

Fairyland Park was a classic Americana 1950's roadside attraction. It was located on the west end of the Mesabi Iron Range by Marble, Minnesota on US Highway 169.

Fairyland Park

Marble, Minnesota

1948-1972

Tim Wick 2013

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In September of 1958, an advertisement selling life-size fairy tale people can be found in Popular Science magazine. It appears M. Gustafson from Marble, Minnesota was selling something very unusual. Here is the advertisement:

Popular Science, September 1958 issue

<p>Clifton 5,</p>	<p>Free Catalogue from... Studio M. Gustafson, 11220 San Vicente Blvd., Los Angeles 49, Calif.</p>	<p>AUTOMA (ted), you electric bla much. Gen Corporation</p>
<p>lonely ad- cameras, ches, type- discounts to wth... 5,</p>	<p>FOR sale beautiful life size Fairytale people, for starting weather resistant, private or public parks. M. Gustafson, Fairyland Park, Marble, Minn.</p>	<p>WIN Cad Amazing n 114-B, Ch</p>
<p>rows "How etire Now!</p>	<p>SHARPEN Scissors, pinkers. Inexpensive machine Sharpening supplies. Bloch Sheldahl, Iowa.</p>	<p>INTERNA</p>

The beginning of Fairyland was 1948 when the Gustafson's purchased the property. Myrtle M. Gustafson was the original creator of Fairyland Park. It is believed her husband, J. G. Gustafson, did not contribute to the creation. The park was located in Itasca County, Minnesota, just west of the village of Marble. (Sec 19, Twp 56, Rng 23)

In 1955, my parents owned a small home in Marble on Sadie Street. Father was a millwright in the nearby iron mines. Mother was a school teacher and a budding artist.

• **Between Hibbing and Grand Rapids . . .**

FAIRYLAND PARK

• **HIGHWAY 169 MARBLE, MINNESOTA**

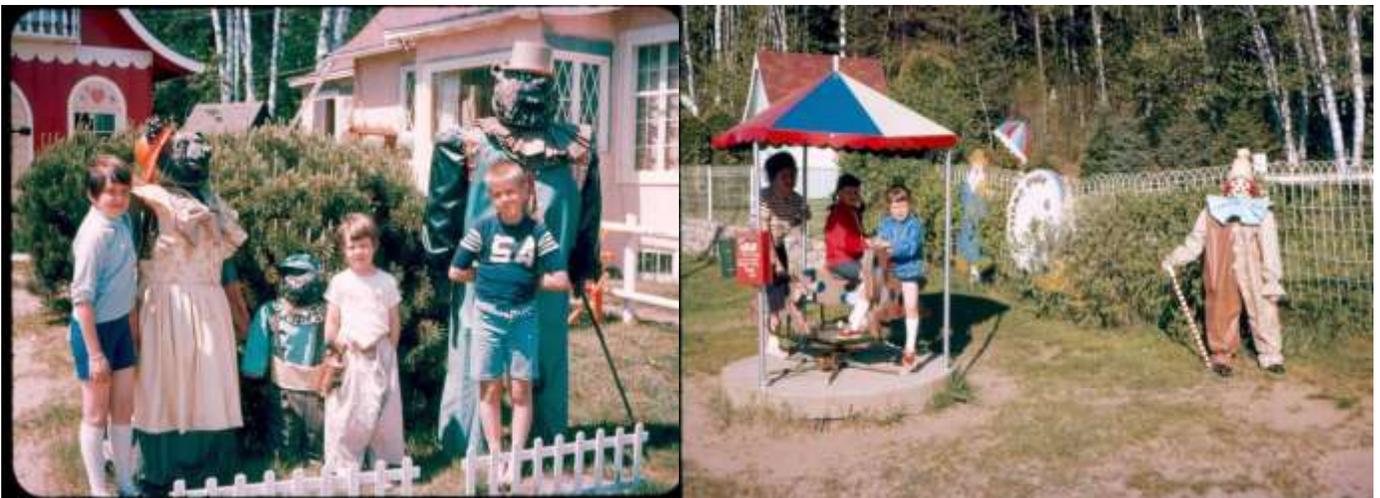
FAIRYLAND PARK

Marble, Minnesota (1948-1972) by Timothy Wick

Melvin and Faith Wick, my parents, bought Fairyland Park in the summer of 1960. It was in need of maintenance and upgrading.



The ticket office was replaced and the residence was substantially remodeled.



Fairyland was a 1950's "roadside attraction" that offered entertainment to families. These types of attractions were scattered across America. The park was the creation of Myrtle Gustafson. She and some friends did most of the construction. Not much is known about Mrs. Gustafson, but she was a very good sculptor, painter, and builder. It took a huge amount of inspiration to build and complete this park. During the weekdays, the women, dressed in coveralls, constructing the park scenes. If visitors arrived, they had dresses ready to pull-on over their coveralls.

Admission was charged to walk the winding forest trail where you would see life-size figures arranged in classic fairy tale scenes. The path curved frequently to visually isolate each scene. Erosion was problematic, and eventual concrete stairs were installed by my father on the steeper sections of the trail. There were 38 scenes in the park.

A sign describing the park was located by the road. This sign probably existed since the mid-1950's to about 1967. The photo is a bit blurry, but the sign reads as follows:

Fairyland Park

For Old & Young – Covers several acres.

Visit Enchanted Forest & Spooky Witchland

35 Scenes. Oddities, Freaks & Antiques.

Going through time, 30 minutes to 1 hour. Bring your cameras.

