



A Junior at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1931

La WANDA IDA ENGEL

September 9, 1910, March 27, 1972

The gentle center of the Kenneth A.L. Johnson family and my Mother.



The Adam Engel family, 1911, Shumway Illinois. LaWanda is the little one next to here dad. At 16 Adam's father, Ludwig (Changed his name to Louis when he arrived in the U.S.), in 1846, left Raezwiler, Kingdom of Bavaria for America. He married Katherine Metzler in 1854, and purchased the 120 acre farm in 1864. Adam married not Eve, but Matilda Deible in 1891. Emil Engel, great grand son of Adam still farms the land and lives in the pictured house.

Tales from the life of LaWanda Bertha Ida Engel Johnson

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The chorus of groans from the five Engel sisters and single brother, as they tumbled into the farm house after the mile walk from the Shumway, Illinois school on September 12, 1910 was, "Oh no, not another girl." The baby was a small thing but very active. She was destined to be the baby doll for the giggling gaggle of Engel girls. When the family was stymied for a name, Matilda, the third of five sisters, suggested 'La Wanda,' the name of her best friend in Effingham. So the infant traveled to Trinity Lutheran

Church in Shumway, for Baptism with the agreed upon name of, 'La Wanda Ida Engel.' But because there was an idolized Aunt Bertha, a Bertha sister, and other relatives with the name 'Bertha', the pastor knowing the family tradition, mistakenly baptized mother as La Wanda Bertha Ida Engel. So she carried her memorable moniker through life.



Emil and LaWanda. My mother, LaWanda, and my wife, Ruth, both knew how to milk a cow.

Notice the cover picture, the Victorian frame is sharp brassy-bold, while mother's picture is warm and soft, that is the way Mother chose to play out her life in a hard challenging world. These first stories about my mother I received from cousin Barbara Fark Raferty as related to her by her mother Matilda Engel Fark. She was the second oldest Engel sister still on the farm that September 10th morning. Freda, the oldest daughter was married and living in Indianapolis, Indiana, which left Matilda to care for, and 'Big Sister' La Wanda.

Matilda took over the teaching position at the Shumway school, from Frieda, when La Wanda started first grade. In a class project the children were to bring in colorful fall leaves. When the custodian saw the bright red ones, he said, "Poison ivy." The children were duly warned. That afternoon, La Wanda told her chums she was not afraid of poison ivy and on their dare, rolled in a beautiful patch of red. Well, that night she blossomed in a total body blistering and for a week was dangerously ill. The suggestion to wrap her in rags soaked in buttermilk to sooth the itch, came from a telephone party-line discussion. A contrite teacher,



LaWanda is fourth from the left on the front row in this Shumway one room school house picture of young Matilda Engel's class.

Matilda carried her everywhere for days until her mother insisted she stop, La Wanda needed to walk. To prevent a recurrence of the poisoning, their neighbors helped pulled up all the poison ivy vines in the mile between the Engel farm and school.



Sisters Frieda, Ella, Matilda, Bertha, Mamie, and LaWanda Engel.

The Engel girls were a bright high-energy bunch known to dominate conversations, so La Wanda also inherited her dose of imp. During one Christmas holiday, Matilda after a night of partying lay down on the



dining room couch, pulled up a blanket and took to napping. When Matilda refused La Wanda's plea to play, she pinned the blanket to her sisters hair while she slept and in a daring disregard of family rules, started to light the

Mother's green thumb started here with mentoring from her mother, Matilda. Our home, where ever it was was always crowded with chlorophyll and blossoms, and in Danville when farm children mom and dad had a garden, the table always boasted of fresh vegetables and sweet, sweet strawberries. The local rabbit was their enemy;



candles on the Christmas tree. The tree caught fire and Matilda with the blanket still pinned to her hair threw it over the tree, putting out the flames, but not before it scorched the curtains and wall.

One afternoon Matilda was getting ready to go to Effingham for a party with friends. La Wanda thought she should stay at home, and as the former started down the stairs, La Wanda jumped out with a "Boo!" Matilda tumbled down the stairs, sprawled at the bottom unconscious. A contrite La Wanda stopped the teasing...for a while. Yet after another afternoon of teasing, Matilda having had enough hung her squalling little sister on a hook on the back porch.



