

May Day Frolics

By Lucinda Strine

Do you remember the Maypole dances we performed in days of yore? I think it took 16 girls, each controlling a long pastel streamer, to complete this complicated weaving. Half the girls traipsed one direction in and out, while the other bunch met them going around the other way, making a colorful design at the top.

This was the tradition of long-standing for our “Last Day of School Celebration” at Ruggles-Troy High in Nova, Ashland County, Ohio in the 1940s. We girls practiced in gym class for at least a month prior to the big day.

If it rained, this entertainment was held in the stuffy and crowded gym. The sophomore and junior girls performed this festive dance. Our school wasn’t the only one to celebrate this way. Hubby remembers a May Day celebration, too, on May 1 in their country high school.

The second year I was to dance around the pole, a few girls decided it would be better if we all wore matching dresses. They picked out a certain dress with pastel flowers from the Spiegel catalog. It cost \$2.98, plus shipping! That was a large expenditure for nonessentials for our farm



Top right: I am shown in my formal (which cost my parents \$11) with my new graduation watch, holding a wine peony and wearing the necklace I was awarded for being class salutatorian. In the background is the office of the Nova, Ohio, telephone company.

Right: The seven girls in the May Queen’s court in May 1946 are shown here bedecked in formals and flowers. I am at the far right. The blonde with white flowers near the center is the queen. Two of these beauties have since passed on. This photo was taken in front of Ruggles-Troy High School at Nova, Ohio.



family back in the 1940s. That was also the year I turned my ankle while practicing. I skipped around painfully, but I refused to let it force me to quit. That pain I still remember!

The “special” dress arrived. It was not nearly as pretty as pictured. Only three other girls actually had ordered a similar one. It was flimsy, cheap cotton that had to be starched after each wearing or it would “look like a dishrag,” as Mom was fond of saying.

I’d like to think that that was the last of my battles with teen peer pressure, at least about clothes. Alas, it wasn’t!

For the next year’s ceremony for crowning the Queen of May, we senior girls all needed a new dress—and this time it was to be formal! The queen was chosen and all seven of her classmates were attendants who were expected to wear long pastel gowns, complete with corsages, and carrying a maroon peony. I still have a picture of us all in a row, formally gowned, in front of the old school building (which since has been torn down).

The queen was adorned in a long gown of white satin with a train, much like a bride’s. She carried a bouquet of fresh flowers. A blond beauty she was!

This procession marched to the throne to the music of the *Grand March* from *Aida*. Over the years I grew to love this triumphant refrain so much that I planned to use it for my own wedding march someday. (I didn’t.)

After the winding of the pole, there were other musical numbers to enjoy after the queen and her court were seated. Perhaps it was the music teacher who helped oversee the proceedings; we students were told very emphatically that the regular classroom faculty were much too busy completing final reports to join the frivolity.

The fish fry that followed was out of this world. Townspeople caught the fish in Lake Erie and cooked them in hot oil in a huge, drum-like apparatus. They labored over this bubbling, steamy “stove” most of the day. Though there was also a potluck dinner at noon, I only remember the unspeakably delectable taste of deep-fried fish—the high point of the day for me!

One year the strawberries were beginning to ripen on the last Friday in May, adding to the bountiful feast.

This was all too good to be confined to a single day, of course. The crowning of the Queen of May fired the imagination of my two sisters and me. As youngsters, after watching this drama year after year, we would dress up and play “May Queen” far into June. By then the light blue iris were blooming in abundance for a queen’s bouquet.

As older sister, I always wanted to be May Queen, but just as often I was out-voted by younger sisters to take turns.

Our favorite costume was a couple of discarded lace curtains to drape around us for a white formal with a train. We marched from the front porch to the back steps where the crowning took place. Was the crown made of yellow dandelions intertwined? That detail escapes me. But I do remember that if we didn’t all three keep in time with the “hesitation step,” we had to start all over!

Like many other local happenings in the country schools, these events have gone by the wayside. But what a joyous time it was! Do you remember? ❖

