

Toy Stories: Nostalgic Attempts at your Inner Child

Choosing a topic for an Athenaeum paper is a daunting task. As I embarked on my sophomore voyage, tonight was no different. A slew of ideas flood my mind each time someone presents a paper and then those fall by the wayside as I walk out of each meeting and return to daily life. But one paper in particular this year sparked my interest enough for me to write down my thoughts. I remember leaving that meeting feeling as if I was taken back to my middle school years. I never realized the impact Fruit Stripe gum could have had on my youth. I remember selling sticks of it for a quarter a piece. If it wasn't gum, it was cinnamon toothpicks. If it wasn't toothpicks, it was homemade suckers. And, I am almost positive there are those in this room that did the same things during their tenure as a student. We often hear things, see things, and smell things that make us feel nostalgic. Personally, I can still get a whiff of musty air at times that reminds me of Cayce Yost when my dad worked there as a child. The things I remember: the mechanical horse out front, the bikes on the first floor, the tools in the back, and not to mention the toys found on that second floor. I still get that feeling of excitement when thinking about it. So tonight, gentlemen, I want to take your minds back a few years as chronologically we will delve into the 1940s – 1980s. The subject: the history of some of the most popular toys of each decade. The stories behind those beloved toys you played with. Some, you may have played with as a child. Others, you may have bought for your own children. Nevertheless, I present to you tonight "Toy Stories: Nostalgic Attempts at Your Inner Child."

We will begin our journey tonight by examining the 1940s. William Turner was born, but aside from that some interesting toys hit the market that still fills the shelves at Wal-Mart. The most popular toys of the decade include:

Scrabble

Scrabble has filled up coffee tables for nearly 70 years. Scrabble was originally named Criss-Cross Words. Scrabble might not be in homes across America if fans of the game had not taken personal action. Alfred Butts, creator of the game, turned his love for crossword puzzles into a board game that used a mixture of chance and skill. Only a handful of handmade samples were made and given to family and friends. When he attempted to sell his idea to established game manufacturers, they all declined. He was too busy in his architect business to bother with pushing forward on some game. Friends of Butts and fans of the game he created, the Brunot family decided to pursue marketing the game in 1948. They made a few minor changes to the rules and decided to change the name to Scrabble. Butts gave permission for the Brunots to manufacture the game, which they did with little initial success. Success was slow, but sudden. Upon returning from a trip, the family found their little factory swamped with orders for this new game. Today, Scrabble is the second best-selling game in US History, with only Monopoly surpassing its sales.

Cootie

This worldwide childhood favorite began as a hand whittled toy in 1948. Letter carrier and creator, Herb Schaper, carved the first forty thousand wooden COOTIES by hand! By 1952, Schaper's company sold 1.2 million Cootie games, and thereafter, a million games a year. By the

mid-1960s, Schaper's company was selling more than twenty-five different games from its Golden Valley, Minnesota headquarters. In Australia, the game was distributed by Toltoys in the late 60s under the title Creepy Critters. Cootie was one of many revamped traditional games cast in plastic by the Schaper Company. Several games had bug titles such as Tickle Bee, Inch Worm, and Tumble Bug.

Model Airplanes

Model airplanes became popular to help sell airplanes to the military. Prior to the invention of plastic, consumers would have to cut their own wood pieces. Those initial model airplanes were sold as kits with balsa wood and patterns. With the use of plastic, inexpensive, yet detailed, model airplanes were able to be mass-produced. Assembling model airplanes takes patience and skill. Some model sets are easy to put together, but most are complex, and some modelers even prefer to assemble an airplane by hand with self-acquired parts. The ideas behind model airplanes are simple: Start with some parts and glue and create a miniature version of a modern-day form of transport, a military air vehicle, or a spaceship to rival any sci-fi fan's greatest dream. What might seem odd is the history of model airplanes. Putting together model airplanes actually dates back to ancient civilizations, when modeling kits and glue weren't invented yet.

