

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

REMEMBERING BYGONE SUMMERS

CAR REPAIRS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

PRODUCTS OF A BYGONE ERA

REMEMBERING THE 4TH OF JULY

LEMONADE STANDS

CHANGES IN PACKAGING

CRACKER JACKS

HEROES OF MY ERA

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Did you ever have one of those days or weeks that make you feel like shouting, "Stop the world, I want to get off.", but nobody listens? After reading and hearing about all the scandals and violence, I often long for the "good old days" when things moved at a slower pace, but then realize that a lot of the things really weren't that good in the old days after all. One of the things that does make me feel better, however, is the sight and sound of things past.

For example, I just saw a special display advertising Barnham's Animal Crackers at two boxes for \$1.09. When I was a child, the box looked the same and the cookies tasted the way they do today, but they used to cost a nickel. Putting price aside, it is interesting to see children getting Mom to buy a box as kids have since 1902.

The little girl on the Morton's salt box has undergone some changes in her attire but she still grips her umbrella to remind us that her salt will pour out in spite of the rain. Then there is the familiar Bon Ami cleanser with the chicks reminding us that "it hasn't scratched yet" and the young lady in her cap and apron about to serve us some Baker's Cocoa.

When I see the animal crackers I think of trips to the Highland Park Zoo with my mother and sister. The trolley ride was great because we had to transfer to a second street car that stopped at the zoo gates, but even then it seemed like a long walk before the elephant house came into sight. But then the excitement of seeing all the other animals made the long walk worthwhile.

I view Bon Ami and Baker's Cocoa with mixed emotions because on occasions when I misbehaved (very frequent) I was given several blackened pans to scour or a bathtub that could use a second going-over with the chicks that "hadn't scratched yet."

In the later days of my youth, I enjoyed coming home after sled riding and having several cups of Baker's Cocoa but when my sister and I were small, we looked with apprehension when mother approached with a cup of unheated cocoa... because we knew it contained a large amount of milk of magnesia. In those days, milk of magnesia was very thick, chalky and unflavored so Mother was trying to make life a little more pleasant for us but NOTHING could disguise the stomach-wrenching taste of Mr. Phillip's leading product.

It is also reassuring to learn that Cracker Jacks are still being produced. I always seemed to be carried back to the twenties and being at a baseball game with my father. This childhood treat also used to cost just five cents and the prizes found at the bottom of the box were made of lead and featured whistles, small battleships, primitive airplanes, racing cars, and other small objects that delighted small boys. I don't recall any items for little girls. Oh, well, it was a man's world then. Now Cracker Jacks are more expensive and the prizes are sleazy little plastic items, but I'm sure that they are still enjoyed by little boys in 1987.

Another reassuring sign that some old things are still good is to pick up a jar of Wright's Silver Polish. The label has been changed but when the jar is opened that familiar odor of sassafras greets your nose. Some other silver polishes come and go but Wright's still seems to do a good job. I can remember helping my mother polish extra silverware when company was coming. Here at home today when I smell the sassafras aroma, it is usually a sign that someone will be a dinner guest very soon.

I have discussed some sights and smells that seem to speak of times long ago so I will mention something about the sounds—the sound of music. Hey, that would be a good title for a movie musical, wouldn't it?

When I hear people singing "God Bless America", I always think of the remarkable man who wrote it. He came to the United States as a child with his immigrant parents from Russia before the beginning of this century. He began to sing and dance in the streets of New York for pennies and soon began to write tunes. His first big seller was "Alexander's Ragtime Band" and while in the army at Camp Upton at Yaphank, New York, he sat down and wrote a little ditty that was the hit of the army show because all the soldiers could relate to it. The song was, "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning."

He also wrote another song for this same camp musical but after going over it a few times decided that it just didn't "fit". The verse began, "While the storm clouds gather far across the sea, let us pledge allegiance to a land that's free." If that is not familiar, then consider the chorus which began, "God, Bless America---land that I love." Yes, it has become our unofficial national anthem and it was not sung again until 1936 when Kate Smith introduced it on her radio show. It became an immediate success and made its author even more endeared to the American public.

