

Watermelon Party

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I shall never forget my first watermelon beach party, which was held at Myrtle Beach in South Carolina. The people with whom I was staying had dug a deep pit in the sand and had filled it with wood for the campfire, which also served as the light for the cutting of the melons. We sat on blankets spread around the fire, singing school songs and old favorites. The night was dark; there was no moon, only millions of stars in the vast, appalling space overhead. The beach at night is terrifying; you cannot see the surf—you can only hear the thunderous roar as the breakers pound the sand. It is so different at night from the gay, friendly beach of daytime

with its colorful bathing suits and beach umbrellas and the shouting and laughter of the bathers in the surf. The friendly, familiar faces around me were made eerie by the shadows from the campfire. During a lull in the gay banter and singing, the breeze from the south would carry to us snatches of music from the hurdy-gurdy and distant shouts of laughter from the crowds on the midway. Along the shoreline, stretching for two or three miles to the north and south of us, the large hotels and guest houses shone with hundreds of lights. They seemed so cheerful and full of life when you were a part of them, but so remote at night, viewed from the darkness of the beach.

There is nothing sweeter than a watermelon grown under the warm South Carolina sun; in order to enjoy it fully one must eat it as we ate it at the beach party. At first I rebelled—I could not think of submerging my face in that half circle of sticky sweetness, but I soon learned the technique. The correct position is of utmost importance in watermelon eating: dig your knees into the sand and rest upon your heels, so that your clothes will not be soiled by the watermelon juice. After the second or third piece, I learned to keep the watermelon out of my ears, and it did not matter if I got my nose in the stickiness. I happily allowed the sweet juice to run off my chin.

The rinds were tossed into the fire pit when they were finished, but they did not burn; and when the party was ended, the pit was filled with sand. The nice part of a watermelon party is the absence of any clean-up jobs; yet, thanks to the tide, there is never a trace of a beach party the following day. Since my first watermelon party on the beach, I have looked forward each year to the next one, and my friends at Myrtle Beach plan one whenever the folks from Indiana are their guests.