



and the

Voice of the Turtle was heard in the land ...

Give me liberty
to know, to utter
and to argue freely
according to
conscience, above all
liberties.

– Milton

Toys weren't us

Have you been in one of the big toy stores lately? Like “Toys R Us?” The selections run into the thousands, and the prices range into the hundreds.

Nintendo is the hottest game on the market, and it alone costs over \$100. The games for it can cost hundreds more. Some refer to it as an “electronic babysitter,” because it will entrance the kids for hours on end.

Youngsters who don't have a Nintendo are often considered underprivileged. Many of today's children consider Christmas a bust if they don't find a dozen (or more) toys under the tree.

How times have changed! I remember four of my first early Christmases: One was a BB gun, one a pedal-car, one a bicycle, and the fourth was an Ives electric train that ran on a six-foot circle of track.

Each of us got a stocking stuffed with nuts, candy and an orange or two. There were the usual shirts, socks and pants, or perhaps a coat in the winter, but they didn't count.

The single toy did!

But we weren't without plenty of other toys and games. The difference is, we made up our own games and built our own toys. We made rubber-band guns from an old innertube, a piece of wood and a clothespin. Desert Storm was a

skirmish compared to some of our wars!

In the winter, since our parents couldn't afford a Flexible Flyer sled, we built “go devils” from a barrel stave and two small pieces of wood. An expert could out-run a skier. In the spring we made our own kites from newspapers, sticks of wood, glue and string. They flew as well as, and often better than, the store-bought versions.

Best of all, these things kept us out-of-doors.



We played street hockey with a crooked stick cut from a sapling, and a mashed tin can for a puck. The latter could inflict a nasty wound.

“Duck on a rock” was a favorite game and required only some round stones. In the right season, we raided orchards and grapevines and were ceremoniously chased by irate owners. A shotgun, purportedly loaded with rocksalt, was frequently brandished but seldom fired.

On a rainy day, when we weren't in school, we were allowed to play in the house, but were usually restricted to one room, often the basement or the attic. Any other time, we were shooed outside. We spent many a

day hiking or on bike expeditions that usually lasted until dark.

By and large, we spent most of our childhood outside and were a pretty healthy bunch. We had to wear lots of clothes and galoshes, like it or not. Mother saw to that.

There were few fat kids, and “fast food” was unheard of. The staple snack was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. School was never closed until all traffic was stopped by snow.

We were a happy bunch and sure didn't worry about our “rights,” or anybody else's. We hadn't heard of gangs, minorities or a drug war. We learned to write in legible longhand and did our math in our heads without the aid of a calculator.

You didn't sass the teacher, or you got sent home and tried to explain it to an angry father.

Our material goods usually consisted of a BB gun, some agates, a bicycle, a few baseball cards, and perhaps a Lone Ranger wooden six-shooter.

Financially, we were well off if we could con our parents out of a quarter for the Saturday-afternoon movie, and a nickel or dime for candy or popcorn.

Christmas was always a happy time, and one single toy – no matter what – made for a happy holiday. Who needed anything more?