

JULY 11, 1974

Legalized fireworks are ending in 1974. The last 4th of July has passed for home ground explosions. Kids are just going to have to be mean and noisy by their own devices. Parents are going to have to forget the days the town sites resounded in aerial and ground firepower.

Before the ban was ordered, fireworks were weakening. I can remember back in the '30s, baby giant firecrackers were so powerful that an old kid ignited one that blew all the hair off the top of his head without moving his hat.

Displays were so hot that year that the sheriff gave us all a chousing. He wasn't worried about blowing up the kids. His concern was how many milk cows were going to be dried up from fright.

As I've told you before, during that depression parents looked after kids about as close as they did the birth records on tree possums.

Milk cows were a different matter. Milk and butter could be traded at the grocery stores. Kids, however, to be driven from the market places to keep them from spitting chewing tobacco on the floors. So, folks with a good milk cow were held in high esteem. Citizens so unfortunate as to have a mob of kids were pitied and scorned at the same time.

Mysterious Orientals manufactured the firepower of those times. For a dollar you could buy an arsenal of powder that'd last for several days. Big-hearted uncles could run the score up to a full week of terror and noise for a neighborhood.

But as I started out to say, neither government nor the governing bothered about their charges except for short spurts of interest on election years. Mother hen government was to come in later years. Non-voting age kids, for example, could have eaten the rusty nails around the old courthouse without bothering the worthies inside. Health, education, and welfare was unknown.

By the next decade things changed. The politicians, prompted by the wet hand kerchief set, began huge campaigns to look after people from the lawbooks.

Pillowmakers were ordered to blunt the quills from their stuffing. Match factories were so closely supervised that the non-inflammable match that we know today was discovered. The good life was soon to mean a society so protective that guard rails were going to be put in the furniture stores to keep folks from stubbing their toes on the chair legs.

Protective government was such a big change. One time before then I was visiting a family on the Fourth, that had a baby who liked to chew on roman candles and sky rockets. We were all out in the front yard playing. The mother threw a terrible fit about the toddler breaking into a sack of fireworks. She said she didn't want a sick kid spitting up on her clean floor.

Wouldn't she have been a case history for the Modern Department of Minding Everybody's Business? Dye from fireworks is worse than tooth colic on a baby, but that old sister was more concerned about saving mop energy than anything else. I imagine today she's probably modeling for sweet little old lady pictures. If I could remember her name I'd turn her in as a fraud.

Fireworks could have ended a long time ago and it would've suited me. When all our eight kids were home, we had 16 eyes and 80 fingers to worry about.

On holidays the barrage would be so intense that the chicken hawks and wood peckers would migrate to Mexico three months early. It'd take a week to coax the dogs back from the thickets in the Mertzson park. Tomcats were thrown so far off pattern that the fall kitten crop would take a severe drop.

One regret I do have about the ending of the firecracker era is the waste that was involved. Every now and then the newspaper has an account of one of our enemies that could use a baby giant in his hip pocket of a cherry bomb between his ear lobe and his lower mastoid. no need to go into detail, but a little spot treatment in certain quarters would sure help our feelings.

Herders have more reason to celebrate the Fourth of July than other people. As long as we can get to the ranch or to the yards, we ought to combine the spirit of the Independence Day with the thought behind Thanksgiving, and count our freedoms.

The lack of firecrackers and the abundance of lawmakers hasn't ruined us yet. We still live in the greatest country of them all. Sometimes it's just hard to understand.