



Perspective

Did you ever use an “aggie?” Or play “dropsies?” Or have a sack full of “immies?”

To those who don't remember knee pants, or who never had the humiliation of having to wear knickers to school when all the other kids were wearing cowboy pants and boots, these terms all refer to the wonderful institution known as Marbles. Marbles was played by four or five boys kneeling around a crude circle drawn in the sand behind the elementary school. In the center there were a lot of marbles — “immies.” The skill of a marbles shooter was determined by the number of marbles he could shoot out of the circle, using his favorite “aggie” as his shooter. Those he knocked out of the circle he could keep.

The aggie was larger than the immie and more colorful. Held between the thumb and forefinger by a freckle-faced boy who kneeled in the sand with one eye closed and his tongue between his lips, it was used to knock the immies out of the circle.

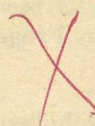
The aggie in a boy's collection was his prized possession. Like a putter in the bag of Arnold Palmer.

There were opaque cat's-eye aggies, translucent aggies, and solid glass aggies known as “clearies.” The Marbles King of the school always had several aggies in his little draw-string bag. One of them, usually the biggest and heaviest, (call “bummies”) was used for the first throw to determine who got the first shot. The others were used on special days of the week. Some kids could win as many as 30 marbles a week, playing during recess and after school.

I never was any good at sand-shooting. I did my best at home on my mother's front room carpet where I would make a circle out of sewing thread. I learned to master that rug like Palmer or Player masters a green. Kids coming into our living room with a bag of marbles always left empty-handed.

Then a new fad hit the school. Dropsies. Dropsies was another marble game, only instead of being played by kids kneeling around a circle, it was played by cutting a small round hole in the top of a cigar box. Then a kid would challenge other kids to see who could drop marbles into the box. Those that missed belonged to the box holder.

Marbles had to be held waist high and the box placed



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between the feet of the dropper. Some kids were so dead-eye that they could fill their box in one day and were as feared as the hired gunman at the OK corral.

An alternate to dropping was to cut a marble-sized hole in one end of the box. Then the contest was to draw a line in the sand and “shoot” them in. The same basic rules applied as to the hole on top.

Kidds don't play marbles any more. They prefer switch-blades. Of course, marbles were popular in an era when the only knives brought to school were used to play mumblety-peg. (But that's an entirely different subject).

I got wiped out playing dropsies. A third grade kid named Pee-Wee, who only had to drop his marble half as far as I, became the school champion. I still remember the pain of losing all my immies and putting everything I had on my last lucky cat's-eye aggie, only to see it roll off the side of Pee-Wee's box.

That childhood trauma left its visible mark. Just the other day I happened to overhear a man talking about me to an associate, saying, “There goes a guy who has lost his marbles.”