As the years passed he again became a spokesman for the American G.I. with his tunes for the musical, "This is the Army." Also at this time he wrote the music for a movie entitled, "Holiday Inn" and a young man named Bing Crosby sang a song, "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas". As the war in Europe continued Bing, known to the Germans as "Der Bingle" sang to our troops and "White Christmas" brought tears to the eyes of American G.I.'s from generals to lowly buck privates. Americans at home had tears running down their cheeks too.

After the Second World War, this great man became a recluse of sorts. His kind of music did not appeal to the youth of the 60's and 70's. I must interject here to say that I didn't like the so-called music of that period either. I know that at this point our younger club members will think, "that old goat doesn't know what good music is!" That may be true but I will conclude with several mind boggling facts.

I am proud to share my birthday with the man who brought much musical pleasure and patriotism to all of us. I am thinking about Irving Berlin who celebrated his 99th birthday on May 15th along with me. I hope that he had as happy a day as I had. (Editor's note: I didn't realize that John was that old!)

REMEMBERING BYGONE SUMMERS

Most people in the United States look forward to late spring and summer for numerous reasons and rightly so. For many it is the pleasure of working with plants in a flower or vegetable garden, for many others it means vacations trips to see new sights, or to visit friends and relatives. Then many people, both young and old, can hardly wait for the baseball season or the seemingly endless number of lawn parties, firemen's parades, and fairs of all kinds that seem to be held on fairgrounds that sit idle and unnoticed most of the year and then spring to life with bright lights, contests of all kinds, Ferris wheels, and pony rides. Of course, the most important activity of this time of year is the endless number of antique auto meets that are held somewhere in the USA every weekend from late March until the snow begins.

There is yet another sure sign of summer that can be detected by nose rather than the ear or the eye. It is the outdoor cook-out; the barbequing of chickens and ribs, the grilling of steaks, hotdogs or hamburgers by countless amateur chefs throughout every neighborhood.

When I was a child living in a suburb of Pittsburgh, the signs of coming summer were; the big striped awnings on the south and west facing windows of the big, old houses on my street and the weekly appearance of the Italian vendors of cherries and strawberries along with the arrival of the organ grinder with his clever monkey. The monkey, I remember, wore a green, short-sleeved and short-panted suit and a cap with a little leather chin strap. The cap was always quickly doffed in a quaint kind of salute after he took the penny or nickel in his little black hand and dropped it in his coat pocket. If the man with the grind organ gave the monkey's long chain a jerk, he would also do a backward somersault to the delight of the children crowded around and another offering of coins would follow. I suppose that the SPCA would not allow such things today or some group promoting the civil liberties of apes and simians would have the man arrested on the spot. So be it. I'm glad that I was a kid when life wasn't quite so complicated.

I will always treasure the memory of my Uncle Tom's front porch in the summer when school was out. All of a sudden, it seemed, the wicker chairs were brought out, the rug was laid down, the big green awnings were installed, and the big porch swing was attached by its chains to the giant hooks on the porch ceiling. Some of the indoor plants were placed on the top of the short, solid wooden walls that enclosed most of the porch.

Even on a sunny, hot day the porch seemed to be cool and shady and quiet. In short, it was what I would call "cozy". What a wonderful feeling it was to stretch out on the padded swing. It often became an airplane or a dirigible with "you know who" as the dauntless pilot. With my small blonde head on the pillow, I could listen to the birds singing in the nearby trees and the steady clip-clop of a horse pulling a rubber-tired wagon on the street out front. Depending on the day of the week, it could be the Haller Bread man, the Polar Ice wagon, or the United Parcel Service. If the clapping sound was louder and the wagon sounds were of metal tires, it would signify that someone

was getting a load of driveway limestone gravel or a load of coal at summer rates from Keller Brothers, who maintained a stable of eight, beautiful Clydesdales at their rail spur, near the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad, that cut our beautiful little town into two sections.

Now and then, I might hear the sound of the delivery trucks from Horne's, Gimbels, Kaufman's, or Boggs and Buhl's department stores located in the downtown area. These stores used either early Reo Speed Wagons or those beautiful but top-heavy "cab-over" autocars with their big balloon tires and exhaust whistles that always seemed to catch me by surprise and cause me to jump ever so slightly.

