

# ENJOY THE SEASON

#6

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June 1959. One hundred junior high school band members from all over the city gathered in the high school band room. This was our initial gathering of the summer recreational band program. We knew the routine. We were "seasoned". Most of us had one, even two years of this business under our belts. Registration. Uniform fittings. Practice schedules. And finally, the much awaited program schedule for the summer.

Band director Alan Harris mounted the podium and slipped on his glasses. The room was as quiet as a vast mausoleum. We were longing to hear one word: Riverview. We all started to fidget as he read the list; Cedarburg, Rockford, July 4 in Racine, Milwaukee County Fair, Lakefront Stadium Battle of the Bands.

Okay, I thought. The same as last year. So there's still hope that he'll say THE name.

"And we'll end the season in Chicago at Riverview", he concluded.

Cheers resounded, and we dispersed not giving any thought to the long, hot tedious hours of practice. However many of us passed out during the season, it was worth it because we were going to Riverview.

Riverview was our favorite place not only to perform, but also to have fun. We marched in a quickie early afternoon parade, and the rest of the time was our own until after dark. We played no concert and stood no inspection. All there was to do was to have fun.

I assumed that the amusement park was so named because it was close to a river, but we never saw any water. We didn't care. The place was massive with tons to do. Before the trip, Mr. Harris told us that ours was the last band from our city that would ever travel to Riverview. The word was that the park was falling prey to unsavory elements and would probably be closed permanently in the near future. All the more reason to have fun.

We knew that the amusement games were too difficult to win because they were rigged. But some of our guys spent a month's allowance money in hopes of winning a cheap

cuple for their girlfriends.

I was wary of the food because I didn't know how long it had been lying around. Besides which, I hadn't even heard of some types of food that was available there. I was not concerned with this in the least. Food never impressed me. Eating subtracts time from other activities. It's necessary only for survival, although the contents of most food promotes the opposite. I always wanted to get eating out of the way or skip it altogether on occasion. Riverview did have one exception, however: SNOCONES. It was the only place I had ever seen crystal ice shavings bathing in sweet, thick syrup. It was heaven on an August day.

Why, really, was Riverview so great? The rides! During the bus trip I befriended a boy from another junior high. We hit it off and agreed to spend the whole time together catching as many rides as we could. For the first time ever I kept my eyes open at the top of the ferris wheel. Perhaps it was to impress my "date". We went on many other rides together, the name of which have slipped my mind. The rides were exciting to us; tame by today's standards. The last two we went on will always stand out.

THE BOBS was a "super" fast roller coaster that moved laterally more than vertically. I remember being joggled repeatedly so that my right hip rammed the inside of the car. My date (I don't recall his name) enjoyed the ride so much that we went again. Bravely, I endured. Later, upon inspecting my hip in a women's facility, I was astounded to see a bruise the circumference of a basketball. But this was Riverview. Nothing dampened my spirits. Not mosquitos, not "unsavory elements" that poked fun at our band uniforms (no, they weren't dorky), not even a humongous, painful contusion.

The afternoon flew by and dusk set in. The myriad lights made us feel as though we were in our own special world. In our hearts we knew that this was our reward for a successful

season of hard work, high scores and trophies won. This was as good as life got.

After pausing for a bite to eat, "my man" headed for the Tilt-A-Whirl, my absolute favorite ride in the whole world. I never got dizzy spinning in those wire baskets with poor seat padding. I could spin for hours. As we spun and whirled, I noticed that my date was turning pale. He tried to keep on laughing, but I knew that something was wrong. As the car swung to a stop, my partner leaned forward and threw up grape soda on the floor. The attendant wasn't thrilled. Another reason not to eat.

That was my only date that summer. As we headed back to the bus, him holding his gut, me limping, something told us that we were not to be a permanent item. No words were called for. We turned to take one last look at the park that was the setting for so many good memories for hundreds of kids like us. The rides, the lights, the music, the sweet air, people having fun.

In the school years that followed, my mind ended each summer season with Riverview.

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