Confirmation day for LaWanda. Back row: Mamie, Emil, Matilda, Adam, and Freda. Ground: Matilda, Bertha, Ella, and LaWanda. Julius, born in 1901, died after one year and ten days.

Education was a strong value for the Engel family so a college degree and a teaching position was the favored journey for all six sisters. The father Adam, died in 1929. so brother, Emil, stayed at home and farmed, yet for most of his adult years he was an active member of the Effingham County School Board. As a teenager mother went to live with Matilda and her three daughters, in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she complete her high school education. Then she took her freshman year at Carthage College, then transferred to the University of Illinois taking a major in History and a minor in elementary education.

To give you a flavor of her relationship with her sister and her boyfriend from northern Illinois, and so that she can tell her own story, I have included quotes from two letters she wrote home from college to her sister, Matilda in Indianapolis. Xerox copies of them are in my family history files.

“[Mother musing about her place in life with her graceful handwriting]

April 13,1932 Oh me! Oh my!!

“Now I had to stop and take a long sigh. It seems so far to the end!

“I’ve been rushing and dashing just like the old roosters, whose heads we used to cut off back of the smokehouse.

“For the last week I’ve been doing practice teaching at University High

School. Rather liked it, but my the amount of extra time one can put in on it.

“Er I go away farther—thanks for the lovely time I had while at your home. Truly it’s the best time (more home like) I’ve had for several years. I think this letter will have to be all for you (you is singular). Each time I come to visit you – I can see deeper and deeper into life. Also each time I recall things you said to me the year I spent with you. I think during my childhood I led a rather unusual life _ due to the fact I was the youngest in the family, and everyone did everything to shield me from the blows of the world. No wonder I was so radical – Truly, Mathilda, don’t you think I’ve gone far in putting those radical ideas from me?”

“Life was opened up with such a shock and blow the summer following Dad’s death [1929, The community knew him as a stern man given to anger.]– that I could hardly imagine we I’d been those 18 years. I don’t think I really knew or understood Mother until that summer. Mathilda – now you seem so much like her – So patient and so understanding – and forbearing. I admire you! I think you’ve a brood of three mighty sweet and darling girls. If I can do half so well- my aim in life will be fulfilled. All I need is time.

“I was so disappointed the last night I was there. That I had to leave in such a hurry – or else I guess it was all Frieda. Sunday when I went home with them I left my green dress at your house on purpose. I knew by hook or crook I’d get back to see you and yours. Also I wanted you to see me in it, I didn’t get to see it on. And I would have loved to have seen the baby’s pretty things. Is Ruth Ellen’s stomach better now? And how are you?”

“Before I forget – tell me the truth – The morning I went to Kindergarten with Barbara Jean – Remember I said something about having planned to go shopping alone? Well, did you call Frieda after I was gone – and tell her to go easy one the suggestion’s etc. I’m almost positive for truly it would have been impossible for any Engel to be so _____ [The Engel girls had a reputation for being alpha-verbal females] _____ (Unless – I may have forgotten she has relinquished her claim to the title – Miss Engel)

“I most had to sit on pins every once in a while – to believe I was witnessing Frieda’s too married, love life – Several times. I most had to laugh – Smile I did – To me – it seemed so child like – silly I mean – I could see nothing



Senior picture from Indianapolis, Indiana High School, 1828.

dignified or beautiful in it. It seems like a puppy – dog affair (you know what they accuse very young lovers of). But she certainly seems to be near heaven – in happiness. Then I am glad for her – But – so far as I can see she has nothing to live for - Neither Bertha. But if they're happy – OK. [Mother seems to have marriage in mind and is evaluating her sisters choice of mates. I know nothing about Freda's husband for she died soon after her marriage, but Bertha married Waldemar Pendrup, a Danish military cadet who killed a fellow soldier in a duel and escaped prosecution by emigrating to the US. I knew princely pipe smoking Uncle Pen when he slept at our house in Cincinnati now and again when I was in the sixth grade, for he had a layover from his job as railroad conductor. He was always slender, tall, and smartly dressed in a conductors uniform. They had no children. Ruth and I slept in his relatives apartment when we visited Copenhagen.]

“From this – do see I want real life – that has something to work and labor for in it. For after all it can be so dull without it (labor). Now what do you think?