Admission kept down to 35¢ a person for everyone.

Children under 13 should be accompanied by one parent.

This is strictly a scenic park

Tourist cordially welcomed.



My mother never liked this sign. The idea of oddities, freaks and antiques were at odds with her love of whimsy and nursery rhymes. She repainted the sign using a theme of "Hey – Diddle –Diddle the Cat and the Fiddle." At this time, the admission price was increased.

The front of the park had two 30 foot tall characters, known as Mr. and Mrs. Tall, facing the highway. In the next picture, they are barely visible, located left of the blue building. This photo was taken from the roof of the residence and you can see Twin Lakes in the distance.



The park was open from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day (Bovey Farmer's Day) each year. By 1966, the attendance was over 6,000 people per year. Sunday and Holidays were always the busiest. The admission price that year was 50¢ for adults and 35¢ for children (under 12).

I started collecting admission tickets at the park in 6th grade. Selling souvenirs, restocking the Coke machine, and resetting the tape recorder for the talking wicked witch were all part of the job. Each spring, my family would run hoses throughout the park to clean the scenes and figures. Some figures would need to be repaired, repainted or rebuilt (recast) because they were damaged by the extreme -40 °F winter.

The park came with numerous casting molds to remake new heads, hands and special objects. Rubber castings were surrounded by plaster encasements to keep the rubber from deforming. Generally, the heads and hands were life-size. The heads and hands were cast using mortar cement poured directly into the mold.

A metal spike was position into the casting from the mold pour hole. This was used to anchor the head to the body. Hands were much lighter, so wire was used instead. The bodies were made of copper sheeting and pipe. A Marble heating contractor made many of the bodies. Copper sheeting was shaped like skeletal ribs and bent into a frame. Chicken-wire formed into cylinders was used for arm and leg structure. The clothing was made from vinyl fabric. A building (we called the barn) stored the molds and rolls of vinyl fabric.

This is how my mom began sculpting, out of necessity. She had experience with design, sewing, drawing, paint and brush, but sculpting human figures was something new.

In the fall, the work at the park entailed removing tons of fallen leaves that would engulf the scenes and pathways. Sometimes, the Marble Boy Scouts were hired to help with the leaf removal. Covering the figurines with protective plastic to prevent cracking from the snow and ice was another fall task.



Family activities and park work fused together. My brother's birthday was in May and you can see his party in the next picture. It was hectic, because this was spring and the park had to be ready for opening by Memorial weekend.



The residence is painted pink and the new ticket office is red. Since it is fall, the park is closed.



In 1960, the park was located on a frontage road to U.S. Highway 169, just outside of Marble, MN. Before my parents purchased the park, this frontage road had been Highway 169. It must have been dangerous to have such a narrow road so close to the park.

Behind the park, was the original Mesabi road connecting the town of Marble to Taconite and Bovey. This road existed when the park was first built. The original 1948 "ticket office" was located inside the big brown shoe pictured below. This scene was from the nursery rhyme, "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe, she had so many children, she didn't know what to do."



The entrance and exit of park had to be moved depending on the evolving route of Highway 169. This highway runs east to west across the entire Mesabi Iron Range. Fairyland Park was located on the west end of the Range.

THE SCENES AT FAIRYLAND

Subjects of the scenes included presidents, fairy tale people, nursery rhyme characters, old men, old ladies, children, wicked witches and others. The figures in the scenes are life-size. Children most feared the witch. The witch would talk, move her head and flash red eyes making her life-like. Of all the scenes in the park, the wicked witch was the most popular.

Some scenes in the park existed from the beginning (1948) to the end (1972). Others were replaced because of decay from the elements. By 1965, a couple scenes were removed because of inappropriate or demeaning content and at least one was removed because of a copyright challenge.

