

LAURA ON LIFE

Bombs Bursting In Air!

When the United States became an independent nation 234 years ago, did everyone run around blowing things up? What is the premise for fireworks on the 4th of July?

"Yay! We are free from an apathetic imperial ruler! We can drink tea without paying taxes on it! Let's blow something up!"

After a while, they probably ran out of old barns to blow up. They may have realized, eventually, the stupidity of destroying things they might need someday, so they decided to launch bombs into the air, just to hear a satisfying racket.

In time, somebody would say that bombs weren't pretty enough to celebrate our freedom. Enter, a new job category: Pyrotechnic engineer.

If blowing things up was the only qualification for pyrotech-

nic engineer, my 8-year old would be the world's best. Unfortunately, you have to know how to do it carefully and we don't have any old barns on which he can practice.

Last year, we went to a fireworks display about an hour's drive from where we live. It was a beautiful night to watch explosions and contemplate our good fortune. I'll bet England never has fireworks or parades on the 4th of July. Just think how empty the 4th of July would feel if we didn't win that war!

We found a nice patch of roadside where we spread our blanket. My kids brought books and hand held video games, because what if the fireworks didn't start right away and they were forced to talk to each other?

No fear, though, the explosions started right on time. We oohed and aahed as a

kaleidoscope of colors blistered the night sky. We squealed and covered our ears when the loud, obnoxious booms echoed. They were, no doubt, presented as sort of retro-rockets, if you will. Anyone in the crowd who was over 200 years old would've felt their cockles being warmed to hear such a familiar old-fashioned detonation. No graphics, no old barns, just sound.

Of course, on the long ride to the fireworks show we cautioned our children about the dangers of playing with fireworks. Everyone has a grisly story to tell about someone who got hurt or killed on the 4th of July.

Ours was about a fireman who was helping with a fireworks display when one went off prematurely. He was paralyzed by a stray piece of shrapnel that sev-



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ered his spine. Very sad.

Duly warned, my children nodded solemnly when I asked them to promise never to play with fireworks. None of them wanted to be paralyzed.

I'm still not sure what happened - perhaps a sudden shift in the wind - but just before the grand finale we started feeling pieces of ash falling from the sky. Some were still lit.

Then at the end, when the fireworks

were being launched rapid-fire, we thought we were in a Revolutionary War re-enactment. We saw "the rocket's red glare," heard "the bombs bursting in air," and it "gave proof through the night that"... we needed to grab our children and run!

Burning ash was suddenly falling all around us!

My son yelled, "Incoming! Cover your spines!"

Clearly, he had heeded our warnings.

We ran for the car which was also within the falling ash zone. People were running all around and yelling for their kids. In the words of Jeff Foxworthy, "It was pandemonium!"

Talk about experiential learning! We were at the front lines of the Revolutionary War that night! Someone wearing a red coat could've easily been mistaken for the enemy and got themselves bayoneted with a marshmallow roasting stick!

This year, I think we can make do without all that excitement. Perhaps we'll simply stay home and watch the neighbors shoot bottle rockets off their driveway.

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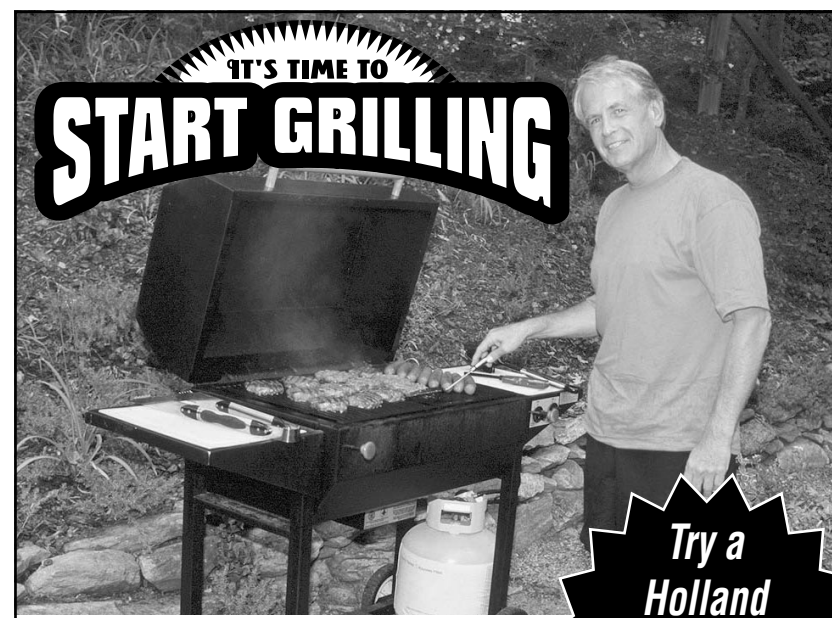
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