

Fourth of July

Fourth of July is a huge holiday for me: Explosions leave a surprised look on your face. I enjoy all varieties of explosions. Black snakes grow out of fire and smoke, and artillery rounds launch with an amazing force. The smoke dances through the air after a Morning Glory launches. The next round highlights within the smoke filled air. Black powder everywhere!

The last artillery's wick breaks. Do you light it? Is it going to fire right or explode right here? While others debate these types of questions, I devise a plan getting me a couple of more inches away to light it up! A punk, a gun-shaped lighter, or just some paper lit on fire; these devices are in my arsenal. I will find a way to launch the rocket.

Anyway, I am ahead of myself. I love the Fourth of July. Some people celebrate Christmas, others Thanksgiving, and so on. I celebrate the Fourth of July. The day is usually hot. Families fire up grills cooking a traditional American meal of hamburgers and hot dogs. Everyone in my family anticipates the evening ahead.

My love for the holiday started when I was a child. Each year my family and I went to the Vail Profit Fair in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. The fair still happens today. Vendors are cooking, selling, and hustling about everywhere. The amount of people is unbelievable. The Vail Profit Fair is under the Gateway Arch and uses the grounds close to the Mississippi River.

My first experience with the Vail Profit Fair happened when I was eight. I saw little shows families put on in a back yard, but I had no idea how big fireworks could be. The people, the Gateway Arch, and the fair were huge. My eyes never stopped moving back and forth from one thing to another. The people created a theatre. Each vendor fought for my attention trying to sell me trinkets. The vendors carried them to the crowd. I wanted to see them all. I felt a hand grasp mine; pulling my attention forward. Everything around me was amazing.

As the evening got underway, everyone started settling down. People found a place on the grass with a blanket huddling close to one another. Where ass the best spot? The best spot has the Gateway Arch in full view. Everybody settles in.

No announcements and no people on a loud speaker, exploding fireworks shake you from within. Louder than thunder, a white flash, now the show can begin. The vendors stopped cleaning and hustling about. The show was about to begin.

I remember the first shot being very powerful. The colors blossomed skyward for eternity. The people on the barge waited long enough to create a doubting thought the shot was an accident. A murmur builds in the crowd, as everyone grew with anticipation. I was not paying attention when the next shot surprised me. The show created a surprise factor. Quietly, spark trails flew through the night. The fireworks slipped into the air without a sound. The explosion out rattles the first! A huge spectrum of color grew reaching toward the ground. People leaned back as the colors in the sky fell toward the ground. The explosions created a roaring crowd. Cheering and hollering, the show began.

The show lasted about forty-five minutes. The sky filled with all sorts of colors. The explosions rattled my bones and create a shudder from the inside out. Multiple shots fired rapidly. Occasionally, a slight pause from all of the glory; then more shots went off one after another. The spectacular colors keep stacking on top of each other.

My eyes stayed fixed on the sky so long I could not move my head. I smiled like the Joker creating the show. A giddy feeling as each explosion shook my skinny little body. Tearing me away would be cruel. The finally was massive and everyone knew the show was over. I believed there could be one last shot. My parents knew what I do not want to accept. The show was over. The thoughts of what I have just witnessed danced through my head while trudging to our car. The car was parked miles away. Eventually, the crowd dissipated into the night. I fell asleep in the car's backseat. I could feel the engine's hum. I dreamt about colors in the sky.

Another Fourth of July memory that was special was one our family spent at home. I was around twelve, so I was allowed to participate. This Fourth of July was a different type of event. Two other couples came over that day. Food and music were going on throughout the day. Two of my friends came over too. The evening started settling down. The rules were laid out. On the picnic table was thousands of bottle rockets. We were given a glass coke bottle and a large amount of bottle rockets. We were told, "If you run out it would be a mad dash to the table, Good Luck." The only rules entailed not shooting someone who said

they gave up or the table with the bottle rockets on it. Everyone scattered throughout the yard.

A Roman Candle fired off. When the fireballs were gone; the war could begin. Total chaos! Little missiles whizzing everywhere. No safety equipment, not even gloves for the firing hand. Grin and bear the pain, or don't play. The war was an experience of a lifetime, and one that will never be repeated for all the reasons most sane people can guess. Luckily, the injuries were very minor.

Growing into adulthood, fireworks consumed part of my summer. The excitement builds inside me: I watch huge tents go up around town. I desire to stop at them all. One stand might have something different. Who has the best deal for the biggest explosion? I shop for big artillery rounds. Many boxes give vague information hinting their glory. The labels state they emit showers of sparks and explosions. The fireworks should do at least that!! I dream about owning my own tent. The tent owners preview the newest and best fireworks.

The past few years, I became the Master of Ceremonies: My teenage boys are my assistants. Buying the fireworks is part of the excitement. The boys and I dash to the fireworks stand one last time for a few extra rounds on clearance. When the evening fades to darkness and the preparations are done: The show can begin. My wife watches the show we put on in the pool with our daughters.

A typical Fourth of July starts at my house with food preparations. I cut a watermelon to look like a basket, and fill it with fruit. I put the watermelon in the freezer to chill. Around 10:00 a.m. the grill is started; pans with beer and Bratwurst is placed on the fire. The Bratwursts cook for several hours soaking up the beer; then I grill them locking the flavors in. Hot dogs and hamburgers are made for anyone wanting a choice. My way to relax is caring for the food and keeping everything flowing. I want people enjoying themselves. I will take care of everything else. My boys follow my lead and help out.

Food, good company, or just our family; we make the best of the situation. Many people may come over or just the family is wonderful. The Fourth of July is about family and fireworks. Flags fly high honoring our independence. Even my tiki torches are red, white, and blue!

My sons and I open the fireworks in advance. Unwrapping early means there is a flow of colors in the sky later. We use

a plywood sheet and screw launching tubes to the wood. The screws keep the tubes firing up to the sky. We buy extra lighters, too. I have no fireworks I can light with a punk. My sons and I load and twist wicks together to fire rounds simultaneously. The work creates a giddy sensation amongst us men.

The sun slips out of sight so the show can begin. The first few explosions cause our neighbors to stop their fireworks and watch our show. The trails of fire and smoke linger through the air: Fire wafts while smoke dances in the night. Lingered all around the smoke is a scent of black powder. Our audience cheers us on.

My boys scurry to the tubes still smoking from the last launch. The boys drop shots in the tubes. Smoke bellows out from the previous shot. The cardboard heats up again and again. Quickly, we twist the wicks together waiting for each other to complete the same task. My boys and I say nothing: We light the next set of rounds. We scurry back watching the wicks burn down the tubes. Eight balls of fire blast high into the sky. The sparks create amber light. A small white flash, then colors grow everywhere reaching down towards us. "Ohh, ahhh," are the sounds we hear as the colors change from blues, greens, yellows, and reds. Each explosion differs. The colors create sensations of awe.

The bond my sons and I create during this experience is so strong none of us needs to say a word to one another. Our actions show a primal understanding. Our movements are swift. We grunt and point upward as fireworks explode. The ballet continues for several hours. If a tube breaks, a drill and screws magically appear to replace it. Grunting occurs as objects are passed to each other. Seamlessly we play into the night. We are puppets and the actors are show above us. Everyone is the audience. We shine into the night.

My family is very important to me, and the Fourth of July is a special time. I love to see us all working together and getting along. The summertime air fills me with excitement about the next show with my family.