

Toys & Games

Driving Putt-Nik

AT THE SAME TIME the Soviets were launching their Sputnik satellites into space, from 1957 to 1961, my dad was building a car that he respectfully named Putt-Nik after the famous satellites.

My ingenious dad used the combustion engine from a Maytag washing machine—the type used on farms before electricity—and found a Ford Model T spark plug at an auto parts house.

Putt-Nik rolled on 6-inch wagon wheels and wagon axles, the steering was a belt-and-pulley power train, the pads against the tires worked successfully as brakes and Dad used a pulley slippage for the clutch. The body frame was constructed of two-by-fours, and the cowling was plywood.

When Dad stomped on the push crank in the back of the car with his foot, Putt-Nik responded with a loud “putt-putt-putt-putt!” The sound echoed through the neighborhood and, as if it were the Pied Piper’s flute, drew kids hoping for a ride.

—Janice S., Fair Oaks, California

Multi-Legged Dilemma

WHEN I WAS a girl of 6, growing up in Hackettstown, New Jersey, I spotted an octopus in one of my mother’s books and told her I’d really like one.

A few days later, she surprised me with one she had made by wrapping yarn around a ball and tying on six legs made of braided

yarn segments. It was lavender, my favorite color, but she immediately sensed that I was confused.

I explained that in school, I had learned that an octopus has eight legs, and my doll had only six. She responded that she thought it was a six-legged spider I wanted.

“Oh, yeah, a spider!” I exclaimed, and I spent all day playing with my new friend.

My spider slept in my bed with me that night, and the next morning, to my amazement, my spider had grown two legs. Mom insisted she had nothing to do with it, explaining that she thought the spider knew I really wanted an octopus.

Since I was so kind to it and loved it despite the two missing legs, Mom said, it must have grown the legs all by itself.

What started out as a small surprise turned out to be a good lesson and reward for a child’s patience and kindness.

—Cheryl S., Netcong, New Jersey

Hunger-Driven Horseman

MY HUSBAND had a steel, pedal-driven horse his family purchased for him in Norwood, Ohio in the late '20s.

He once pedaled his steel horse 3 miles from his home in Marion to a farm of some friends—of course, without parental consent. He was headed there to get some goat’s-milk fudge.

The people who lived there were members of Epworth Methodist Church in Marion, where my husband's father was minister. That's how he knew about the fresh batch of fudge, and he had eaten fudge at the farm several times with his parents.

Upon Franklin's arrival, the farmer called the family, and the wayward boy and his horse were driven back home.

—Gladys M., North Canton, Ohio

Bottling Up the Enemy

ARMED WITH grocery bags, my boys and their friends hunted for bottle caps, sorted them by logos and took them to the beach, where they built fortresses for their war games.

I don't know what their strategy was, but the more common bottle caps were privates, and others were designated different ranks up to colonel.

Later, they did more battle on the rough terrain provided by the gnarled, exposed roots of a large tree pushing up the sidewalk in front of our house.

—Margaret M., York Haven, Pennsylvania

Budding Entrepreneur

In 1933 or '34, I wanted a Monopoly game so bad, but money was not available for such things during the Depression.

Using a neighbor's Monopoly game as a model, I cut a board the

right size and worked out all the squares. I hand-printed the money and property cards, cut hotels and houses out of scrap material and colored them with crayons.

Many hours were spent playing the game. And my playing pieces? They came from Cracker Jack prizes.

—Eve E., Milwaukie, Oregon