



Across the Fence

By Howard Sherpe

Midsummer's Eve Adventure

It was Midsummer's Eve, 2004 and I was heading west on Hwy. 151 to Little Norway, a pioneer homestead museum nestled in a wooded valley between Blue Mounds and Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. It features a Stave Church reproduction and houses the largest private collection of Norwegian antiques in America. They were having a Midsummer's Eve celebration and I'd been asked to do wood carving demonstrations.

Midsummer is an old pagan celebration, dating back to the Viking Era that began in 893. The actual day of the celebration is also the longest day of the year (summer solstice). This was also the setting for Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," that wonderful play about fairies and strange happenings during that magical night.

It was the ancient custom to light large bonfires after sundown, which served the double purpose of providing illumination for the revelers and warding off evil spirits. People would leap over the bonfires' flames for good luck. I suspect this was done after consuming large amounts of ale!

A wealth of folklore surrounds the summer solstice. It's a night for faeries, elves, gnomes, nisse, and all the little people. According to British faery lore, this night was second only to Halloween for its importance to the wee folk. However, in order to see them, you must gather fern seeds at the stroke of midnight and rub them onto your eyelids. Unfortunately I couldn't find any fern seeds but I did throw a piece of clover into the bonfire to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck!

In Norway, spectators throw toadstools into the bonfires to protect against trolls. If any trolls are nearby, the toadstools will reveal them. So to be on the safe side, bring a toadstool to your Midsummer's Eve celebration and throw it into the fire. One never knows where trolls may be hiding, especially during Midsummer's Eve!

As I started to tell you, I was driv-

ing to Little Norway on 151. As I neared Mount Horeb, a trailer ahead of me, filled with bikes, swerved into the ditch, veered back onto the road, and landed upside down in the center of the two lanes of traffic. The car that lost the trailer went merrily on its way, the occupants unaware of their loss. Apparently, trolls were out doing their mischief on this Midsummer's Eve. The accident occurred under an overpass, a place where trolls love to lay in wait for unsuspecting travelers.

The cars ahead of me were either in a big hurry or afraid of trolls, because they drove around the wreckage. I stopped. We couldn't leave all that stuff lying in the road. A semi following me also stopped. Another semi, seeing what had happened, pulled into the left lane and blocked it.

I got out and started walking toward the overturned trailer. That's when I remembered how I was dressed! I was wearing the outfit that guides wear at Little Norway. I had black knickers... with pewter buttons on the side, white, knee-high socks, black shoes, a white shirt, a red Norwegian vest... again with pewter buttons, topped off with a black "frilly" bunad tie, with a dangly Soljje pin attached.

I wondered what people behind me thought. Not only had a troll upset the bike trailer, now a red-vested creature in knickers was standing on the highway checking the damage!

I looked back and the two semi drivers climbed down from their cabs and started toward where I now stood amid the wreckage. They looked like macho-type truck drivers. Real men! They certainly weren't wearing knickers and a frilly tie! I tried lifting the trailer. It was much heavier than it looked, at least to a Midsummer's Eve wood carver dressed in knickers, red vest, and a frilly tie, with dangly jewelry.

The first trucker joined me at the trailer... a big, barrel-chested guy wearing a Harley t-shirt. A skull and dagger tattoo adorned one bicep, a

Harley logo the other. A smile appeared under his bushy handlebar mustache, revealing two missing front teeth. Probably lost them in a biker brawl in Sturgis, I thought.

"SOB's don't even know they lost their trailer," he said, pointing up the road.

The second trucker, a tall, wiry guy with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, joined us. He eyed me up and down. I didn't want to know what he was thinking.

"Glad you guys stopped to help. This SOB is heavy," I said, trying to sound as manly as I could, standing there in my knickers, white socks and shirt, red vest, and black, frilly tie. I don't think it was working.

We all grabbed hold of the trailer and dragged it off the road. We picked up other debris and threw it into the ditch. No words were spoken. The highway was clear.

"Dumb *@#%* will probably be halfway to Dubuque before they realize they lost their trailer," the big guy said.

The tall, wiry trucker and I shook our heads in agreement.

They headed back to their trucks. I got back in my car, turned the flashers off, and slowly pulled out. The two truckers followed, getting in line behind each other, and the backup of cars roared by us. I wondered what those truckers were thinking. I wished I had a CB radio to listen in on their conversation. I can imagine how it went.

"Hey good buddy, what's with the guy in the knickers?"

"I don't know, but this is pretty close to Madison. They got some strange people living there."

"10-4, you got that right, good buddy."

I turned off the highway and headed down the tree-lined valley road toward Little Norway, a place where trolls, faeries, nisse, gnomes, and other strange creatures make their home. I would fit right in!