Students at the University of Illinois. Dad was in their ROTC. Always, dad sang church choirs, National Lutheran Chorus in Washington D.C, and in prison camp, the Oflag 64 Choir.

My blue organdy dress is finished looks nice – got real soft pink silk for a sash. I'll wear it Friday night – to the Men's Glee Club Concert and formal dance afterwards. I told you I was going with Ken – didn't I? He said today he had a car to use – belongs to a married friend of his who is in school.

“Last Friday night we went to the Ag dance (Put on by the agriculture students). Boys wear overalls – girls house dresses. His roommate was on the Committee planning the dance – so Ken got a complimentary ticket. So we went. Had fun – bales o hay – oat bundles, etc.

“Mrs. Roosa [Mother worked and lived in an Italian woman's boarding house and learned to cook many Italian recipes' from her.] has gone to New York again- So far has been gone a week. Don't know when she is coming back. Jan is quite sick with a cold and vomiting On top of it Mr. Roosa decided to go to Chicago Saturday – said he'd be back Sunday morning, but didn't get here until Monday. So I've been quite busy.

Loads
of love to my ideal Sis,

LaWanda

July 21, 1932

Dear Mathilda,

Isn't this delightful weather after the intense heat? So glad to have your letter. My your girls surely are growing fast.



Newly weds in Rockford, Illinois being introduced to the Frank E. Johnson family: Grandpa, Stan, Mom, Dad Reinhold, Grandma Olive, and daughter Margaret.

We are living in a nice little apartment. 408 E Healey, Champaign, Ill.

Love LaWanda



Mom and Dad's friendship began at the University of Illinois Lutheran Student Association. Ruth Heider and I met at the Lutheran Student Association at Texas



Kathlyn Jane Johnson and Mother, in California, 1934. Mother loved children and where ever we were she taught Sunday School, and collected Hummel figurines.

Bet Betty Jo doesn't like her Aunt Wandie - cause she never mentioned her birthday well anyway I think you are getting to be a mighty big girl.

Gracious I must write Hilda real soon- but I feel dreadfully guilty now - I know she feels badly cause I slighted her at Xmas.

Now if you can hold your own - I'll tell you a huge surprise. Now there are five Engel girls married.

Ken and I were married July 15, at Bloomington in a Lutheran church.

I know I should have said something a long time ago- so now I'll take my scolding.

State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas as well. When my parents retired in Danville Illinois, Dad returned a favor to that group and drove to Urbana every month for several years as a supporter and member of the Lutheran Student Association Board.



The wedding soon changed mother's education plans. She finished three years of college then gave birth to my sister Kathlyn Jane, on February 9, 1933 in Champaign Illinois. That spring dad graduated with a degree in Industrial Management. Mom and Dad headed West to



I was born in Medford, Oregon. Six months later dad was transferred to Wisconsin, so this picture is from one of those two places.

California and then Oregon. Dad had been active in the Army ROTC program and was called up as a First Lieutenant to organize Civilian Conservation Corps camps for the Works Projects Administration. A government program to employ men during the economic depression. I was born on February 21, 1935 at Sacred Heart Hospital in Medford Oregon while dad was working in Crater Lake National Park. We lived in Oregon for only six months after my birth. The only noteworthy family story from that era is that besides consuming years of second hand smoke one day I was found eating cigarettes from mother's handy pack.