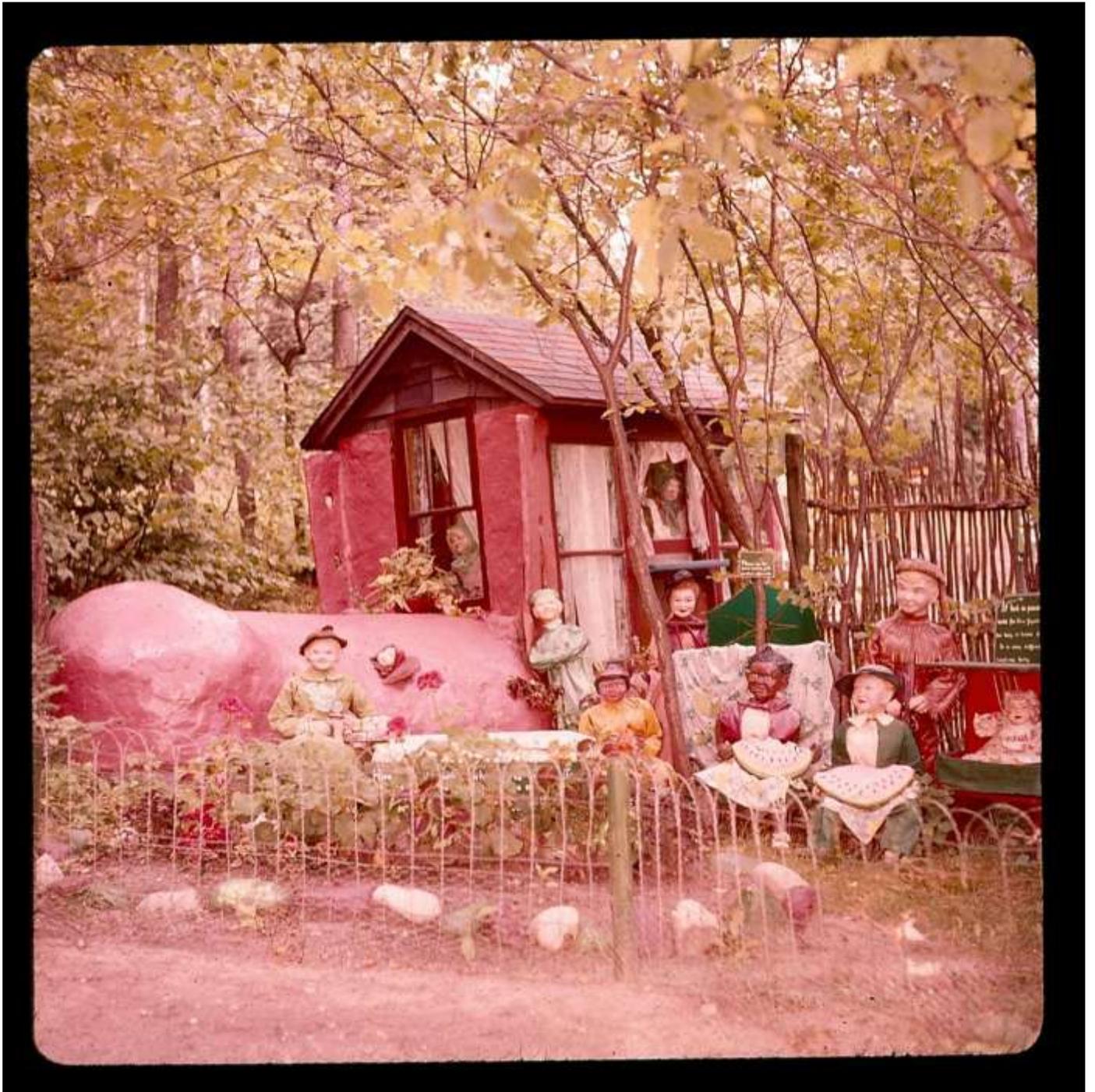
The **Wishing Well** was the first scene. A figure of woman dressed in Salvation Army garb stood by the well. Of course, the well was filled with water. It was quite a job to remove the water, and collect the coins. I remember helping my father bring up pails of coins from the bottom at the end of the season. The money was given to the Hibbing Salvation Army annually.

The next scene was the **Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe**. As mentioned previously, this shoe was the original ticket office when the park first opened. The picture below is probably from 1970. The sculpture of the "Old Woman" was a self-portrait of the parks creator, Mrs. Gustafson.



The backside of the big shoe had a split door so the upper half could be opened to make ticket collection easy. After the ticket office moved, my sisters used the shoe as a playhouse.

Below, is another picture of the big shoe from the 1950's A new coat of paint was required almost every year. It changed colors frequently. This scene had many plum trees that would bear fruit each year.



One of the children is dressed as Davey Crockett, a very popular character from the 50's. The shoe was painted frequently, and the colors varied widely.

Here are more pictures of the big shoe from the 1960's. The sign reads, "Here is an old mother, Who's cares are not few, And here are the children who live in the shoe."



The next scene was **Winken, Blinken and Nod**, a very popular children's poem written in 1889. Wikipedia states: The poem is a fantasy bed-time story of three children sailing and fishing in the stars. Their boat is a wooden shoe. The little fishermen symbolize a sleepy child's blinking eyes and nodding head.