Now I must admit, that passenger autos passed quite often, too, but they went by so swiftly (probably at 30 mph) that I could not enjoy their sound on the warm summer air. The only creature that could be more relaxed than I, was would have to be Garfield, the cat.

The only occasion that could top this great feeling was sitting with the grown-ups in the big wicker chairs watching the fireflies begin their evening show as we talked and ate home-made strawberry ice cream and sponge cake.

In recent years, I have passed by Uncle Tom's old house, which someone has "modernized" by installing windows that stretch from the second floor to the first and removing that wonderful front porch. Yes, the porch has been physically removed, but in my mind it will always be there; the swing will be moving slowly back and forth, there will be the sound of low voices and outbursts of laughter. A car will pass in the twilight and the driver will lightly toot his horn and wave. Those were times that are forever gone--but fondly remembered by those of us who grew up in the "twenties."

CAR REPAIRS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS

"Amazingly simple-simply amazing" was the slogan of a make of automobile some sixty years ago. In some ways this statement was true and in other ways it wasn't. The early "machine" or "horseless carriage" as they were referred to for a number of years after the turn of the century, were indeed somewhat uncomplicated in their construction. Most of the owners of these vehicles were wealthy persons and employed "chauffeurs" to drive them or at least to ride along (sometimes up on a seat on the side of the car) and to diagnose the problem and to make roadside repairs when necessary.

These repairs might include the changing of a clincher tire, adjusting the sparker coil, or even draining all of the gasolene (spelled this way until the early 1920's) and re-filtering it through a chamois skin to remove water and bits of carbon or dust. Then, on occasion the adjustable electrodes on the sparkplugs might need adjusting or the little metal crank on the carburetor might need to be turned this way or that to compensate for the jostling on the rough roads encountered on the trip.

As the years passed the chauffeurs remained only as drivers of the limousines of the wealthy and they probably did not know how to make repairs, but knew which commercial garage to call for service. By the middle "teens" the village blacksmith had realized that his future was not involved with old Dobbin but with the internal combustion engine, and,"JOSEPH WILSON'S BLACKSMITH and HORSE SHOERING" became simply "JOE'S AUTO REPAIR".

The advent of the Model T Ford brought about some important changes in automobile maintenance. A large portion of Model T sales were made to farmers who had some rudimentary mechanical skills. Also, the sales manual contained many tips on repairs for this ubiquitous vehicle such as: if the car fails to start after all starting directions have been followed--first check the timing coils. Gradually, the owner became a mechanic and he was able to make most of the repairs. I don't know whether these manuals gave directions for jacking up the rear wheels and attaching a pulley so that the Model T could pump water, saw wood, or grind corn but, if they didn't, some ingenious farmer figured out how it could be done and soon the family car was a useful farm machine that could do things that were beyond the ability of the faithful team of horses.

When the "behind the times Model T" was replaced by the Model A in 1928, backyard repairs were still possible. Driving the A onto a large rock or log, putting the wheel on the opposite side slightly above the ground, making it possible to change a tire, replace wheel bearings or repair brakes. A burned out bulb on the dash board could easily be replaced simply by unscrewing the bulb. A faulty carburetor could be cleaned by simply removing one bolt to take the carburetor apart.

Let us suppose that the same problem occurs with our 1980 native or foreign "miracle of engineering." In order to get at the burned out dash light about twenty screws must be removed before we can even get to the bulb. To correct ills of the carburetor of our modern chariot, various hoses and the air cleaner must be removed just to find the

location of the carburetor. Then when we find it, OH LORD!, the solution? Call Joe's Garage and plead for a house call or have the useless vehicle towed to Joe's.

Now, let us suppose that we are cruising down the interstate and we suddenly hear a loud bang or feel our car suddenly veering to one side or the other. We pull off to the side of the road and find that one of our tires is flat. The next move entails the opening of the trunk and the removal of the bumper jack which is probably still in its original carton. Now come the frustration of finding the directions for its assembly which is probably beyond the ability of the average motorist. And then conclude we have to find our jack, where to put our jack under the bumper or into slots conveniently placed by the manufacturer, Now, if you are lucky, you might have a bona fide spare.

