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Around the Table
Chef's Apron

Contact Susan Nye at
susannye@tds.net
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More information the web at
www.susannye.com

I was eleven the first time I celebrated Hospital Day. It was still Hospital Day not Days and was held on a Tuesday. My parents had rented a ramshackle cottage for our first summer vacation on Pleasant Lake. By luck rather than design Hospital Day fell in the middle of our two week stay.

There was no midway but the Pony Club offered rides and some kids let you climb their rope ladder. The games were all homemade and put on by the local Boy Scout troop and who knows who else. There may have been prizes, I'm not sure. There certainly were no florescent stuffed animals. The dunking machine saw a lot of action, particularly when the high school principal took a turn.

The white elephant table had the most amazing collection of kitsch, clutter, chipped cups and broken toasters. Nothing was perfect but everything could be had for under a dollar. Large items were auctioned off under a big tent. If you were patient you could bring home countless treasures for a song. You could buy real, genuine antiques, including ancient beds with moldy mattresses, sofas that should have been kicked to the curb and chests of drawers that had lost their handles.

You couldn't starve because every church in town had a bake sale. The Lion's Club served pancakes in the morning and the Rotary flipped burgers and dogs for lunch. There was a chicken barbeque in the evening and the tickets sold out days in advance.

Then as now, the parade was the highlight of the afternoon. It started with a mob of kids on bicycles. They decorated their handle bars with streamers and attached playing cards to



the spokes with clothespins. Then a slew of antique cars rolled up Main Street; I had never seen so many old cars. There were several homemade floats. These were mostly pickup trucks decked out with crepe paper and packed with kids. The Barn Players threw a piano in the back of a truck and someone played show tunes while the rest of the cast sang. The Scouts, Boy and Girl, marched, the Pony Club rode and Leapin' Lena leapt.

I was coming from suburbia. It was my first vacation in a small New Hampshire town, my first real country fair. I am ashamed to confess I viewed the whole day with something of a jaundiced eye. There were two fairs in my suburban home town, one in the spring and one in the fall. Both sported a big Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round and cotton candy.

All the mothers in town hated those fairs. They worried that we'd be pick-pocketed or get in some kind of trouble. All the games, rides and food stalls were run by carnies. As far as the moms were concerned carnie was another word for ne'er-do-well, scalawag or troublemaker. They only let us go because one fair was next to the police station and the other was a fundraiser organized by the Sisters of Charity.

Of course my mother loved Hospital Day. She had great fun at the white elephant table. Better yet, Hospital Day was real grassroots fundraising in action; there were no carnies, only volunteers. Everyone in town turned out to help with the games, grills and rides. She was in worry-free heaven.

The last day of our vacation my parents bought some land near Pleasant Lake. It might have been the crystal clear water, the relaxed atmosphere of the quiet little town or maybe, just maybe, it was the treasures at the white elephant table!

Bon appétit!

Susan

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or just look like one!

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Mojito Melons

Forget the cotton candy; this cool dessert will be a welcomed and refreshing addition to your next summer celebration. Enjoy!

Serves 12

1/2 cantaloupe, seeded

1/2 honeydew melon, seeded

1/4 watermelon

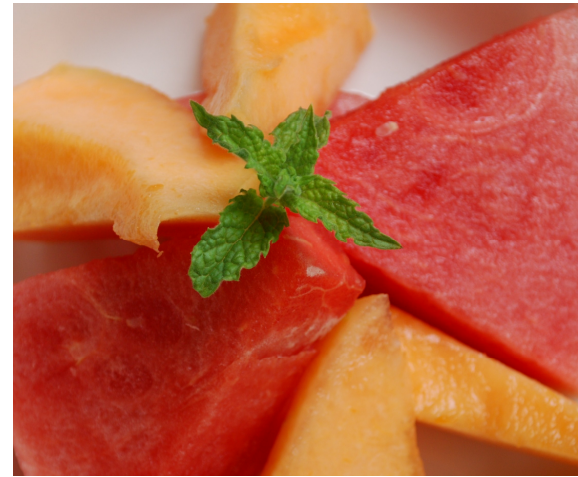
Grated peel of 2 limes

Juice of 2-3 limes

1/4 cup honey or to taste

2-3 tablespoons rum (optional)

About 4 tablespoons finely chopped mint



Cut the melon in chunks or use a melon-baller to scoop the melon into balls and place in a large bowl.

In a small bowl, whisk together the lime peel and juice, honey and rum. Drizzle over the fruit, sprinkle with mint and gently toss to combine.