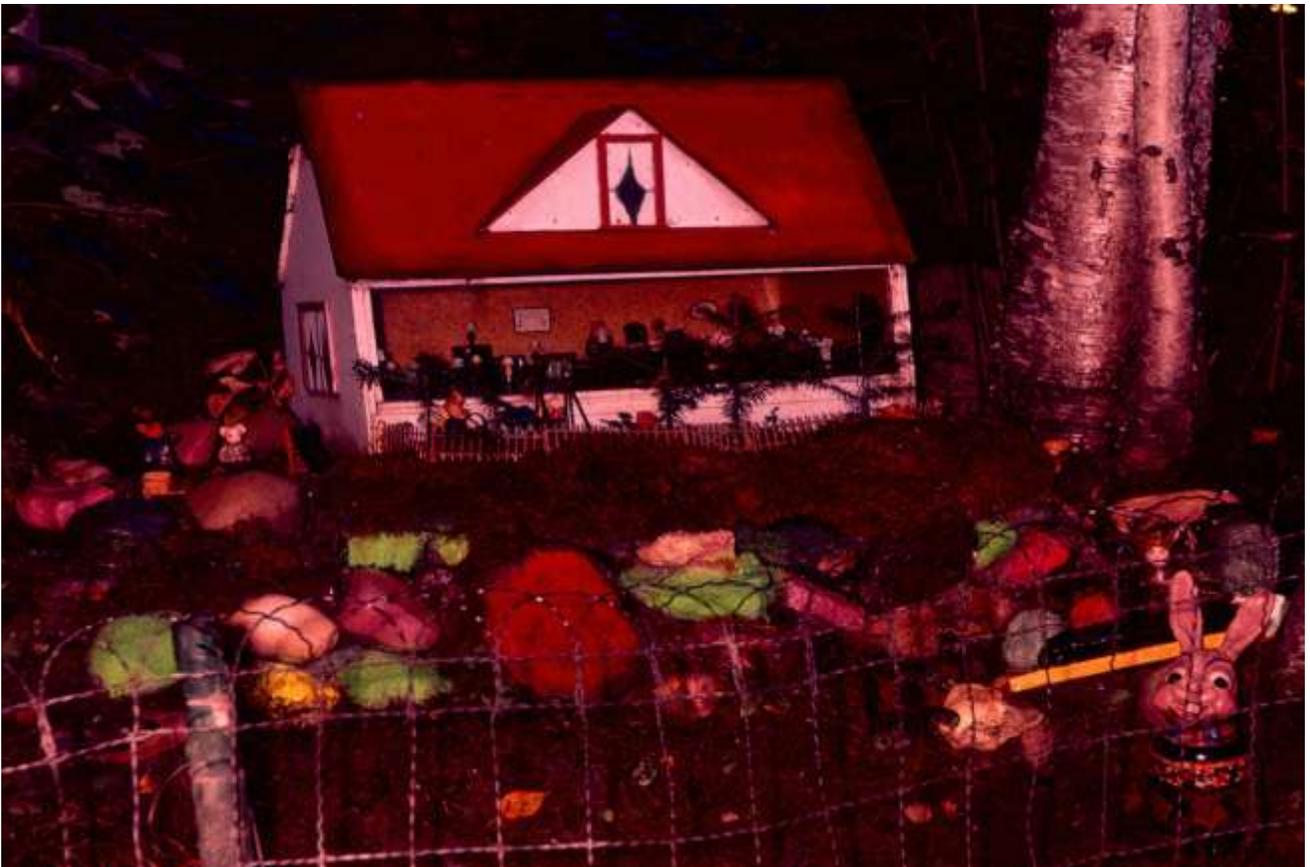
An old black and white postcard of this scene from the 1950's is shown below.



FAIRYLAND PARK - Located at Marble Between Grand Rapids & Hibbing on Highway 169



Little Miss Muffet



Mouse House



Mouse House (details)



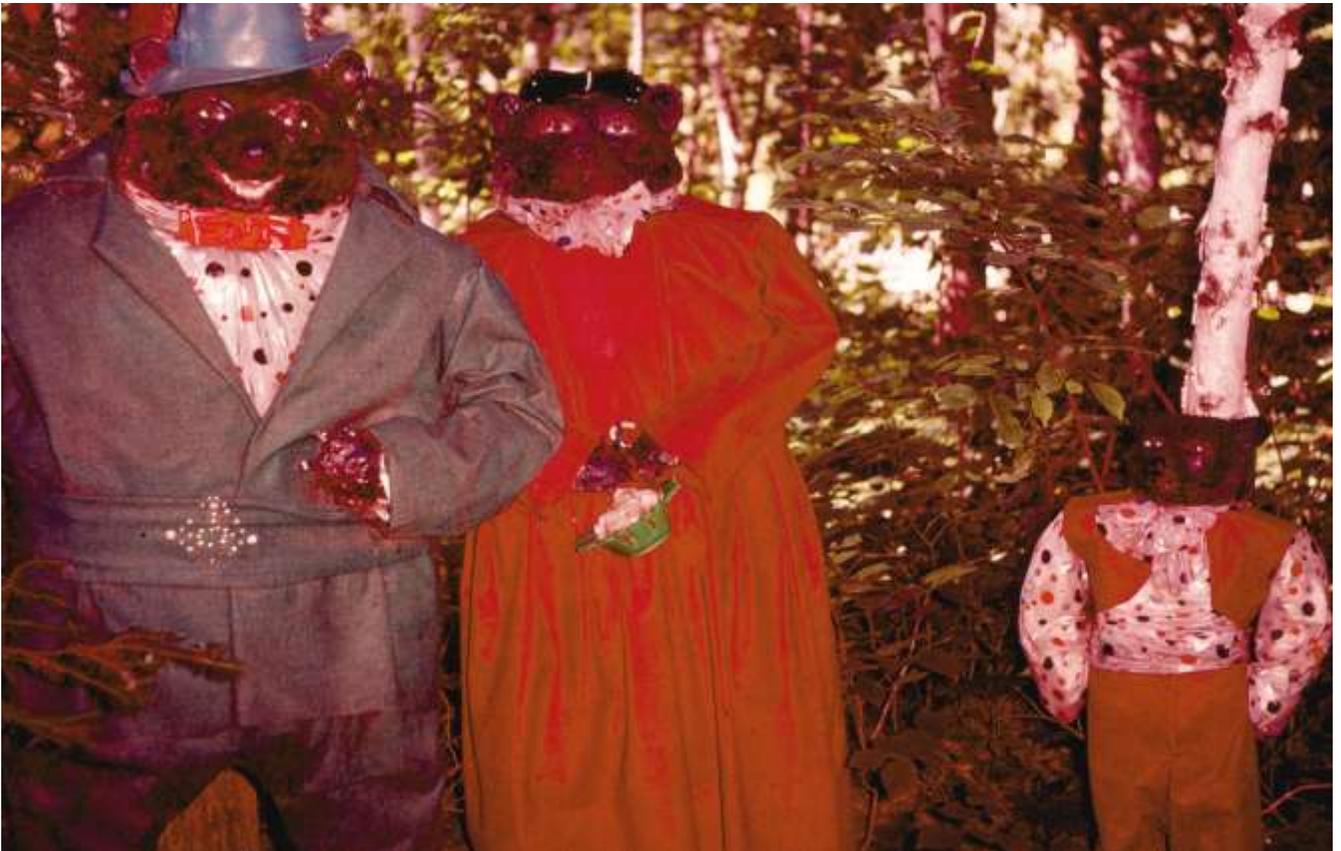
Button Eyed-Dolls in costume (Raggedy Ann and Andy)



Davey Crockett



The Three Bears





The Three Bears were moved to the entrance when the new (red) ticket office was built in the mid 1960's. Goldilocks was placed in the balcony on the ticket office as can be seen below.



