

DUST

THE MAIL



In rural America of the 1940s, the whole world was nailed to a post just up the road, and on that post was the mailbox, where you could find many good things, garden seed, catalogs, letters from family and friends, some you didn't even know except by their letters, sometimes they wrote about family Mother hadn't even seen.

It was always special when something was on order. R.E. and I would go to the mail box every day from the time it was ordered until it finally arrived. Sometimes it was Dad's tomato seeds, or Mother's new thinner and sharper quilting needles, or sometimes it would be a yard or two of a very special material. One Saturday evening when Dad and Mother bought groceries Mother picked up a new type of breakfast cereal called Pep. The next Monday morning when R.E. and I decided to try the cereal we were surprised it was real good! About half way through eating his bowl of Pep, R.E. started looking inside the box and shake it from side to side.

What are you doing that for?

On the box it says that there is a free magic arrowhead inside.

Did you find it? I ask jumping up on my chair to look inside the box.

No, I can't see it anywhere. Bring me a big bowl.

DUST

I ran over to the cupboard and climbed upon the old highchair retrieving the largest bowl I could find returning it to the table where R.E. was anxiously waiting. Taking the bowl he poured all the cereal into the bowl, four hands converged into the center of the serving bowl searching fervently for the free prize. Cereal swirled around spilling out onto the table.

"What are you boys doing?" Mother ask, as she came in from the cistern porch with a fresh bucket of drinking water.

We are looking for an arrowhead in this bowl of cereal.

"What arrowhead?" Mother ask, as she picked up the empty cereal box.

"That one right there on the box!" R.E. shouted, pointing at the pictures with the big word FREE!

R.E. what it reads is that the arrowhead is free, but you have to mail this box top to the Pep cereal company [Kellogg's] with a dime for shipping and handling, in return they will mail you the arrowhead.

Can we mail it in with a dime?

I want one too!

I don't have two extra dimes and you boys don't have two box tops. Now put the cereal back in the box.

R.E. started replacing the contents of the box looking at me with that IDEA look in his eyes and that silly grin across his face that denoted genius in thought, carefully tearing the box top off he slid down from his chair walking toward the bedrooms while I followed wondering what trouble he was going to drag me into this time. Once in the bedroom he pulled out the cigar box where he kept all of his marbles placing the precious Pep box top inside pushing them back into the cardboard wardrobe Dad had bought because during the war you couldn't buy wood or metal furniture since all the strategic materials were assigned to the war effort.

Gary, we're going to have to go back and eat that whole box of cereal so we can talk Mother into buying another box of that cereal next week if we want another box top.

Saturday night Mother bought another box of Pep cereal after R.E. and I followed her around Guy Brown's Grocery nervously waiting for her to push the grocery cart to the small cereal section at the back of the store on the last isle. Then cautiously pointing out just what kind of cereal it was that we wanted.

"Gary, we tricked her into it and she never even guessed!" R.E. said, walking up the sidewalk toward the picture show satisfied with his wizardry.

DUST

(I could enjoy having a smart brother if he just didn't act so smart about being so smart. Sometimes that really unscrews my lid!)

With two box tops in the special cigar box, all we had to do was come up with two dimes and a three cent stamp, then we could order those secret arrowheads with the magnifying glass, compass, secret compartment, and smooth drilled hole in the wide end to place a string through so you could hang it around your neck.

After spending Saturday night at Pa and Ma's where I emptied Pa's spit can for him and R.E. helped Ma wash the dishes, we had the two dimes, we could mail off to the Pep cereal company for our magic arrowheads.

Mother took time out from her busy day to help R.E. fill out the order with the proper return address placing one of her precious three cent stamps on the envelope for us. (Boy! R.E. can sweet talk her out of about anything. I just hope it doesn't backfire or I'm bound to be in trouble.)

Walking up the hill to the mail box with swift steps and anticipation we were ready to place all of our worldly possessions on the line for those magic arrowheads at the Pep cereal company so far away.

For the next two weeks we waited next to the mailbox post every morning waiting for Mr. Horton to deliver the mail in hopes that today he will bring our order. Each morning he would hand us the mail saying, "Not today boys, sorry."

One morning after R.E. and I had tromped all the weeds and grass down for several feet around the mail box post, Mr. Horton drove up to where we were standing with a big smile on his face.

Boys I think I have something for you, that is, if you two are the Hooper boys?

Yes! Yes! Both of us!

Well, do you have any identification on you?

My heart sank right through the bottom of my feet, he had my magic arrowhead and I couldn't even prove that I was me!

"Well I, uh, we uh, no." R.E. said, dejected.

Mr. Horton laughed, handing the package out the window saying, "You look like good boys, so I guess that I can trust you."

The arrowheads had finally came just as I was trying to convince R.E. that someone at the Pep company had stolen our dimes and box tops.

Those arrowheads were never as good as the memory of R.E. and I being together waiting for them to arrive and the smile on Mr. Horton's face as he drove away in a cloud of dust.

DUST