of very close friends and cousins around. The pool was where I met kids from Brooklyn for the first time and what fun they were.

What a childhood! No one in our group was ever very sick or injured. No one was abused, as far as I know, but I think we would have been able to tell. Because of that I never remember anyone being cruel to an animal or another child.

We had no pressure to perform; the dancing class was kind of free-spirited, the art class was fun; there was nothing over-organized. The baseball games were made up by the kids, not the parents – we were just allowed to grow and become who we were.

I guess our parents knew we would observe and be like them, rejecting what we didn't like, and copying what we did.

You know the saying "It takes a village" to raise a child. Cragsmoor was a good example of that. When we left home in the morning, we would meet up with older people at the post office, the library, and the theater or *The Inn*. Almost all of them were nice and the odd balls were harmless. I realize the world has changed, but I still think Cragsmoor has retained some of that same flavor.

One final observation that is going to sound like a grouchy old woman. When I was a child we had to behave. We sat up straight at a restaurant and we had good manners. We giggled in church, but not enough to be annoying. We never threw food or anything at each other; we didn't interrupt or sass the adults. We had lots of loud, wild times together, but with adults we were good. And none of it caused any harm. Actually, it made life a lot easier as adults.

But enough about me.

This morning, May 15th, I was pretty ticked off that both **Center** and **Canal Streets** were closed at 10 AM, when I was trying to get to church. But as fate would have it, I had to take the **Berme Road**. Not too far from **Rte. 52**, I saw a horse in a paddock. He looked OK at first and then I saw his ribs showing. A horse should never have ribs showing. I am going to report this to the SPCA and the owners had best get a vet to check him for worms or they will have some explaining to do.

I plan to report all my sightings of animal neglect. There is also a case of two dogs in Cragsmoor without adequate shelter. Oh, they have doghouses, but according to NY State Law, they do not meet the requirements. I'm about to call Sheriff King as soon as I send this article in. If you can't care for your pets, then give them to a friend or a local shelter.