Changing sparkplugs used to be simple, quick, and even fun on the automobile built half a century ago. One lifted the hood and there they were—gleaming brightly on top of the engine head. A turn of the little brass knurled nut made possible to unhook the wires and a simple wrench unscrewed the plugs. The gap was checked with a dime, or, in some cases, a nickel.

Today, the first problem is to find the plugs, or even the engine which may be in back, in front, slanted to one side, or crosswise under the hood. Those wires one sees lead to the sparkplugs, which cannot be seen at first. They are finally located but then a special socket wrench is needed that will go around corners and behind things. This takes time and is no fun at all.

I suppose we should never buck progress, but so much of our sophisticated progress is getting very complicated.

YESTERYEAR: That was down the road?

It is a sunny warm day in June and I am driving my post World War I auto along the highway. I start to slow down and notice that the brake pedal goes all the way to the floor. I grab the emergency brake and slowly guide the car to a halt on the shoulder of the road. Just as I thought! A clevis pin dropped out. Tough luck? Not really. There is a nice wire fence shining in the sun. What luck! Now, I'll just get out the old pliers and walk over to that fence. I'm sure the farmer won't miss 3 inches of his fence. Now, a cut here and another cut there ---- and I'll be on my way in two minutes.

PRODUCTS OF A BYGONE ERA

It has been pleasing to an older person like myself to see the products that have made a come-back during the "nostalgia kick" that has swept the country during the past few years. Once again, we can buy "long-johns", cast iron stoves, cast iron mechanical banks, and reproduction Model A Fords, boat-tailed Auburn speedsters, and other automobiles and accessories of the past. These things are great but there are a number of "old -timey" things that I believe should be made and sold again to this generation of youngsters.

Wouldn't it be great for certain stores to hire a patient, elderly person to work behind a large curved candy case and bag a selection of candies picked very selectively by young buyers with a small amount of change to spend? They could ponder over selecting such goodies as chocolate babies, sour balls, fireballs, root beer barrels, orange slices, spearmint leaves, Boston baked beans, candy corn, and little licorice tubes sold ten to a box. Or how about Mary Janes, starlight kisses, jaw breakers, or cinnamon imperials?

I know that there are so-called "Country stores" here and there they sell some of these candies but they are few and far between and the candy prices would send little kids away in tears. Where, in these times, can a child stand for five minutes to make a choice of something he would like to buy?

I was looking through a book that I've had since I was a child. It shows all kinds of wonderful toys and games that could be made with things found around the house. Where today can one find a soap box, a nail keg, any empty sugar sack, or a Log Cabin syrup can? Soap and nails come to stores in cardboard boxes and maple syrup stands on the supermarket shelves in look-alike glass bottles. How can a boy make an Indian tom-tom out of a cardboard box when directions call for a large wooden cheese box which was not square but round?

Television promotes the myth that vegetables are still sold by a man who comes around in a truck. We see "Mom and Pop" butcher shops, candy stores, and general stores where folks are invited to sit down for a cup of coffee or a bowl of soup.

I believe that we would have less trouble with kids if they could go to the store and get a sack full of damaged lettuce for their rabbits or guinea pigs, meat scraps for their pet alligators or turtles. I had many pets and my trips to the grocer or butcher were rewarded with copious supplies of damaged vegetables or meat scraps for a few pennies or for no charge at all plus interesting questions about the welfare of my animal friends.

I know that youngsters of today can talk their moms or dads into buying radio-controlled racing cars, Star Wars robots, or talking baby dolls but wouldn't it be nice if they could find wooden laths used for plastering walls to make swords or boomerangs and the wooden hoops from old barrels to hit with a stick in a hoop in a hoop-rolling contest

across a vacant lot? Electronics have helped modernize our culture I agree, but I believe they have taken a lot of the joys out of childhood creativeness and imagination. A battery operated space hero can vaporize a space villain but a half-century ago a lead soldier with his lead sword could conquer all villains and save the world!