Silly Putty

Silly Putty is a story of marketing success. James Wright created a synthetic, pliable rubber that was inexpensive and of use in a variety of applications. Wright created this rubber during World War II to be used for caulking and molding. After the war, Wright was left with an

excessive supply of which no one had a use. A Connecticut store owner, Peter Hodgson, bought a large amount to repackage and sell as a toy to children. He put the rubber into plastic eggs and labeled it Silly Putty. Silly Putty would sit on the shelf for almost 6 years before reaching the owner of a toy store, named Ruth Fallgatter. She saw potential in the odd substance and decided to retail it in her catalogue for \$2 apiece. It went on to outsell every item in the catalogue with the exception of Crayola Crayons. Two years later, Silly Putty was portioned into plastic eggs and sold 250,000 units within 3 days. Children still use Silly Putty to create and play with, but most children love its ability to lift comics right off the pages.

Slinky

Navy engineer, Richard James, was attempting to find a suspension device to make sailing on battleships less rough when he noticed that a torsion spring will walk end over end when it's knocked over. Upon returning home, he and his wife began production of the toy she named Slinky. When Slinky made its debut in Gimble's Department Store in Philadelphia in 1945, James was surprised when the toy sold out (400 Slinky toys) in ninety minutes. Over three hundred million Slinky toys have been sold since then. Despite the huge success, Slinky toys are still made in the same factory, using the same machines in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania.

1950s

Play-Doh

Noah and Joseph McVicker created a non-toxic reusable wallpaper cleaner in 1955. That same year, a relative and school teacher asked about a safe modeling clay substitute. Joseph sent her a sample of the clay wallpaper cleaner he co-invented. The kids loved it. The next year, the

brothers created Rainbow Crafts Company to manufacture the product. They named it Play-Doh. Due to the instant success of the clay, the Fun Factory accessory play set was introduced in 1960. Initially offered only in white, today Play-Doh is sold in a vast array of colors and it is still a favorite non-toxic arts and crafts toy for young children. And, as a side note, I'm sure at least one person in this room has tasted it although few would admit it.

Frisbee

Frisbees come with a fun and interesting history of two vastly different ideas coming into one great product. Idea 1: In 1870, a Connecticut pie baker, William Russel Frisbie, came up with a fantastic marketing plan. He had his family's name impressed on the bottom of the reusable tin plates his company sold their pies in. The plan was that each time the pie pan was about to be used, the housewife would see the name Frisbie and think how much easier it would be to simply buy a pie. The family business spread throughout that State over the course of many years. In the 1940s, students at Yale were the first to began sailing the tins through the air and catching them. Idea 2: In the 1950s, Walter Frederick Morrison designed a saucer disc out of his enthusiasm for flying saucers. He sold his idea of playing catch with these flying discs to Wham-O who began marketing the product. These two ideas joined to make one great product.

The President of Wham-O was doing a promotional marketing tour of college campuses where he encountered the pie tin tossing at Yale. Upon returning to California, he renamed the California flying saucer after the Connecticut pie plate. The second "i" in Frisbie was changed to an "e" to avoid potential legal difficulties.

Tonka Trucks

Tonka trucks are the result of turning a failure around. A group of teachers from Minnesota failed when attempting to make and sell garden tools. Upon that failure, they decided to use the left over materials to make toys. The toy truck they made was named after the lake Minnetonka. The success of those toy trucks was phenomenal. Over thirty million Tonka trucks have been sold in the United States. The signature yellow Tonka truck is still an outstanding success. A tonka truck and a pile of dirt equals epicness.

Matchbox Cars

Matchbox Cars are a result of Show and Tell. Creator, Jack Odell, made a miniature brass model of a Road Roller for his daughter to take to school. He placed the car into a matchbox when he sent her to school with it and the matchbox made the toy a huge hit. Every child wanted a miniature car that was small enough it would fit inside a matchbox. Today, over one hundred million Matchbox Cars are sold each and every year.

