

It Wasn't All Work

Bill Hawley - 2010

Stories of the “good old days” usually are really stories of just how tough it was “way back when”. And it was tough! But don't think we didn't have fun too.

When Martha Anne and I became of an age that playing ball was fun, the best place for a ball game was very close. What is now East Buckoak Street between South Main Street and Dallas Road was an open field and there was room to play. There were enough kids in the area to have a ball game. Of course the ball was just a rock wrapped and wrapped and wrapped with friction tape. There was no problem finding a bat at the lumber yard. Bark slabs made good bases. What is now Derr Street looked very different in those days. There were several houses just on the other side of the railroad track. The Clarence Armstrong family lived in one of those houses. Forrest and Ovelia were just about the right age. Bobby Hawley and Jimmy Smith also were close by. There were lots of ball games when the weather was warm. Fun – you bet!

If there was one thing Papa Hawley liked, it was having some sort of puzzle his grandchildren could not figure out. He kept some kind of puzzle in his pocket all the time. Most of the puzzles were short lengths of round metal which had 360° bends on one end. Two were intertwined and the idea was to separate them. They were fun to play with and it just tore him up if you figured it out. The next time you saw him, you can bet that he had a much more complicated one for you to try. I have no idea where he found all of those puzzles. Probably salesmen that came by the lumber yard office.

Papa Hawley loved to play checkers. How he hated to lose. He had a very nice checkerboard. It was about 30 inches square with rounded corners. I can remember Daddy and Papa Hawley playing checkers even when Mama and Papa Hawley lived in the old house down by the sawmill on Dallas Road. They would sit in chairs facing each other and the checkerboard would be placed on their knees. I couldn't wait to grow up enough to play checkers on Papa Hawley's board. When I did, I found out that I was not very good at it.

There was another game that was played on that old checker board. The game was called Carom. Carom can best be described as the game of pool played on a checker board. Papa Hawley's checkerboard was also a Carom board. The board had pockets on all four corners and two opposite sides. The red and green checker “men” were used as the pool balls. The checker men were wooden rings. A black checker was used as the 8 ball. A white checker served as a cue ball and one of your fingers was the cue stick. The winner was the one who could first clean the board of his color of checkers and then make the black one. You can imagine the skill level needed to shoot the “men” into the pockets while the board was sitting on your knees. I became very good at this game and it was fun. After our children were born, I bought a Carom board and taught them the game. We even played the game with neighbors down at Clemson. Needless to say, I still have a board. The “men” are made of plastic now though.

And then there was a card game called “Setback”. Each year when we went to West Virginia for the Walker reunion, there would be a “Setback” game on Saturday night. Papa Hawley and Daddy would play uncle Forrest and Orella at Uncle Forrest's house in Princeton. There was plenty of “Setback” played at our house also. Pete, Jess and Ben Smith would come to play with Daddy. Mother would always have some kind of cake for them. I also learned the game and Hodge McBee started coming later. It became “sitdown Setback”. This version of the game is played with two pair of players playing and the third pair sitting down eagerly waiting to challenge the winning pair.

Yes, the games we played were much different from all the electronic games of today. But you can bet that they were just as much, if not more, fun!