REMEMBERING THE 4TH OF JULY

By the time everyone reads this column, the "Glorious Fourth" will have come and gone. It has been celebrated annually almost from the day that our Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. Somehow, it is a holiday taken over mostly by men and boys of all ages. The setting off of fireworks has been a male privilege from the early days. It is easy to picture a boy with a piece of smoking punk in his hand holding it to fuse a huge firecracker and then darting away as the girls held their fingers to their ears and prepared to scream when the explosion took place.

When I was about nine or ten years of age, my Dad informed me that I was old enough to set off firecrackers and he would bring home a glorious supply of lady-crackers, flash crackers, sparklers, Roman candles, sons-o-guns, pinwheels, and Egyptian "snakes". What excitement they created even before they were used! I recall sleeping fitfully on the night of July 3rd---the same way I did on the night of December 24th. It was a day to look forward to once every year. I can remember lying in bed on a hot July night hearing distant detonations and envying those kids who were allowed to set off some giant firecrackers on the night of July 3. However, I would drift off to sleep in sweet anticipation of the fun that was just a few hours away.

When the happy day dawned and all the large and small boys exploded onto the streets and sidewalks with matches, sticks of punk, and strings of firecrackers, the Fourth of July became official. What a thrill it was to set off a string of "ladycrackers" on top of an inverted garbage can lid. Of course, the big guys lit the string and held them disdainfully at arm's length until almost all of the little firecrackers had been exploded and then tossed them in the air for the finale. About the main excitement for the girls was lighting those little pyramids that turned brown, squirming "serpents", or spinning around on their heels to set off the red paper wrapped "sons-o-guns" that popped pieces in all directions. I wonder at the point whether most of my readers know what I'm talking about.

From this point on, I know that my Fourths of Julys were unique because my family packed a picnic lunch and headed for the Demler family reunion, which was held on a farm a dozen or more miles outside of Pittsburgh. The Demler clan was prolific and there were many cousins, aunts, and uncles who attended this reunion. As I grew up, I can recall that more than one hundred people gathered together for this event.

We had the setting off of firecrackers in "designated areas", foot races of many kinds, and a balloon race that was invented by one of my mother's cousins. Each child was given a helium-filled balloon which was attached to a large spool of #40 thread. Upon command, the balloon was released until the thread reached the end of the spool. Then another signal was given and all the contestants began to reel in the thread and pull in the balloon, which seemed to be a half mile up in the sky. I can't remember what the winner's prize was, but I do remember that one of my cousins always beat my sister Adele and me. Nevertheless, we tried again the following year with the same dismal results.

Just about dusk, the relatives began to leave. I still have some fond memories of seeing the fluttering of the little silk American flags, attached by a holder, clamped on the motometer on our big Marmon touring car. I can also recall that Adele and I were given American flags attached to a two-foot wooden dowel that we held proudly out of the side of the car as we drove on our way home.

By the time we arrived in the city, it was almost dark and about every other year there was a thundershower, which necessitated a rush to attach the rain curtains. Even though we had to peer through the celluloid openings in the curtains, we could see families setting off such things as pinwheels, fire fountains, and Roman candles.

When we finally arrived home, we would look forward to having Dad set off and wave around Roman candles and then we ran around the yard with huge sparklers. Sometimes, before they were burned out, Dad would put a bend into the hot wires and toss them into a tree, where they continued to sparkle for a brief exciting moment.

Those were the days of my childhood. When I became a father, after the tragic days of World War II, my children looked forward to the activities planned and carried out by the local VFW. They had wonderful events for children such as foot races, a greased pig, softball throws, bicycle races, and sack races. Of course, all my children were involved. They won a few events and lost most of them, but they considered the Fourth of July as one of the great social events of the year. All of the children were easy to round up at dusk because when they arrived home, it was time to grab a chair or blanket and sit out in the hayfield and watch the fireworks finale set off by our volunteer firemen and the veterans.

In recent years, there are no more activities on the ball field sponsored by the VFW. They are mostly gray-haired men whose ranks have thinned since 1945. Now, everyone flocks to Staunton to enjoy and, perhaps, take part in "Happy Birthday, USA". Those of us with antique cars have found another outlet for our hobby and we have an opportunity to be in a parade and meet folks we haven't seen since last year and folks we've never seen before. We don't mind that the crowd thinks our Model A's are Model T's, cars with red wheels are considered to be fire trucks, and a vehicle with a boiling radiator is identified as a Stanley Steamer. We don't mind because we are enjoying our cars and having fun.