Continuing on through the park, the next scene after the 3 Bears was President Teddy Roosevelt. At one point, Teddy held a huge club, and the placard read, "Speaks softly and carries a big stick".



President Theodore Roosevelt

Traveling to the next scene, you'd walked up a long staircase. Located halfway up, was **The Three Little Pigs** standing by their respective homes. In the distance, you can see the wolf.



Three Little Pigs (*Straw, Sticks, and Brick*)

A short walk from the top of the staircase, was the Elephant scene. The Elephant was constructed with a ramp in the back so the guests could climb up behind the Mahout (driver). This was one of the most popular scenes in the park.



Guests viewing "The Elephant"



Across the way from the elephant was a traditional Native American scene. There is a certain irony in the fact that the Indian elephant and mahout sat directly across from this Native American scene.



Sioux Teepee



The path turns back into the dark forest and the sunlight is largely obscured. The forest canopy allowed only a small percentage of total sunlight, making photography quite challenging.

There was an **Old Woman** liv'd under a hill, And if she ben't gone, She lives there still (1714)



Georgie Porgie kisses the girls and makes them cry



Old Mother Hubbard, went to her cupboard to find her poor dog a bone... (postcard)



Alice and Wonderland (postcard)



I remember watching my Mother paint these cards as a kid. The circles were old Coke signs.

Rub-A-Dub-Dub three men in a tub (postcard)



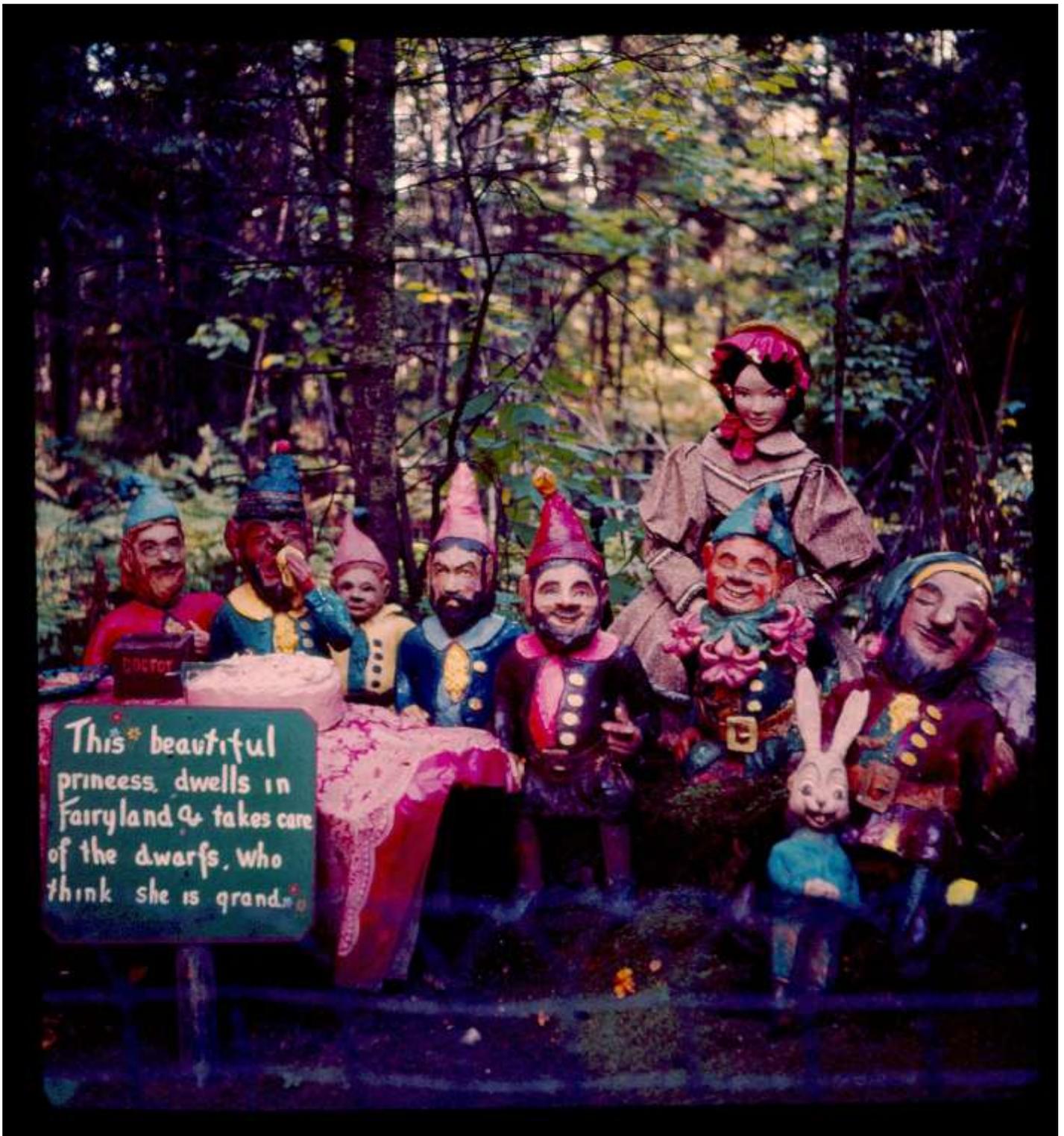
The Enchanted Forest preceded the Wizard of Oz scene. The Wicked Witch is present.