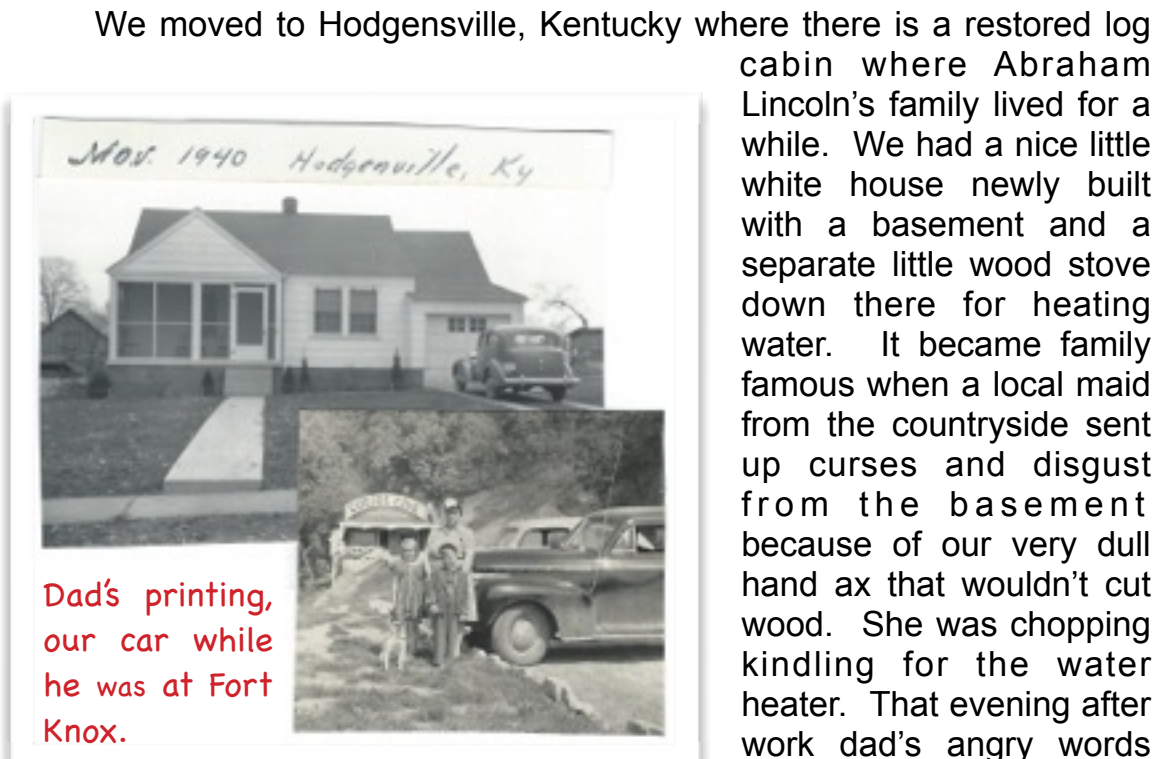
My first clear memories of Mother are from Black River Falls Wisconsin, where dad rented a portion of an old Victorian house. It featured a bronze lion out front, a wood cook-stove, and an old man with

a cane who walked me to the corner grocery and bought wee jugs of chewable wax filled with colored sweet water. I remember sitting in front of the wood stove with steaming wet shoes propped on the open oven door watching flames chew up the kindling through a little heat-yellowed mica window. Dad also helped the old man stoke the basement stove with large wooden logs.



Grandpa Johnson, Margaret, Stan, Mother, me, and Kathlyn, Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

My next memories are from Rockford, Illinois. Dad ended his military work establishing CCC camps and for a year or so found work in the factories in Rockford. There we lived on Hollister Avenue in a little house with a sour cherry tree in the back yard. So mother, always cooking and baking, trained our little family to favor sour cherry pie, and jam. Kathlyn began taking piano lessons. They didn't work for me. That is the extent of my memory of that interlude for the Country was gearing up for war against Adolph Hitler's violent expansionism. Dad was called up as a Company Commander to the First Armored Division at Fort Knox, Kentucky.



Dad's printing, our car while he was at Fort Knox.

We moved to Hodgenville, Kentucky where there is a restored log cabin where Abraham Lincoln's family lived for a while. We had a nice little white house newly built with a basement and a separate little wood stove down there for heating water. It became family famous when a local maid from the countryside sent up curses and disgust from the basement because of our very dull hand ax that wouldn't cut wood. She was chopping kindling for the water heater. That evening after work dad's angry words

floated up from below as well. It seems the maid chopped wood without removing the sheath from the hatched head. So ever after that hatchet had teeth marks where the rivets had been that held the two faces of leather together.

The Hodgenville house had some dark memories for me. Dad was gone long hours and weeks on maneuvers as the First Armored division prepared for war. Mother was dreadfully sick with German measles. That is when the maid came on board to cook, sing old style hymns, and care for my sister and me. For weeks the house was dark. The light bothered mother's eyes, and we all had to be quiet. She lost all her hair from the high fever. The maid didn't know some of our modern ways, yet her food and comfort were first class. From that memory I probably learned that 'black people' were good people.