LEMONADE STANDS

I recently saw a picture and short write up about several youngsters who were cashing in on the temporary hot spell we had by selling homemade beverages to cars passing by. Their sign stated that the kool-ade was 25 cents a cup. There was no indication of a homemade stand. The modus operandi seemed to be to rush toward the curb with the sign when a vehicle approached and if the car stopped someone would come to the car with a paper cup of kool-ade and, according to the article, the boys had taken in a sum of over thirteen dollars in an hour or two. What an easy way to make money these days! I suppose that we will always have some version of the old lemonade stand with us and it took me back to those simple peaceful days of the twenties I enjoyed as a child.

A decision to sell lemonade called for a lot of planning, a certain amount of skill with tools, and a pooling of resources to purchase the sugar, the lemons, waxed paper cups, if mothers would not loan glasses, and arrangements with the ice man to leave off a ten pound piece of ice. An ice pick was also necessary and some scrap lumber to build the stand and temporary use of a brush, and some second hand paint from someone's garage. The stand and sign painting might take half a day, depending on the number of kids involved. Of course, it also meant that the more people involved, the less profit per capita, so the work force was usually just two or three.

The last problem that stood in our way was the weather and I remember that after everything was done, except for the squeezing of the lemons, we would listen for a weather report on the radio which might be given once or twice a day or checking to see what the Pittsburgh Press had on the front page of the paper my father brought home from work about five o'clock. I would also ask Mother to check her faithful barometer for the prediction which was almost always correct since she planned or called off picnics and hanging out the laundry on her readings. Incidentally, I have her barometer on my dresser still and I check it every day because it is working as well as it did three quarters of a century ago.

The only other factor we had to consider in our lemonade business was the temperature. If it started out hot and humid, we might do well because people would be thirsty and we had to rely on those who were walking along the sidewalks on either side of the street. They were nearly always people who knew us; children, men who drove the bread wagons, the coal wagons, the department store delivery men in their auto-car panel trucks, an occasional vendor, such as the scissors grinder or the Fuller Brush man. Then we often made a sale to friendly adults, who probably weren't thirsty, on their way to catch the train to work downtown, but they would stop, tell us that the lemonade was delicious and give us a dime, because they said they didn't have a nickel, and that we could keep the change. What a windfall that was!

I don't remember how many hours we stayed open for business but it seemed like a very long time and when business was slack, one might read a story or two in a second hand copy of the Country Gentleman, Colliers, or Popular Mechanics. Yes, it was work and it was fun and when the stand was put away and everything was cleaned up, the

money was counted. The expenses were deducted and profit was then equally divided. If memory serves me correctly, the average share was about a dollar or a dollar and fifty cents, but we went to bed that night happy and drifted off to sleep deciding what we would do with our nickels—buy something we had been wanting or put it in a cigar box in the closet. It was a good lesson for children of those times and we grew up knowing that if we really wanted something, we could find a way of earning money to get it. This was before the days of Mr. Roosevelt's New Deal, with its welfare programs that produced a generation that was told that the government would take care of them from cradle to the grave. Yes, we learned those many years ago, there is no such thing as a free lunch.

CHANGES IN PACKAGING

About the time I was in high school (that was over 50 years ago), some anthropologists predicted that in the twenty-first or twenty-second century, man would have only a thumb and an index finger on each hand, because so many devices being put on the market have pushbuttons. As things have developed, it seems that they could never have been more wrong. Now with the coming of the computer and similar gadgets, we seem to need all of our fingers and could probably do better with six on each hand. It is true that a well-directed finger will work on the channel changer for the TV set and cause changes to take place in our cars by selecting the right button on the instrument panel, but there is an insidious conspiracy developing to make us use most of our fingers and sometimes our teeth.

I'm referring to the packaging industry that is aiming its sights especially on the elderly and perhaps the handicapped as well. Let me prove my suspicions by pointing out some of the glaring examples of this nationwide plot to make life more miserable for millions of us.

