

Flying Cargo

Family's Radio Flyer wagon hauled everything from summer berries to winter coal.

By Elizabeth Viola, Rogersville, Tennessee

I DON'T remember where it came from, but my red Radio Flyer wagon was always there, in the garage, whenever I needed it.

It was the late 1940s, and we lived in the old part of Bangor, Maine, where houses were only a driveway apart. There was hardly a need for the driveways, since few had a car.

My mother didn't work outside the home, caring for the seven babies she had in 14 years, and Dad was a cook at a local hotel. We were barely able to pay the monthly rent of \$27 on that small house.

Trusted for Mission

One of my jobs was to take that \$27 to our landlord downtown on the first of each month, always being warned not to lose the money and to get a receipt.

Some mornings, there was no bread for toast. I would get the Radio Flyer and my sister Mary, who was 2 years younger than me, and go hunting for returnable bottles—2¢ for small ones and 5¢ for big bottles. Mary had to come along because I refused to touch the beer bottles. For 18¢, we'd buy a loaf of bread to make toast for all those brothers and sisters.

In summertime, my Grandmother Nana and I would pick berries all afternoon and pull the buckets of berries back home in the wagon.

When the iceman made a delivery, I'd put the leftover ice chips in my wagon, and all the kids in the neighborhood would sit on our

front steps and suck on the cool ice.

Other days, Dad and I hauled bags of dandelion greens home. Mom would cook a big pot of them with potatoes for supper. Can you imagine kids eating that today? Our neighbors bought what greens we didn't need for 25¢ a peck.

Maine winters were long and cold, and we were lucky if we could buy two loads of coal each season to heat the house.

When the coal was gone, we'd huddle around our oil-burning stove in the kitchen and eat hot potato soup to stay warm.

At those times, I'd take the Radio Flyer and walk around the neighborhood, raking through ash piles to find any unburned pieces of coal. Believe me, I burned my fingers a few times, but it never stopped me. I'd find quite a few wagonloads and was so proud to help my family.

Recently, we built a new house. My granddaughter was helping me load up her own Radio Flyer wagon with rocks to clear the area for a lawn, but after about 10 minutes, she went home to watch TV.

I worked most of the day hauling rocks in the wagon, and the memories came flooding back. I recalled the special era when there was no TV, no electric refrigeration, no car and little money. But it was a time when we learned to make do with what we had and it was fun being resourceful with a red Radio Flyer wagon.

Proud to Look Back

Today, I can plant any kinds of greens in my vegetable garden or walk out back and pick blackberries to my heart's content. I can push a button to warm my house, push another to get all the ice I want and drive my car to a big supermarket to buy a loaf of bread for \$2.39.

And to this day, I've never touched a beer bottle or outlived my need for a wagon.

I'm thankful for all that I learned while growing up in a time of necessity, when a Radio Flyer wagon helped prepare me, in many ways, to live contented with what I have.