

The Incredible Flying Mr. Yates

I was at the Bonita Springs YMCA yesterday, when I started thinking about how different it was growing up in the “old days.” We played outside, sans adults, the entire day. The only thing that could bring me inside was the faint sound of my mother's voice in the dusk calling me to dinner. Well... except that one time.

It was one of those hot summers in Bonita when the sound of heat bugs filled the still air. My friends and I were ten or so and had never seen an actual hill. We knew they existed and that you could ride sleds down them on something called snow, but that was about it. We were desperate to experience the thrill of a ride down a steep hill, wind in our hair, propelled by gravity and a reckless disregard for our teeth. But the closest thing to a hill that we could find was the steep sides of the railroad track that still cut through Bonita. So, we took our wagons up on the track, packed ourselves in and shoved ourselves off the top. It was great... for about 3 seconds and then we would crash and burn; sprawled at the bottom of a ditch, chins bonking on the back of heads, knees into mouths, elbows into eyes... laughing, rolling around in the sand. It was great!

But we were always looking for a steeper slope... a more thrilling ride. One day, we were searching along the ditch through the head high brush, when suddenly, there in front of us... was a *man*, laying face down and completely motionless in the bushes like he had fell from an airplane. We had all watched enough TV to know what to do next... RUN! When we got to my mom, we were covered in sand spurs and out of breath. I calmly explained the situation. “SOME GUY FELL OUT OF AN AIRPLANE INTO THE DITCH!!!” My mom wasn't buying it and said with a raised eyebrow “Let's go see.” By the time we got to the scene of the crime... he was gone. Mom knew by our bugged out eyeballs and squeaky voices that we had seen somebody, so she took us to Mrs. Yates' house (not her real name). As my mother had correctly deduced, the man in the ditch was Mr. Yates and he hadn't fallen from an airplane... he had fell out of a whisky bottle. Apparently, my friend's screams (Hey! I'm telling this story!) revived him and he had staggered home to sleep it off.

Now, when I visit the City's Recreation Center or the YMCA and see the smiling faces of the kids there, I am reminded that although the times have changed, kids have not. They still need to laugh and have fun! They still *need a challenge... an adventure*. And if we don't work together to as a community to provide them with good ones, they are liable to create some interesting ones of their own.