First, there are those plastic pill bottles we buy at the drugstore with those horrible caps that have to be opened by lining up almost invisible arrows or dots before they can be removed. What person waking up with a splitting headache at 2 AM wants to line up arrows on a bottle? What was wrong with the little metal tins of aspirin that popped out when you pressed the lid? Now, what about buying flashlight batteries in all the different sizes we need? We have to realize that our kids of this decade cannot enjoy toys unless they are battery-powered and most come stating that the batteries are not included. When you try to get to the batteries you have to get a sharp knife or screwdriver to punch an opening in that tough plastic cover on the package. Also, what an annoyance it is to buy products that tell you to "push down and turn" at the same time or "squeeze and turn."

It takes all the joy out of breakfast if one has a half-gallon of milk or a half-gallon of juice because the side that says open is almost permanently sealed by some giant machine that causes the opener to break a fingernail or need to get a knife to get inside. The makers of cold cereals are also changing to a plastic wrapper that is difficult to open. I miss the friendly feel of the waxed paper inside a corn flakes box, don't you? The one company that has the jump on all the others is the maker of Nabs and other crackers of that kind. Do you honestly know of anyone that can open one of them without biting an opening? I have never been able to make that little red plastic strip work for me if there is one on the pack. I have to bite a hole and go from there.

I have often fantasized about getting the chairmen of the boards of these outfits in a locked, closed room and making them open their bottles, boxes, or packets in ten seconds or less and those who fail would be sent to China for the rest of their lives. How can someone with arthritis open a bottle of "super strength" something or other with all those "child-proof" caps? I have found that I need to leave my name on file with the

pharmacy so that I won't need a plumber's license or a course in engineering to get to the large assortment of pills my doctor says I need to keep functioning.

While I'm on the subject of drugstore products, I wonder why they don't enclose a small plastic magnifying glass so that the buyer can read the directions printed in extra small type. Anyone who can read them without glasses doesn't need to take them in the first place! They must be in cahoots with the companies that print the telephone directories, but then I guess when one passes three score and ten, getting the green olive out of the jar seems harder than it once did when people crowded the showrooms of the Ford dealers to see the brand new 1928 Model A.s. The Romans so wisely observed, "TEMPUS FUGIT". This sheet of paper, unlike the compact discs on "Mission Impossible" will not self-destruct in 10 seconds. It might take 10 years if it isn't BIO-DEGRADABLE!

CRACKER JACKS

Last week I found a box of unopened Cracker Jacks left over from the Halloween supply for the trick or treaters who visited us. As I prepared to open the box, a wave of nostalgia swept over me. The little guy with the sailor suit and his dog took me back to a time many years ago when my father would take me to see the Pittsburgh Pirates play at Forbes Field. I believe that the inflated prices at the ballpark caused the Cracker Jacks to cost ten cents, instead of the regular price of a nickel, but that was expected at a baseball game. Besides, the heavenly mixture of caramel covered popcorn and peanuts was a special treat for a seven year old kid sitting in the hot sun with his dad who knew many of the players personally and who explained the games' rules and exciting plays. Then, of course, at the bottom of the box, wrapped in wax paper, was the PRIZE. This would be a lead miniature battleship, a cannon, an airplane, or a whistle. The prizes were definitely for boys. I remember that clearly.

Now, back to 1988. The box was quite difficult to open and the contents tasted stale. The box was much smaller than it used to be and the prize was two pieces of paper that were to be placed over one another to make a picture appear. Big deal! What a rip-off for 35 cents. Nobody can convince me that the box was as large or that the contents were better or "as good as" they were six decades ago. At the present price in this age, the box should be twice as large and the contents twice as flavorful as they used to be. What has happened? The only answer I can come up with is that to a small child anything received is exciting and if it is some kind of confection it tastes wonderful, but that is one of the many joys of childhood...things look bigger, taste sweeter, are more fun... and most of the time more exciting.