Yahtzee

A wealthy Canadian couple created The Yacht Game for their friends to enjoy during cruises on their private yacht. The couple's friends loved the game so much that they each wanted their own copy. This prompted the couple to approach a toy maker, Edwin Lowe, to commission copies to give as gifts. Lowe loved the game upon seeing it and bought the rights. In 1956, the couple, who have chosen to remain unknown, received the first one thousand game sets in exchange for the rights to their creation. That year, Lowe changed the name from The Yacht Game to Yahtzee.

1960s

Hot Wheels

Husband of famed Barbie creator, Elliot Handler invented Hot Wheels while experimenting with adding axles and free-rolling wheels in 1968. His first car reached three hundred miles an hour. The first year sold ten times more than expected, making the new toy a hit. The reason for Hot Wheels' instant success was its revolutionary features which allowed the cars to roll further and the orange plastic track allowed the cars to perform tricks, such as jumps and loops. Hot Wheels are powered by gravity, but their design maximizes gravity's influence. These features are what keeps Hot Wheels a favorite even today. The famous Hot Wheels logo was created by artist Rick Irons who worked for Mattel at that time.

LEGO

All the parents who continually step on little plastic LEGO pieces throughout their homes can thank Denmark for their pain. LEGOS were strictly a Danish toy until 1962, when they were first introduced in the United States. By 1966, LEGOS was an established favorite toy in this Country and still is today. The toy's history begins in 1932 when a master carpenter in Billund, Denmark sets up a business to manufacture ladders, ironing boards and wooden toys. Ole Kirk Christiansen names his company LEGO from the letters in the Danish word for 'play well' (leggodt). The LEGO was the first company in that Country to purchase a machine for making plastic molded toys. In 1949, two years later, LEGO produced the forerunner of today's LEGOS, Automatic Binding Bricks. Six years later, in 1955, LEGO launched it's LEGO System of Play with twenty-eight sets and eight vehicles. After a few more years of developing this toy, the

company obtains a patent for its newly invented stud-and-tube connecting system. When the LEGO System of Play was introduced in the United States in 1962, it was initially offered as a loose set of bricks. The line has continued to grow in this Country and some of their specialty kits, such as the Star Wars themed kits, sell out year after year.

G.I. Joe

The story behind the creation of G.I. Joe, the toy, is a bit murky. Different stories are floating around, but the gist of it is that the real story is a little piece of each. Stanley Weston approached Hasbro about creating a male doll based upon his television show *The Lieutenant*. Hasbro's creative director rejected the television tie-in, but did go to executives about creating a soldier with movable parts. The term "figure" was used instead of doll as the day's mindset did not allow for boys playing with dolls. The resulting toy was named after the lead character in a movie instead of the television series. During World War II, David Breger was contracted to produce a comic strip for the United States Military *YANK Magazine* and *Stars and Stripes Newspaper*. Breger named his comic strip character, G. I. Joe. That comic strip character became a movie star when United Artists released the movie: *The Story of G.I. Joe* in 1945. The G.I. Joe figure was designed by Walter Hansen and Phil Kraczkowski and was sold in 1964 wearing uniforms of all four branches of the United States Military. To differentiate from dolls, these "action" figures were movable in twenty-one places and had a scar on its face. Incidentally, a manufacturing defect created one thumbnail on the wrong side of the thumb which was later used to protect its copyright. G.I. Joe coined the term "action figure." From 1964 to 1968, the four G.I. Joe action figures were named: "Rocky," the marine and soldier; "Skip," the sailor; and "Ace," the pilot. Beginning in 1966, soldiers from other Countries first appeared in the toy line.

Etch-a-Sketch

The first time Ohio Art saw the toy inventor Arthur Granjean created was at the 1959 International Toy Fair in Nuremburg, Germany. The Magic Screen, L'Ecran Magique, did not interest them. It was not until they happened upon the toy a second time that they decided to give it a try. Ohio Art began production on July 12, 1960 and because of the enormous response, decided to keep their plant open until noon on Christmas 1960 in order to be able to ship them immediately to the West Coast for people in California to be able to buy them Christmas Eve, in time for their Christmas morning. Very little has changed over the years, and yet the Etch-a-Sketch is still the number one drawing toy of all time.