Mother and Dad settled on a Baptist Church in town, there was no Lutheran. It became famous in our family because it was a large church and the bottom shelf in our house had 15 identical bibles lined up in a row for in Sunday School if you remembered your memory work for the day, you received a Bible with a green paper cover. My sister and I were in competition to see who had won the most bibles.



Kathlyn, LaWanda, and Don in Kentucky, with military preparations. War worries were a dark cloud over the family.

Mother liked to entertain dad's military friends and would set a grand table with candles, silver, and good china. Preparing for one of these meals after her recovery she had yeast rolls on the menu. She rolled them out in neat rows on a cookie sheet. Then set them down on floor vents for the furnace heat from below to help them rise. What a convenient warm place! Every baker should have one if they don't have a dog. It seems our Terry dog also found the snack convenient. For just as the guests arrived the dog waddled through the house whimpering, belching, and bloated from the rising dough. Dad helped him gag and out popped lump after lump of raw dough in front of our

arriving guests.

In the summer of 1940 dad's Company of Armored tanks was shipped off to a marshaling area in New Jersey. Mother went with him and stayed there for several months, and my sister and I went to Waukegan, Illinois to stay with Uncle Ray, Aunt Mamie Rogers and cousin Elle Mae. Mamie led us in art projects all summer. She heaped praise on me for my art work, so all my



This Rockford picture dad had in prison camp along with others. The German censor stamped them on the back, Oflag 64. This loving faces of mother with Terry dog is for dad. She was an idealist, thoughtful, serious, loving, kind, and friendly. All my cousins remember her with fondness as do I, yet I have no memories of receiving hugs and kisses from her. Ruth and I consciously changed that while raising our boys.

life after I knew I could do art. One of the treasures from that summer that I made for my mother was a bright yellow clown's face with its mouth as an

ashtray. I was jealous of my cousins first place with her parents and got in trouble for scratching out Elle Mae's image on a family picture. I still have the scar on my left pointer finger that the butcher knife left when I was making a bow an arrow. The United States declared war on Germany and Italy, on September 1, 1939, and I started first grade for a month in Waukegan before Mother returned from New Jersey and we moved in with my Grandpa Johnson in Rockford, Illinois.

You can read that part of our history in volume II, "War Shadows." That was a difficult time for mother, she was worried about Dad's safety and lonely. In my young mind I knew that mother's troubles were Dad's fault because he was not there to help. After many years he and I worked it out. Don't miss mother's story of frogs with ball bearings in their knees.

When "Jonny came marching home again, hurrah, hurrah," we celebrated in Rockford and moved to California. Dad was stationed at Fort Ord, along the Monterey Bay. Housing was difficult to find so the first year there we lived at Asilomar, a YWCA Camp, on the seance coast line of Monterey peninsula. It is now a California state Conference grounds where our Lutheran Church in America, Pacific Southwest Synod pastors met for years when I served churches in Sparks Nevada and Hawaii. Before that, we were a family of four with a dog all in one room in Hill Top Lodge. Many other military families were living at Asilomar as well. Like them we carried our food down and cooked in the dinning hall kitchen and ate with the other families in the hall that seated 300. The children were out in the sand dunes with semi tame deer, moss covered ghost trees, and surrounded by fog horn moans at night. It was a wonderful playground for children and a challenge for their parents. I remember a scolding from dad when he discovered some boys and I had burrowed a cave into the wet sand without any internal supports. It was large enough for two of us to be in it at once.



In California we regrouped as a family with lots of picnics and outings.

MONTEREY

September 1983 after a Pastoral Conference

I have been to Monterey
the breast of God for nourishment
Sisters and brothers in Christ, kelp, waves,
Word, and a wee wren were there

I came upon the bedroom of the deer folk
surrounded by a sand-gentle glen
under a canopy of sculptured cypress
I listened to the grass and clouds
and the white bones of a fawn

There a silver branch cradled in its neighbors' arms
waits for the ground and fuller rest
Fluttering white wings Sky' write "JOY"
across my sun-spangled space
While golden sheaves nod "YES"
to this hiding place

Not engines in the sky
Horns against the fog
Tires fleeing silence
Nor nuclear toys inviting the death of birth
Stole this wonder of God's fertile skin

The next year we moved into a cracker box house close by Asilomar, in Pacific Grove, California. That was Dad's name for the slightly constructed dwelling. I learned to swim in a pool at the end of the street by the wharf that advertised glass bottom boats. Always in the cove sea otters played among the bobbing kelp. Cannery Row made famous



by John Steinbeck was a favorite fishing place for my friend and I. We would bicycle the mile or so, go under piers on the cat walks and drop our line without a pile by the timer pilings. The sea lions barked and played about the place. We baited our hooks with squid and could see the perch nibbling at our lines. Great fun. Except the day I came home an hour late. It was dark and mother was worrying. The punishment was to clean the 12 fish that I had caught before being allowed in the house for supper.