Wizard of Oz (*early postcard below*)





Snow White and the Dwarfs - *"This beautiful princess dwells in Fairyland and takes care of the dwarfs who think she is grand."* Mrs. Gustafson had a knack for creating simple rhymes with her signs. The dwarf figures were solid cast cement. These figures began to decay over the years. Unfortunately, the molds for the dwarfs were never found and could not be recast.

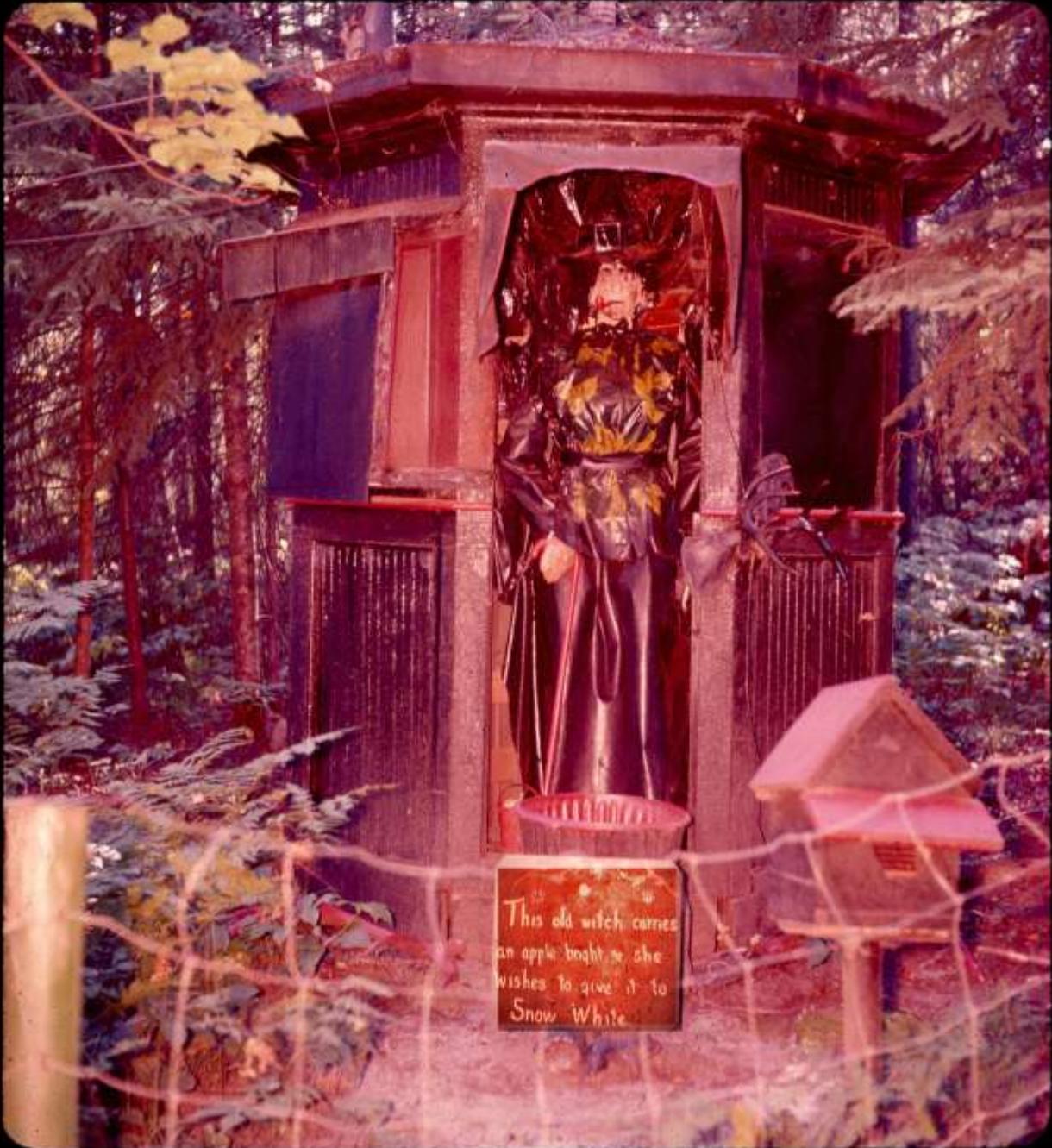
The **Snow White** scene was rebuilt, but the new scene lacked the “charm” of the original.



Spooky Deer



The Evil Witch from Snow White



This scene was located in the darkest part of the forest. I have enhanced the brightness for this picture. The sign reads, *"This old witch carries an apple bright and she wishes to give it to Snow White"*. The witch had an intercom system and spoke to the guests touring the park. Later this feature was replaced with a tape loop in the 1970's. The head of the witch had transparent red eyes that were lit from behind. The head would periodically move a bit from left to right. It scared small children, but it was the most popular scene in Fairyland.

This close-up of the witch is at the proper lighting level as it was viewed in the woods. She is smoking a pipe and holding a cane.



