

BLACKBERRIES IN AUGUST

The week after Grandpa Olson was killed in a car accident, our family was still up north. My dad was out of work that summer and he was looking for a job in the Alcona County and Alpena area. That meant we were spending more time than usual visiting Grandma Olson and Grandma Cubalo. After Grandpa's funeral, we stayed with Grandma Olson. We kids were restless and often went across the road to play with the McKinnon kids, Cathy, Arnie, Eddie and Cindy. Eddie was my age, but I was better friends with Cathy who was a couple of years older than I.

Betty McKinnon, their mother, asked us if we would like to pick blackberries with them at PeeWee Bushrow's house down at the end of the road, a couple of miles away. As I think about it now, it was probably an attempt to allow Mom and Grandma to grieve in peace and also attend to the unpleasant paperwork necessary after Grandpa's death. We ran across the road to Grandma's house to ask permission and Mom said we could go. She helped us find empty coffee cans to put the blackberries in and old shirts (probably Grandpa's) to protect our arms from the brambles. Thus equipped, Sonja & I jumped in the back of Betty's old Ford pickup truck along with the McKinnon kids and headed to PeeWee's farm.

The blackberries were not as thick as we had hoped, but we managed to fill a couple of coffee cans with juicy berries; I am sure we ate more than we put in the cans. We kids were bored with picking, so we pestered Betty until she gave in and said she would drive us back to their house to play. We piled once again into the back of the pickup, carefully setting our blackberry cans against the cab. Cindy sat in front with her mother so she could sit on a comfortable seat instead of the cold metal in the bed of the pickup. Arnie, Eddie, Cathy, Sonja & I sprawled out and hung our arms over the edge, hoping for a breeze to relieve the August heat.

Betty started up the old pickup and drove uneventfully the two miles to her house, but when she stepped on the brakes to slow down for the turn into her driveway, the truck didn't respond at all. I could hear the repeated slam of the brakes against the floor, but the truck just kept on going. Betty wisely decided not to turn into their driveway because it ended at a cliff. She kept going straight down the road. As we passed Grandma's house, Grandma and Mom were standing on the front porch. "No brakes, no brakes!" Betty yelled out the window. Mom and Grandma stared dumbfounded, too shocked to move. We kids hung on to the sides of the truck bed for dear life because we could see we were headed for a big downhill run. Betty yelled, "Hang on

tight!" as she swerved the truck sharply left into an embankment on the side of the road. We stopped with a big lurch and breathed a sigh of relief.

Cindy was crying because she bumped her head. The blackberries spilled. But all the rest of us were uninjured, thanks to Betty's quick thinking. We jumped out of the truck and started to walk back to Grandma's. Mom and Grandma were running to meet us, relief showing clearly on their faces. Two car accidents in one week were too much for everyone to handle, and we didn't talk about it much at dinner. But we did have blackberries for dessert!

Lynn VanderLinde - 1993