

# Kits, inner tubes and tires

I was in a restaurant the other day and I heard an elderly couple mention a lending library they patronized in their youth.

My, my, I didn't think anybody remembered lending libraries. I remember them well.

When I lived on the Victory Mill hill in South Gastonia, Stevenson's grocery store had a lending library. I don't remember the cost, but I think you could borrow a book for 10 cents.

They had a little bookcase in the store and it was crammed full of excellent books. I think I read everyone they had at one time or another.

That was also the first time I ever heard of an honor system. No library card was needed. It was just a matter of choosing a book, paying your dime and going your merry way. The store proprietor would jot down your name in a spiral notebook and mark through it when the book was returned. I loved it, and I would like to see the practice return to prominence.

Mention of the lending library set me to thinking about other things. The 12 o'clock whistle, for example.

Most of the cotton mills in those days would sound a whistle at 12 noon each day, and it could be heard all over the mill villages. We used to call that bean time.

Remember tom-walkers? For those who are too young, tom-walkers were empty vegetable cans that were turned upside down with two holes punched in the bottom. Twine, or cord of some kind, could be threaded through the holes, knots tied on each end so they wouldn't come back through the holes and then used to walk around. The kids on the mill village would use the bands from the mill, because they were so strong. The way it worked was a kid would step up onto the overturned cans and grasp the loops formed by the twine and proceed to walk down the street.

There have been many turned ankles among those who ventured out on a pair of tom-walkers.

Many of the kids used to buy those little packs of candy called Kits. I think there were four in a package and they cost a penny a pack. As we all



**Jim Heffner**

know, those days are gone.

If you were lucky enough to sit by a radiator in school, you could unwrap a kit and put it on top of the radiator. When it melted a little you stuck it in your mouth and ate it and it was delicious, but it took the rest of the day to work that gummy mess out of your teeth.

Nowadays people pay to get rid of their old tires when they buy a new set. In the mill village where I lived as a kid, old tires were treasured. We rolled them all over town as fast as we could. At the end of the day, our hands and clothes were filthy and it took a healthy portion of Grandma's lye soap to get the tire black off, but it was great fun. If I wasn't so old, I'd go out and roll a tire this afternoon.

Inner tubes, they don't make many of them anymore. There is no slingshot on the market any better than the ones we used to make using rubber from an old inner tube. I liked the red ones best. We also used to cut strips from an old inner tube and shoot them with a rubber gun.

Rubber guns were made by sawing a plank into the shape of an automatic pistol and strapping a clothes pin to the handle portion of the carved out gun. Then a piece of rubber was doubled, the loose ends placed in the clothes pin and the looped end stretched across the front of the gun. To shoot, you simply squeezed the clothes pin.

I took part in many rubber gun battles. Those were the days. I wonder if I could find a good, red inner tube somewhere.

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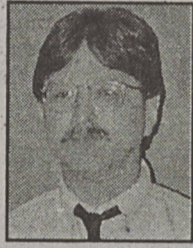


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# Hello school, goodbye TV

One of the most traumatic events in a person's life comes at an early age. No, it's not the time when you get your very first gander at the cold, cruel world and a large, masked being grabs you by your ankles and gives you a big old slap, but the very first day of first grade.



**Alan Hodge**

Guest Column

The first day of school means no more lounging about watching cartoons. Gone too are the halcyon days when the greatest worry is trying to decide what toy will occupy your thoughts and hours. Also a thing of the past are luncheons made of whatever strikes your little fancy. Even the privacy of trips to the bathroom are shattered by the first day of school.

For many young'uns, the first day of school has a double trauma in that they are put on a bus with a load of strangers. Who can forget that inaugural bus ride to school, and that fateful trip down the aisle looking for an empty seat. What a shock to a six-year-olds nervous system to have strange and sometimes menacing eyes watch your every step as you looked for a place to alight.

Besides the bus, the first day in the school lunchroom is another experience few who have lived through it will likely forget. Even now, every time I eat a grilled cheese sandwich I am taken back to the cafeteria at

East Belmont Elementary and the food we were given there. Besides the weekly grilled cheese so saturated with margarine that you could wring it like a sponge, there were other delicacies such as soup made from the weekly left-over beans and corn, as well as ketchup drenched fish sticks (species unknown).

Now, the actual classroom often holds its own tremulations for the arriving first grader. Besides the smells and sounds of a whole corral of new peers, there is the new challenge of a strange adult who can pretty much tell you what to do every minute you are there. Again, I recall my first day at East Belmont and the kindly way our teacher Mrs. Page brought us orange drink in Dixie cups and graham crackers as treats. Even though this stopped after a couple of weeks, I knew in my little heart that our class had been slud into the real world in as gentle a way as possible.

New rules quickly thrust upon you is another trying aspect of the first day at school. Two of the hardest as I recall involved having to refrain from chattering with classmates, and paying attention to what was being written on the black board. Oh, how silly and cruel it seemed to me to sit there like a knot on a log when there were so many rumors to start or such lovely clouds to watch drifting across the azure sky outside.

Of course the hardest part of the first day of first grade is leaving mom behind. As most of you know, more than one tear has been shed at this rite of passage. Many too, are the kids

who have taken their seat in class with red eyes, sniffing noses, and quivering chins. For me, the hardest part of this ordeal was knowing I would no longer have my mom fetch me a cup of coffee around 9 a.m.

Well, by the time this hits the stands, most kids will be over their first day of school. Most will even go back for a full 12 years of the public school system. For all, that very first day of first grade will be with them for the rest of their born days.

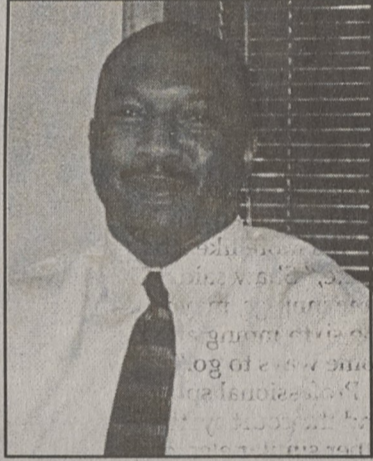
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