When taking a trip in an automobile about sixty or even fifty years ago however, it was usually an exciting event for both young and old. There was the excitement of the unknown, the possibility of a tire blowout, running out of gas because of a faulty gas gauge, a detour that you failed to check with the AAA about, or perhaps a bumble bee being swept in and making a painful contact with someone in the back seat. There were also the preparations of sandwiches, fruit, and hot and cold drinks. Toys for amusing the young were usually not necessary because there were numerous games that could be played only when traveling in a car; scoring points by spotting different kinds of animals, making up rhymes from words on signboard, and keeping lists of different license plates or makes of favorite cars. Yes, there was fun for all in spite of the heat, dust, and sometimes bumpy roads

HEROES OF MY ERA

It seems as though every few weeks some prominent person who has been a "role model" for millions of young people for a number of years turns out to be a rascal of some sort. These people seem to be found in sports, movies, religion, politics, and several other assorted categories. All of a sudden, thanks to the vigilance of the so called "media" something unwholesome is brought to light about some person's past or present personal life and they plummet to the bottom of the popularity chart.

Now when I was a child, I never had such a traumatic experience because the people I admire (we didn't know the words "role model") were just ordinary folks doing things I longed to do when I grew up. Long before Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic Ocean, I admired airplane pilots and the craft they flew—especially after I had been taken for flight in Junkers low-wing enclosed cabin plane owned by Cecil B. DeMille, who was a friend of my Uncle George in Los Angeles, where we lived for several years. I can remember running out of the house every time I heard a plane passing overhead and I always waved in hopes that the pilot flying at probably 1500 feet would see me and waggle his wings. I suppose some of those pilots took a couple of drinks after they landed or shouted at their wives or kids, but I never knew any of them personally, so I kept on admiring their daring life.

Now I liked policemen and was befriended by many kindly officers in my youth and my parents never threatened to call a policeman if I didn't do what they expected me to do. I admired policemen because I didn't get into any kind of trouble that would make it necessary for me to meet them professionally.

There were several years when I hoped that I could be the driver and delivery man of the Haller's bread wagon, the Polar Ice wagon, Wilson's Dairy, or Keller Brothers Coal wagon that was pulled by a beautiful team of Clydesdales or Percherons depending on the weight of the load. I suppose that there weren't any strict company policies of "no riders" or worries over lawsuits because I was often told to "hop up and take the reins" for a while by some of the drivers and I enjoyed filling the now outlawed nosebag that was slipped over the horse's head when the driver stopped for lunch.

I once aspired to be a professional gardener, because my bachelor uncle employed two Italian immigrant war veterans to tend his large collection of roses, tulips, shrubs, and vegetables. I would sit spellbound while Tony told me about fighting the Austrians in the Alps and looking with awe at the half a dozen shrapnel wounds in his lower legs. I learned how deep to plant tulips, to know when melons were ripe and how to make a whistle from a willow branch. Also, one didn't have to dress to be a gardener.

I remember how much I enjoyed going to baseball games with my Dad to watch the Pirates play and the Warner brothers were my heroes but I didn't want to be a baseball player because I was very small and un-coordinated at most sports.

My first football hero was Gibby Welch, a halfback who played for the Pitt Panthers and I followed his every move at the games and read all I could about him in the newspapers. I know that he went on to play professional ball with the Chicago Bears but then I lost track of him. I did aspire to play college football because I was too small to play in high school until my senior year, but one season of sitting on the bench at Bethany College convinced me that I must pursue some other means of making a living in the Depression Days.

I had some movie stars I admired such as Wil Rogers, Douglas Fairbanks, Ramon Navarro, Gary Cooper, and Charlie Chaplin but they didn't get involved in any scandals that I know of and the beautiful actresses such as Clara Bow, Janet Gaynor, Delores Costello, and Mary Pickford managed to keep most of their escapades at low key so I never was shattered by learning something unsavory about them.

About the time I was in high school, the sound of the big bands came along with Russ Columbo, Rudy Vallee, Bing Crosby, and Perry Como sang great songs, but just in the middle part of the recording, which gave equal time to the band and the singer. Now all of the great band leaders are singers or all dead except for Perry Como and Mel Torme, but I can put on their recordings and enjoy thinking about times past when life was much less complicated. I must confess, I didn't know any famous educators and becoming a teacher never crossed my mind; but then Perry Como started out as a barber and Rudolph Valentino was a second rate auto mechanic when they were discovered. I didn't have any idea I would write about antique cars either but I'm still trying to improve on that.