Super Ball

When Wham-O released the Super Ball for sale the summer of 1965, they quickly became the most popular toy of the year and by Christmas, over seven million Super Balls had been sold at only ninety-eight cents each. The ability to leap over a three-story building is what gave the ball its name. Super Balls had so much "bounce" that when simply dropped, they would jump almost back to the same level dropped from. That bounce came from compressing a synthetic rubber under three thousand, five hundred pounds of pressure per square inch. Chemist Norman Stingley experimented during his spare time to come up with this unequaled resilience. Although initially, the first rubber material did not stay together, Wham-O kept working until they came up with a compound that would hold up under normal use.

1970s

Atari

I used to play with this for hours each day after school. I would even awake early before school to get in a quick gaming session. Known as the first true video gaming system, Atari's star fell as quickly as it rose. Founded in 1972, Atari Inc. was a pioneer in arcade games, home video games and computers. The company's work defined the computer gaming industry during its first two decades. Their work opened the way for the more advanced home video game systems we now know. Nolan Bushnell sold Atari Inc. to Warner Brothers where their popular Pong games led to the creation of a home video game system with interchangeable video game cartridges. The Atari VCS 2600 is the video game system people think of when Atari is mentioned. Atari VCS 2600 was released in 1977 for \$199. The first year, there were nine game cartridges available. When the year 1982 began, Atari was making two billion dollars a year. Because of over-licensing and competition from Nintendo (which was just released in Japan), Atari's sales had plummeted so much that in 1983, the company sent thousands of cartridges to Texas to be used as landfill. Oddly enough, people are now searching yard sales, thrift stores and flea markets for this game system and its cartridges. Is it just collectors, or could this game actually have a market again? My wife bought me one two years ago for Christmas. Sold at Walgreens for an astonishing \$39.99.

UNO

In 1971, an Ohio barbershop owner created a card game to play with his family. Merle Robbins' family and friends loved the game. Robbins paid eight thousand dollars to have five

thousand games made, which he sold from his barbershop. A fan of the game bought the rights from Robbins for fifty thousand dollars plus royalties. This new owner formed International Games Inc. to market UNO and the sales took off. In 1992, International Games became a division of Mattel. Undisputed UNO champ anyone?

Rubik's Cube

Creator, Erno Rubik, was a lecturer at the Department of Interior Design at the Academy of Applied Arts and Crafts in Budapest, Hungary. Rubik was a visual teacher and used models to illustrate his ideas. One idea he was attempting to teach was that the simplest things could be duplicated and manipulated into multiple forms. Through trying to model this idea for his students, Rubik eventually built a cube, the Cube, in 1974. Rubik was amazed at the reaction of his friends and students to this Cube. Everyone seemed compelled play with it and he found it difficult to retrieve. During 1978, the Cube began to spread through simple word of mouth all through Hungary. A year later, the Ideal Toy Corporation went to Hungary to see the toy actually in play. One million Cube were originally ordered. As with the success in Hungary, everywhere in the World that the Cube wandered, it was children who sold the toy through their enthusiastic word of mouth marketing. Peeling off the stickers and placing them in order of color on each side was a quick way to beat this game. You did it too...admit it!

SIMON

SIMON was the first electronic game of its kind. The lights would pop on in a pattern and you had to repeat the pattern. Each time you got it correct, a new and longer pattern would begin. I can still hear the sound it made when you missed. I did that a lot. SIMON was the brainchild of

Howard Morrison and Ralph Baer who placed a microcomputer inside the game, which was what controlled the game and kept it competitive. SIMON has always been around, but seems to be making a return. With all the hundreds of electronic games out there, SIMON has proven to deliver a challenge not found elsewhere. Iphone Apps for SIMON are available for purchase on Itunes.