Hansel and Gretel



Hansel and Gretel was another scene in the park with a witch. Notice my little sister is posing in this scene. This was strictly forbidden. Signs throughout the park, instructed the guests to "Keep on the Path" and "Do Not Enter Scenes".

The Nightmare – *"Take a picture of me & hang it up. It will keep away other nightmares."*



The Crooked Man who walked a crooked mile



A Clown



The Bugs Wedding



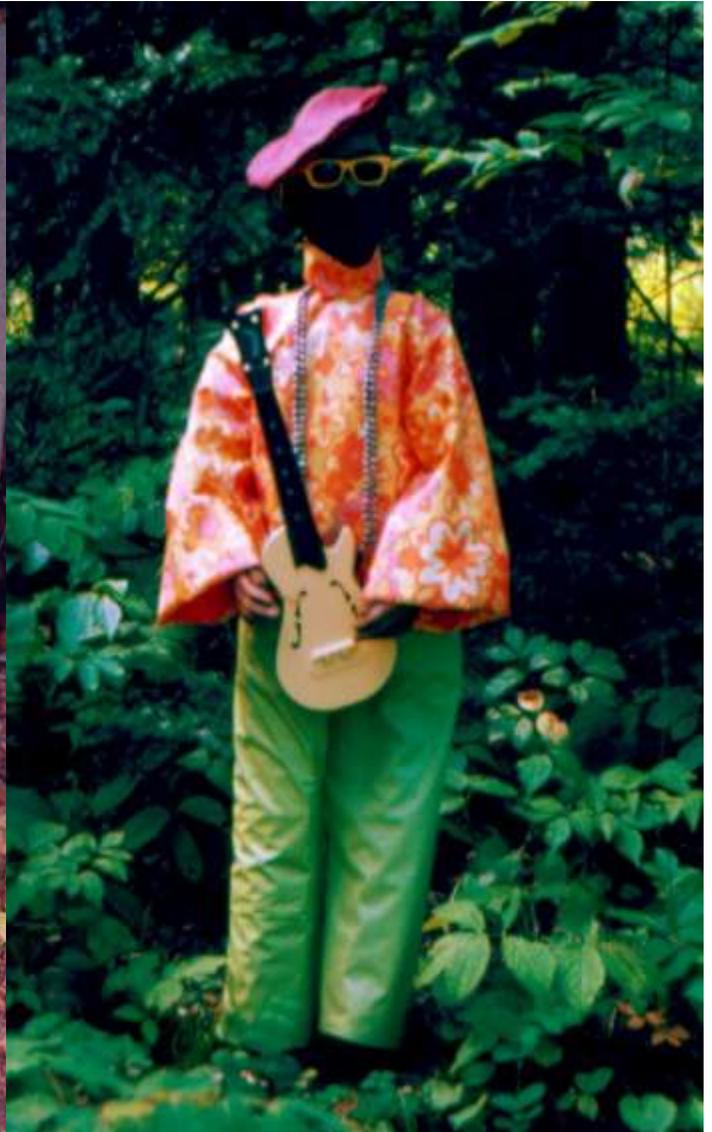
Aladdin and the Lamp



Little Jack Horner sat in the corner



YIPPIE I'm a HIPPIE



It was 1969 when my Mom added "Yippie I'm a Hippie" to the park. It was one of the last figures added to the park.



The Wick Kids - Heidi, Jon, Tim, and Kim "Sugar Plums Danced In Their Heads!"

Faith Wick, our mother, used a moulage life casting material to make the images of our faces. We each had to lay on the deck with straws in our nose while our heads were covered with moulage. Once the liquid moulage dried, the "rubber" was peeled off your face. Plaster supports were created to prevent the rubber molds from deforming during casting.

A series of scenes at Fairyland were American Presidents. They were very popular. You have already seen a photo of Teddy Roosevelt, and below is Franklin Delano Roosevelt. FDR was original located in a building called "The Museum". This building had large exterior windows and was located near the park's exit. Besides FDR, antique guns and civil war memorabilia were on display along with other oddities. I still remember a gold locket with the photo of U.S. Grant inside and revolutionary long guns.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt

This picture was taken through the glass of the museum.



Abe Lincoln and Mary Todd

Overtime, all the presidents and their wives were consolidated into a single scene. Around 1965, Faith Wick began sculpting a life-size likeness of John F. Kennedy from the cover of a Life magazine. After the clay sculpture was complete, the moulage technique described previously was used to create a pourable mold. Mom also sculpted Jackie too. These were Faith's first sculptures.



The Presidents – JFK/Jackie, Mary Todd/Abe, Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt



Three Blind Mice



Mary Poppins



Mary Had A Little Lamb



The trail (or path as we called it) continued to the right of Mary, where you could see the lamb behind.

*Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go
It followed her to school one day which was against the rule. It made the children laugh and play, to see a lamb at school.*

*And so the teacher turned it out, but still it lingered near.. And waited patiently about, till Mary did appear.
"Why does the lamb love Mary so?", the eager children cry. "Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know.", the teacher did reply.*

Cinderella and the Prince



Little Boy Blue



Mary, Mary Quite Contrary



Mary, Mary Quite Contrary was the final park scene on the forest trail.

The Museum



"The Museum" was the next stop after Mary, Mary. At this point you could see the Ticket Office which was the starting point and the front gardens of the park. The museum contained the FDR exhibit along with many antiques and oddities. There was a registration area where guests entered their names, addresses and comments in a book.





