

Finally, a week or so after the Fourth of July, the fireworks and miscellaneous explosions seem to have ceased. Though we were excited to watch fireworks on those rare occasions we had a chance when we were young, I don't really like the noise or even the displays in the night sky. For one thing, we usually have a dog that is both frightened and annoyed by fireworks, and I guess I can't really see any reason, either, for disturbing the nighttime peace. An evening with a display of lightning bugs—fireflies—is much more appealing.

But, when I was little, one of the stories I liked best to hear was about my father's most memorable Fourth of July. I sat on his lap for awhile almost every evening for a story, and although I heard it numerous times, I was always equally interested. Perhaps, I thought it might change from time to time? It never did. That's why I have no problem retelling it on this page. I have heard this story many, many times.

When Dad was a young boy in the early years of the 20th century, a few firecrackers were usually the highlight of the Independence Day celebration. He and his brothers were inordinately fond of explosives, anyway, as was made clear to me when I was growing up, since it was obvious that in removing an object from a particular location, dynamite was Dad's tool of choice. This was probably a result of growing up during a time of homesteading and land clearing. Blowing stumps and stones to make fields that horses could work involved a lot of labor, and dynamite was certainly a big help.

On one particular Fourth of July, the Erickson family had visitors. Their neighbors, a family named Compton, were about to emigrate to some Caribbean or Central American country where they had learned that there was good land available at a very low cost. So, they decided to come and celebrate their last Fourth in the area with the Ericksons. The Comptons brought a firework display, not just a few firecrackers.

Dad remembered that all his life. His story of that evening named the Roman candles, the skyrockets, the fiery display in the sky, and, of course, the noise and drama of the exploding firecrackers. And, the culmination of the evening—the home made ice cream, lemonade, and cake that were usually the talk of a celebration were nearly ignored by the children—was the last shot into the evening sky—a blast of color followed by a parachute that sailed up, up, over the barn and disappeared.

The next day, Dad remembered, was glum for the children. They searched around looking for "duds," the firecrackers that hadn't exploded. When broken in half and lit, they would fizzle weakly, and the drama was gone. They finally found the little paper parachute on the other side of the barn. The Fourth was over. Life went back to its usual routine.

The saddest part of that story, though, was not the children's disappointment that the holiday had passed. The next year, the Compton family returned to the area. They had been victims of a scam that sold people totally worthless land, perhaps not even receiving title to that. The family settled again in a very poor area of sand and swamp in what is now part of the national forest. Where they went from there, I never heard.