1980s

Trivial Pursuit

Two friends, living in Montreal, sat down to play a game of Scrabble. As their game was missing several pieces, they began innocently talking about inventing their own game. The conversation grew until they were actually creating a game. Those Canadians were Chris Haney and Scott Abbott. They partnered with two other friends, Chris' brother John and Ed Werner, a lawyer. They named themselves the Horn Abbot Company. To raise their initial funding, they sold five shares in their company for one thousand dollars each. They gave five shares to the young artist, Michael Wurstlin, for creating the artwork. The company had the name Trivial Pursuit trademarked and produced one thousand and one hundred copies of the game. Canadian sales began in 1981 and at a significant loss of sixty dollars per game. Two years later, licensing was given to the US manufacturer, Selchow and Righter who's successful marketing campaign made Trivial Pursuit a household name. In one year, twenty million games were sold. Games Magazine named Trivial Pursuit to the Games Hall of Fame in 1993. To date, almost one hundred million games have been sold in twenty-six Countries and seventeen languages.

Transformers

It's more than meets the eye! Hasbro, the creators of the very first action figure, brought new depth to the toy category when they released The Transformers in 1984. Their advertising jingle said that there was "More than meets the eye" and there was. Children could manipulate this new toy robot into a functioning toy car. Hasbro successfully entrenched the brand into modern culture by creating story lines with battles and gave their robots personalities. That marketing plan spawned a television series, a movie and comic books. When Hasbro bought the rights to several brands of changing robots in Japan, the Japanese toy manufacturer, Takara jumped on the opportunity and signed with Hasbro to partner the development of new Transformers products. The original twenty-one toys have become known as Generation One. The very next year, Hasbro released the second group of Transformers toys - Dinobots and Constructicons. Constructicons were the first Transformers that could be combined to make a larger robot. Many of us had the legendary "Optimist Prime." The huge staying power of this brand is evidenced in the recently released Transformers movies.

Koosh Balls

Engineer, Scott Stilling, tied rubber bands together to make a ball that would be easy for his children to hold and throw. The name came from the sound the ball makes when it lands. Koosh Balls are unique in that they are made from approximately two thousand rubber filaments tied around the core unlike other balls which had smooth outside surfaces. Stilling's brother-in-law, Mark Button, was a marketing manager for Mattel at the time and joined him to open their own business - Oddz On Products in 1987. One of the hottest toys of the 1988 Christmas season was this new and interesting ball. Millions of Koosh Balls have been sold and

approximately forty percent were purchased for adults to play with. I am one of those adults. A couple of these at a pool make for a great day!

JENGA

JENGA! Swahili for "to build," JENGA was officially introduced to the United States by Milton Bradley in 1987. Oxford University student, Leslie Scott, created the game in the early 70s. She and her friends had been playing the game for six years before they were able to convince her to sell it in the United Kingdom. Having spent her childhood in Africa, one of the languages she spoke was Swahili and thus the name. American, Robert Grebler imported the game to the United States and Canada. In February 1985, Grebler set up a JENGA fund-raising tournament for the Heart Foundation. The public and media responded to that tournament resulting in Milton Bradley obtaining the rights to the game.

Slap Bracelets

Created by Stuart Anders, a Wisconsin shop teacher, slap bracelets were as much a 1980s social phenomenon as a toy craze. Experimenting with steel, Anders created something he called the Slap Wrap: a piece of fabric-covered metal that would curl around the wrist of anyone who smacked the bracelet against their arm. But it wasn't until Eugene Murtha, president of Main Street Toy Co., agreed to distribute them that they became slap bracelets — and a smashing success. I can remember when these were banned in school buildings across our county. It was a sad day in the life of a student.

Most of the toys mentioned in each decade have come full circle and children across the world are still experiencing the same fun we had. A flood of memories surround this paper with feelings from Christmas, birthdays, and letting our minds travel back through time to be a child again. This nostalgic approach was intended to produce emotions to awake that inner child we all possess. A memory or a good story has hopefully been produced for you to use tonight during the comment portion of tonight's meeting. Gentlemen, it's been a pleasure and I thank you for your time and attention.