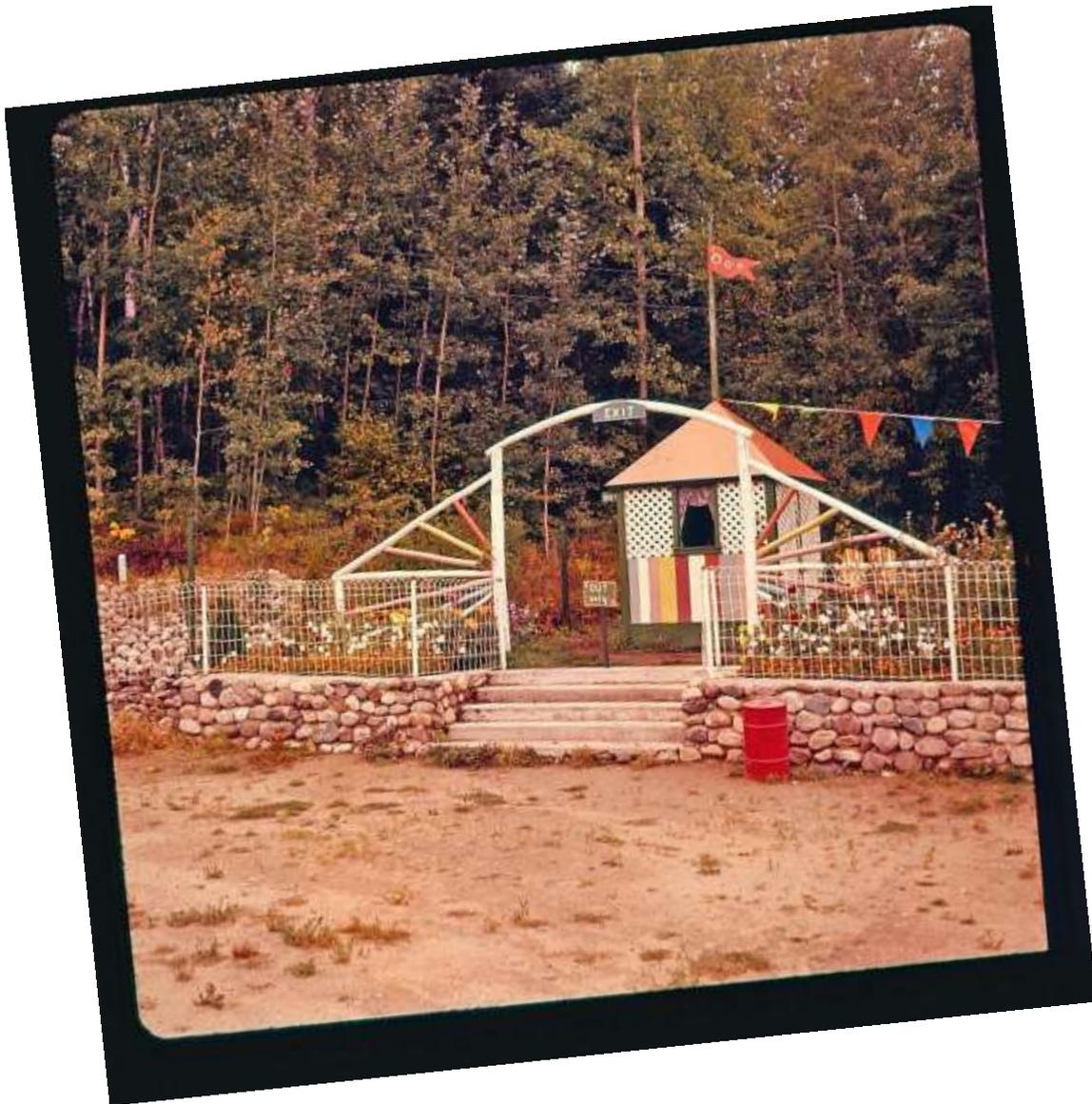


Doll House (*blue building*)



The Doll House was added and the exit was moved by the new Ticket Office (*red building*). Souvenirs of the Fairyland visit were sold inside the Ticket Office.

This is the original Fairyland Park exit which was quite a distance from the entrance.



A front view of the park from old Highway 169.

Large Flowers in front (8 feet tall)



Another busy day at Fairyland



Fairyland Park highway sign on U.S. 169



The Wick Family (1968)





Winter Time at Fairyland Park







Hansel and Gretel in the Snow *(their heads have stacks of snow on top)*



By the 1970's, Fairyland Park was most definitely an anachronism. It was folk art from a different era. My parents sold the park. The objects in the park were sold to a business man from the Wisconsin Dells area. The land, house and buildings were sold on the local real estate market.

Fairyland was always a side business for my parents. My father was a millwright for U.S. Steel Iron Ore Operations. My mother had a master degree in education and worked as director for special needs adults and children in the county.

My mother, Faith Wick, began creating dolls and giftware items as a direct result of the decade spent at Fairyland. She starting sell her designs to companies like Dakin, Balos, and Silvestri who would mass reproduce her works in the orient for resale back in the USA. Melvin Wick continue working in the iron mines for another 15 years before retiring. Faith built a business around her designs and never returned to education.

Fairyland was a wonderful place for a kid to growup. I'm sure my siblings feel the same way.

Tim Wick - St. Paul, MN *Feb 24, 2013*





Melvin and Faith Wick (1953)



50 Years Later (2003)

