

The Red Ryder Rifle

By Keith Schell

One spring weekend in the 1990s, my parents and the dog came down to the city to visit me. This made for a nice change, because usually I was the one going home to visit them. I enjoyed being a host and took quiet joy in my family enjoying my hospitality for the weekend.

Coincidentally, there happen to be an antique toy show going on that Sunday afternoon at the local convention centre. I loved to attend these shows to enjoy a nostalgic blast from the past.

Because it was billed as an antique toy show, I thought my parents might enjoy seeing some of the things from their youth on display at this show. I asked them if they might be interested in going down to attend.

Mom had no interest, but Dad decided he would like to go. He liked to attend the occasional antique show when he had the opportunity. You never knew what you might see at one. So Mom stayed home to babysit the dog and Dad and I went down to the show.

It was a very large show. Dad was impressed with the size of the show and amount of items for sale as we walked through.

Dad was enjoying it, but most of the stuff for sale there was stuff from when I was growing up or later and did not hold that much interest for him. We slowly walked from table to table casually perusing what the dealers had to offer.

Suddenly, my Father's eyes got big and his mouth popped open. He couldn't believe what he saw.

He walked over to one of the dealer tables and just stared at an item on the table.

I followed him over to the table and saw him staring in disbelief at one of the antique toys on the table. He turned to me and said:

‘A Red Ryder air rifle! I had one of these when I was a kid!?’

He picked it up off the table and slowly turned it over in his hands. It was a little rough and rusty, but otherwise in decent shape. You could still see the faded ‘Red Ryder’ stenciling on the stock of the rifle.

He cocked the rifle. The rifle was still in good working order, still making the compressed air ‘bang’ sound when he pulled the trigger. His eyes softened and a smile came to his face.

And at that dealer's table I watched as my Father became a kid again.

After he fired the rifle, he slowly turned it over in his hands again and then put it back on the table.

There was a price tag on the rifle. I asked Dad if he wanted to buy it. He said, ‘No, I don't think so.’ And we quietly walked away from the table.

But as we walked through the rest of the show, I noticed a little smile on my Father's face. I understood exactly what he was feeling. I have experienced that feeling myself several times at these shows when I saw toys for sale that I played with in my childhood.

He was experiencing the feeling of nostalgic joy, the happy feeling you get when you see something from your childhood that brought back the childlike happiness you experienced when you played with it.

As we continued to walk through the show, we came to a table with a large display of vintage Dinky Toys. There was a fire truck on the table. I stopped to admire it.

Dad asked me, 'Do you like it?' I replied, 'Yes.' And he bought it for me on the spot. And soon after that we went home.

In hindsight, I think that Dad's purchase of that Dinky Toy Fire Truck for me was his way of saying 'Thank You' for everything that happened on that day.

But I got much more out of that day than a Dinky Toy fire truck. I got a wonderful memory that I will keep with me for the rest of my life.

For a brief moment in time, I got to see my Father be a kid again.

(Miss you, Dad. Happy Heavenly Father's Day!)