

# **1975 MINNESOTA STATE FAIR**

... Or was it 1974? (also a great state fair year, but based on age I'm predicting '75)

The annual Minnesota State Fair was a family tradition as far back as my memory can potentially go. From being pushed in a stroller to running around with brother Craig, (who's always been an expert on the fairgrounds layout) with most, if not all of its features explored. It is always the week before Labor Day, ending that holiday Monday, around my birthday in early September. It's a huge state fair! Well documented elsewhere so I won't cover it's setup and history.

However I will mention the booth in the **Grandstand** building that brother Brian formed in 1972 (or 1971?) — of painted rocks, that he got the whole family involved with painting rocks with faces, animals, cartoons, and a variety of styles and content. Fun and unique! (with the trippy name 'Stone Soul') That stands out as exceptional, going with family every day. Talk about an 8-year olds dream birthday week!

## **BACK TO '75**

By the mid-1970's it went from one week to a ten-day stretch. It's a popular event! 1975, was the first time I went without family accompaniment. Going with longtime grade school friend Dave W., whose good company made all the difference! I thought it was my birthday, but according to the calendar must have been a pre-birthday full day. Dad gave me a 20\$ bill for spending! Wow! It lasted all day long, spent on Midway ride tickets and fair food.

Driven there by family (Dad or brother Craig?) dropped off out front in the morning. Eagerly enter the big gate and aimed for the Midway — the place for wild fair rides — irresistible for 11-year old kids!

## **MIDWAY RIDES**

I think one of the first rides we took was the **Yo-Yo**. A circling swingset-go-round suspended on chains. Memorable for the Bee sting I suffered at the back of my

beltline! Ow! Rushed to first aid center nearby, they sprayed the spot with a cool blast of aid from a canister. I didn't feel it at all all day! It must have been some kind of super-strength lidocaine. (I do recall it was in morning light during that occasion.)

The other rides and attractions we took in:

-**The Tobaggan.** A favorite, going straight up inside a cylinder, then spiraling down around its outside, then rolling around a track briefly. We returned for another go later on. (and other days/years. I said it's a favorite) The going up in the cylinder made it seem like elevation to outer space!

- **The Matterhorn.** Spinning, circling cars like bobsleds, with an alpine theme. A rush of a ride every year!

- **Jungle Land.** A favorite fun house, with a wild jungle theme. I was awestruck by the huge gorilla as the main towering feature of the facade.

- **The Glass Maze.** (the actual name evades me) Another fun house to get lost in. We had a blast, bumping into plexiglass corridors and enclaves.

- The main **Ferris Wheel.** A fair tradition! Big and with a great view.

- **The Original Fat Albert.** A freak show attraction. Disturbing, if socially shifting our awareness of exploitation. We entered to see a depressed looking African-American guy sitting there. Clearly not wanting to be doing this. Dave attempted to say hi, to a sullen lack of response. We leave thinking "that was depressing."

I'd never checked out those kinds of attractions before. Guess my family knew better not to enter.

## **THE FAIRGROUNDS**

Taking a break from the Midway carnival atmosphere, with its loud barkers with megaphones, screaming kids enjoying scary rides, aroma of cotton candy, and absurdly amplified music, on to go through the rest of the fair.

Drank a ton of **all-you-can-drink milk for a dime** booth. What a deal! (it is dairy land

after all) From several fair grub booths to choose from, got a foot long hotdog and the best corn-on-the-cob imaginable!

Wandering the fair grounds, we enjoyed **Ye Old Mill**, with its cheesy dioramas, seen appearing along the dark tunnel your boat would be pulled through.

Of course, getting small bags of fresh **Tom Thumb Tiny Donuts**, (Yum! A state fair must, and nearby Ye Old Mill)

Nearby, and visually very obvious is the **big yellow slide**, for my first time! Parents deemed it too dangerous. I imagine they were right, but I was eager to try. It was no danger to me. It simply was over too soon.

We had to take the **Skyride!** (traditional feature) Where you ride a capsule across a section of fairgrounds. Very European retro-futuristic. and quiet when you depart the stations that have the engines to pull it along.

I think **The Haunted House** may have been incorporated in its first year? I remember enjoying that, well done, with extraordinary effects. Possibly the following year?

I doubt we spent much time in the animal barns. It was never my thing, and smelling bad. Otherwise the agriculture center may have something of interest. We must have shrugged off climbing tractors on **Machinery Hill**. We were feeling too old for that now. **Mexican Village** was always interesting. The art exhibitions may have been glanced at. We did the usual state fair rounds and through the Grandstand building. Also avoided games for prizes, not caring about stuff to carry around.

Getting to be evening, we went back to ride the **Double Ferris Wheel** which is more dramatic at night with everything lit up!

Ending the day up the **Space Tower.**, a large spindle with a cylindrical viewing rotunda that rotates as it rises over 300 feet up. Fitting a couple dozen people at a time. (it could well be called a space needle, more than Seattle's main attraction)

Located at the other end of the fairgrounds from the Midway.

Fireworks ended the night.

Then dad picked us up, in the evening. We must have been there for over 10 hours, but so much real fun that it breezed by. Still, I believe we were spent, energy-wise. The \$20 gone, but truly lasting for an impressive amount — a few \$ went a long way! One of my favorite youthful times at the fair, and I had many growing up. Going with a good friend made all the difference! That might have been the last day of the fair, or first. I don't remember that much.

Typically more than just one day at the fair was in order. Family went a few times annually, and that might have been my last year going more than once. Great times! This was possibly the year of the one time I rode the roller coaster, I think it was called **The Mighty Mouse**, with Brian Renee and Jill. My first and last time. It shook me to the core, disturbing my guts too much.

It's funny but after it's all over, we always seemed to have had our fill. With no longing for its return anytime sooner than a year.

I would say this was my last year at the fair with a kids sense of wonder. Subsequently, I lost that wonder as adolescence crept in, and I lost interest to a degree. Oh, it was still enjoyable, just different when you're too cool of a teen to act as thrilled as a kid. It was not until returning decades later, visiting from California that it was a pleasant boost of nostalgia. 1994 (Brian too!) and 2000 (Dad and sister Joni was with!) Having a blast with Craig, Karen, and Pam! (more separate memoirs might be made about all the other years)

I love state fair memories! All of them good — and that year around my 12th birthday was one of the best/last years there as a kid I can still recall details about.

- Dean Gustafson, September - December 2025 (50 years later)