

# **The Vanishing “Back Forty”**

**By Dick**

I grew up on a farm where my twin sister and I had our special “Back Forty”. We thought we owned it. Now you know why the memories are so special.

From about age 5, we had our own bikes. Very useful to get to the back forty. Mostly followed well-trodden cow paths to get there. One had to quickly be a skilled bike rider in order to not fall. A little extra speed also helped to get over the rough huff marks in the cow trail. But the destiny was well worth the effort.

Almost a half mile from our house and in the woods, everything seemed perfect. We would build a fort decorated with cattails we picked from the slew along the way. Then old canvasses we “borrowed” from the farm hung nicely from a tree branch and we had our fort. Of course, we needed to gather stones for chairs and table. Starting a ceremonial fire was always exciting. We were careful to use only very dry trigs so there would be no smoke so we could not be discovered.

We spent many an hour looking for beds where the deer had just spent the night. We did not have to worry about black bears. However, fox and even woodchucks were sometimes seen. Our noses always told us when a skunk was too close. Mostly, skunks like to be in the open field hunting for food.

My dog was always with us to the fort. His name was Major. Short brown hair of medium build but with some German Shepherd blood. We did

not need a gun as long as he was with us. Mom and Dad knew if we were gone and the dog was home, that meant real trouble. That never happened.

My twin sister had a basket in front of the handle bars on her bike. She tried many times to carry a cat with us in that basket. Not a good idea. The tranquility of mother nature and the wind in the trees made for a most pleasant atmosphere and place to play. Did I mention, it was also out of ear shot of Mom and Dad’s voices? They learned that we knew how to survive and enjoy nature for even 5 hours at a time.

This, I write because it is in contrast to my grandchildren, who have fun building forts in the family room with boxes, chairs, tables, and yes, bed sheets. They do have fun in that way.

Neither my twin sister nor I were fond of frogs or snakes. Any sight of those and they were quickly removed in a nonliving state.

After a month or two, it was time to build a new fort. We just simply abandoned the old one, at least for now. Of course, cattails had to be picked at least fresh once a week. Mom knew when we left on our bikes wearing our tall rubber boots, that we would be going in the ditches and slews for cattails. We also brought the nicest one’s home to Mom and Dad.

And now to think, the woods in the “Back Forty” have been cleared and in so doing has helped increase global warming.