

The Long Commute Home

Wanna Buy a Popsicle?

When we were youngsters, my Dad had another one of his 'brainstorms'. Just to fill you in, Dad's brainstorms, usually meant that money was made by his troops being put to work.

Dad purchased numerous boxes of popsicles at wholesale prices. It was the job of Marty, Neil, Chris and me (and in later years, Michael and Maura would be 'drafted'), to sell those dam popsicles, while on our summer break from school. Styrofoam coolers were bought to carry the product. The coolers were packed to the brim with popsicles and then ice to keep the popsicles frozen as long as possible.

We were to lug those coolers along the beach and sell those dam popsicles. We set out in groups of two, one person on each side of the cooler. Two of us would be dropped off on the beach, at the entrance to the Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island, and we were supposed to work our way home to 49th street. The other two would set out by walking up the beach, at the top of 49th street, and work their way around the Point, and then walk back home via the road. This would cover the most densely populated areas of beach goers.

Do I need to even mention here that my brothers and I hated this job with a passion? I don't think there is anything else in my life that was as bad as selling those dam popsicles. The coolers were cheaply made and packed too heavy. They always broke before we made it home; and we were left to jury-rig our handgrips in order to keep from dragging the dam things along the sand. The sand was hot as hell and we had to wear shoes and socks. Do you know how drudging it is to walk in soft sand with shoes and socks on? All of our friends were in swimming in the ocean, nice and cool and enjoying their summer vacations while we were being put through boot camp!

My father's rule was that we could come home either by walking the entire respective, popsicle route or by selling out of popsicles. Now, in those days, there weren't stores nearby for the beach goers to buy a cold drink at. So people actually used to look forward to the Hickey kids showing up with their ice-cold popsicles. We sold the popsicles for just 15 cents and many people tipped us for our troubles. Popsicles, it turned out were just the right thing to quench a thirst on a hot summer's day.

We were supposed to lug those dammed, heavy coolers from towel to towel, asking people if they wanted to buy a popsicle. Now the actual phrase that we began with was, 'Do you want to buy a popsicle?' After 50 or so beach towels, it became, "Wanna buy a popsicle?" It is a saying that sends chills up my spine to this day!

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Well, me being me, and knowing my father's rule about when we could return home from this 'mission', I had a brainstorm of my own. I talked my older brother Christopher into eating as many popsicles as we got tips for. That way, we would be done a hell of a lot sooner and we would still be able to account for all the money! To me I had hit the jackpot of ideas! As long as we accounted for the money as we were supposed to...as if we had never received a tip that is...we had it made.

My stroke of genius was soon flushed down the toilet though, on the day my father was home from work. We walked in the door, exclaimed we were done for the day; all sold out. My father's reply was, "That's terrific; come on, load up again and I'll drop you off where you sold out of popsicles." You have no idea how quickly I wanted to get a 'real' job!

In all fairness to my father, the money that we made by selling popsicles took the younger 6 kids, who were living at home at the time, to every amusement park in the area. In looking back, we were taken to many more places than our friends; we were kept busy and out of trouble as well....thanks to Dad's brainstorm and those dam popsicles!

In later years, I was to learn that the popsicle was actually invented the year my father was born....how appropriate!