



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



Picnic Times

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When I was ready to double-check my writing with the internet, I discovered there was no National Picnic Day anywhere near this time. It's observed on April 23rd (which is usually far too chilly) with the international day set for June 18th. What was I thinking?

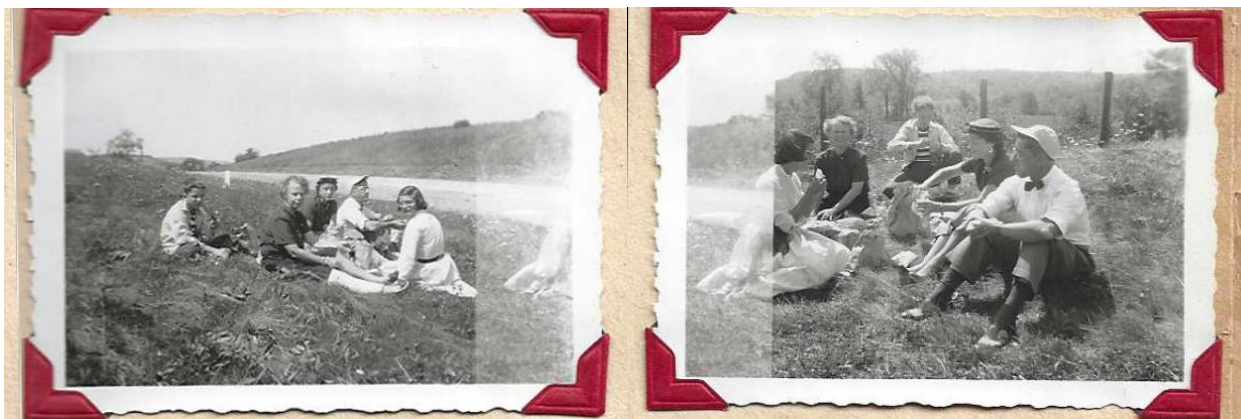
The reply to this (assuring me I haven't lost it at all!) follows: “According to one source, Picnic Day was originally declared a public holiday so railway employees could go to the Adelaide River in Australia's Northern Territory to enjoy a picnic. Regardless of the origins, Picnic Day is an annual day of rest for workers, as well as a long weekend for outdoor games and races, short getaways, and, of course, picnics. Picnic Day is observed on the first Monday in August.” My calendar, You Had One Job. So, it wasn't even the Barry calendar (I look forward to these as Christmas gifts from one daughter) but anyway it's here so let's go!

I'm all for a picnic any day of the year. Too rainy or cold? Come, join me as we spread a blanket on the floor in front of a blaze in the fireplace and/or a Bills game on TV. If it isn't football season, I'm open to golf or baseball anytime.

California was different – one could schedule an outdoor-event weeks in advance, rain was that predictable. As I recall, it only flowed between two and four, equally convenient, in Boulder. Here? One never knows.

Even before I moved back, my parents had found for me the ideal acreage outside Ellington. I recall happy picnics there with my cousin and her family. I had a beautifully outfitted picnic basket given by another cousin which held all the necessities: plates, cups, utensils and napkins, a first aid kit (with extra for snake bit) and toilet paper. Food? Best part for hurried (and harried) moms: a lovely general store in town. Pick what you want: breads or rolls, meats, cheeses, drinks and desserts (probably for the kids – at least -- the best part).

Then quiet (more or less as the seven assorted kids took off to investigate) to visit or explore on our own, even perhaps nap a bit. (I would now; we were far younger then.) Two tiny creeks ran downhill through the



property and the remains of a house sat close by. Across the road lived a couple who raised pigs. None of us realized how HUGE a hog could get or how cute the little ones. (Just realized hanging my pig family picture in the dining room wasn't the most diplomatic choice perhaps but inadvertent and welcome there.)

A group of high school friends (the boys advancing in scouting long after we girls dropped out) loved to head off into the hills or down to the water. The only food I recall from long bike rides was plenty of grapes, wonderful for a thirst rider.

I do remember one special outing to Hearts Content with a friend and her mother. My Dad must have been there and perhaps others as well. Emmy and I left the oldsters to catch up while we hit the trails. Back finally and ready to eat with excited voices as the food was set out. (Emmy's mother was a superlative cook.) "Emmy, where's the water?" I so regret forgetting her reply only know she had dumped it all out. We ate well (and happily) but then hurried home to quench our thirst.

Of course, there are always huge picnics, generally organized for a purpose. Arkwright has a very nice one. These are picnics. The food and drink are the same, just only more of everything with a much greater variety. I know they're picnics so don't bother to correct me but, in my eye, they're parties. And the more the merrier.



Then there was the "Teddy Bear's Picnic." How could I forget? "If you go out in the woods today, you're sure of a big surprise. . . ." Both Janes and Roger are gone and I can't remember who accompanied my bass on the piano. Three willing friends dressed up in fur coats for the high school assembly. They had a picnic basket, spread the obligatory blanket on the stage floor and then unpacked while I sawed away. The only food I remember was a long string of sausages which they slowly pulled from the basket. This was not to be taken any more seriously than my awful bass playing but all had fun and the audience, happy to be excused from class, thought we the best.

Written June 8, 2021.