My guess is this is a picture of mom and dad about this time. I can't tell if those are gold or silver leaves on his lapel.

School was always a success for my sister but by now it started to be a chore for me. Dad's next assignment was in Fort Hood near Killeen, Texas. We moved before I finished the fourth grade

in California. In April 1946 we found housing in Lampasas, Texas in an Old Victorian house. I have three memories from that summer. There was a horse racing track at the end of our street and stables, a hot springs for swimming, and ant-lions in the sandy yard. That summer I spent hours with each one, the ant lions made cones in the dust into which ants slid down with the lion larva jaws waiting for a chomp. Sweltering hot it was so the family went swimming now and again in water that tasted awful. Then there were the stables and watching the horses being trained with the Mexican stable boys giving a ride to the *gringo* boy. In these years after

Rockford, I have no clear memory of mother being other than the good mother that she was.



Mine was the tower bedroom.

By September we had found housing in Temple, Texas. School began to be a problem. I didn't know Spanish so the class laughed at my ignorance when I stood before them and

was asked to give the Spanish word for egg. Something that every child in Temple knew but me. Dyslexia was unknown to my parents so my education was always a puzzle for them. The family loved music. Dad always sang in church choirs and played his record of Tchaikovsky's Sixth symphony, Mother and my sister played piano, so I started orchestra on a cello, failed. Then switched to a clarinet, failed. Then had drum sticks and a rubber pad on which to practice. Creative arts on the other hand was a pleasure. With an inner-tube, some rope, a sheet to girth the tube, mother's old housecoat, a mop head for hair, and a babushka, I became a fat old lady in a community Halloween parade and won a \$5.00 prize. By summer I was playing harmonica in the privacy of my bedroom when we moved to Cincinnati, Ohio.

Before the end of the fourth grade mother loved to serve and care for her family and guests. She was a "good" mother doing most everything for her children: make their beds each morning, buy their clothes, cook all the meals. So my sister, Kathlyn, had to learn to cook from books after she left home.

Willing to try new things and hard for her to stand and do her ironing, so dad bought a \$1,000 mangle iron so she could sit and keep the laundry. She was diligent in learning to iron everything in the house including, muslin bed sheets and white collared shirts. So when I went off to South West State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas after eliminating myself from the US Air Force pilot training program and obtaining an early out to go back to college to redeem my George Washington University grades, she still ironed my clothes. I had a fiber-mailing container with buckle straps in which I would put my dirty clothes and mail them to Mother in Alexandria Virginia. She would wash and iron them and send them back by the end of the week with cookies.

She planned a head so when underwear was a bit frayed, she would buy new, but rather than put them out right away, they would go on a closet shelf and when the hole got just too big. She would replace them. How she got her

Then there was the time when mom and dad were visiting our young family in Sparks Nevada. I remember a Sunday when mother was darning a sock with a wooden egg, and dad came in dressed for church and because the rule in his mind was, no work on Sundays (Mother's rule was care for the family.) Dad's was biblical, no work on Sunday, He came upon Mother darning a sock with a wooden egg and humphed saying "Those stitches

will probably fall out., ,

Mother kept her green thumb from the farm. So always her home had ferns and flowering plants and a garden out back. When Mom and Dad built their retirement home in Danville, Illinois there was a rock garden beside her driveway. To keep it flowering and verdant was her pride and joy. The garden also produced the sweetest strawberries I have ever eaten. Monsanto gets an 'A' for designing a bright red thing that is salable, but a 'D-' for actual strawberry flavor. They both spent their early years on a farm so their dream house had a screened in porch off the dining room so they could eat their summer meals in the verdant back yard without mosquitoes.

Birthday gifts for all. Keep them in decent clothes.