



Source: Paul Martin, 'Oh, the power and the passion—and the pique', *Newsday in Sydney Morning Herald online*, 28/01/06.

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I recently drove to a town that I once called home. We moved south of the city for Dad's work and spent 3 years in a fairly large town on the coast where I learned the art of making dams in the creek that ran close to the house, dabbled with the possibility of becoming a Catholic because my best friend Kathleen Newman was one, and where I fell heavily and deeply in love with Milton Robinson. Great milestones and achievements one might say, but as I drove down the once familiar streets, I found myself yearning for the freedoms of childhood.

I remembered the autonomy we had, to walk the streets for hours, play in sand dunes together building forts and hiding holes, visit houses of people we barely knew but who had the only television in my part of town, just to watch the speckled screen with a test pattern when nothing was being broadcast. The freedom of oft mentioned habits of Australians, that of leaving the back or even front doors open while you visited next door was part and parcel of living in a country town where everyone knew each other and where everyone looked after each other, or so it seemed. The freedom of children going to the Saturday matinee on their own was part of growing up and at aged eight, I was allowed to walk to the pictures on Saturday and was given six pence to buy my intermission sweet.

The picture theatre was an enormous cavern with a stage inside and was about one mile from my home. Right next door there was an outdoor walk-in picture theatre with slung seating. As a family, we often went to the pictures and in summer, there was nothing nicer than sitting outside, watching a film under the stars and perhaps falling asleep in the canvas seats. Being outside made it even more romantic and exciting. The Saturday matinee however, had its own drawbacks; the serials, the cartoons and the entertainment at interval.

There was a ritual of where you sat, with whom you sat and then at interval, what lolly you would buy with the six pence spending money you had. The rush to the foyer counter to buy the sweet of choice was frantic and decisions about what you would buy were often determined well ahead of time; habit and experience determining the outcome. My preference was for the liquorice Choo Choo Bar. The main reason for choosing it and not the chocolate-coated White Knight, was that I could make the Choo Choo Bar last so much longer. In my hands I would warm the hard, newly purchased confectionary delight, sometimes gripping it too long and firmly during the spine-tingling serial or feature, and thereby causing the liquorice to soften too quickly. I learned early on that temperature was all important in being able to keep the bar going. I lovingly licked and moulded the liquorice bar to such a fine thinness, often having dribbles of blue black stickiness smeared on my

face and chin and certainly all through my fingers and hands. This was only evident on emerging into the sunlight or when being confronted by the wet flannel when I walked in the back door at home. That was all part of the ritual; how to create the longest, thinnest and most malleable piece of confectionary so that on the walk home, you could fold the remains of the once-tough liquorice strip into a shape that could be placed in your mouth and then chewed and savoured all the way home. Too bad if your lips and mouth were black/blue, too bad if your hands were a bit sticky, the sweet success of longevity was what had been achieved.

This one time I had managed to maintain the Choo Choo Bar all the way through the second half of the matinee, not that I can remember exactly what was showing but I remember the walk home. I was well away from the picture theatre and was heading down the street which led to my home, in a round about sort of fashion and I had the remains of the Choo Choo Bar ready to fold and pop in my mouth. It was like a toffee, all soft but still firm, just perfect. This time, I placed it in my mouth and I still had a good half mile to walk but I decided to not stretch the pleasure out for the distance and began chewing.

I had almost reached the half-way point, marked by the shop that sold everything from groceries to wool and knitting patterns, pet products and garden supplies, when I was distracted momentarily from my pleasure of sweet liquorice and went over to the window of the shop. I must have stopped chewing, as I changed my concentration from one of oral pleasure to one of visual intrigue. The windows were reliably a cornucopia of stuff filling the display shelves, cascading down the edges and tumbling into the bottom edge of the window. This was where I had bought the scrap book in which to stick the individual cards that explained the dog world to me. Every dog in the world was illustrated on these collected cards and I had them smartly laid out in the scrap book, neatly covered and illustrated with my own drawings of favourites. This was an important emporium.

Dragging myself away from the shop and heading homeward again, I realised my teeth had stuck together with the well-masticated Choo Choo Bar forming the glue. I forced my jaws apart with my juvenile strength to suddenly wince with pain and shock. I realised that I had pulled out one of my teeth now firmly embedded in the liquorice goo. I spat out the remains of the Choo Choo Bar and there was the whole tooth, roots and all, sticking out of the blue/black mass. My probing tongue confirmed the extraction.

I still do not chew toffees.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.*