

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Days of Nickel Drinks....
Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury
Column #1,137 for Release Week of March 30, 2025 or Later

I might never have resented my brother if he'd have been born other than in 1944, when Grapette was getting a foothold in our town.

I had enjoyed "only child" perks for seven years, and in first grade observed that my "well-to-do" classmates brought squatty bottles of a purply soda to chase down their ham-and-cheese sandwiches made with real "light bread." My first brush with Grapette.

Admittedly, I was envious, because my lunch pail usually contained a floppity fried egg encased in a holdover breakfast biscuit. On special days, I welcomed the variation of pimientto cheese. My thermos bottle held Kool-Aid, so watered down that it was hard to distinguish between grape and strawberry. The "Grapette kids" might have enjoyed thermoses, too, but that would have precluded "bottle bragging."

Anyways, on a Saturday morning shopping trip into town for groceries, I tagged along. Displayed in the shadows of well-known 12-ounce brands were several cases of Grapette. Clueless that it was available locally, I had assumed Grapette was imported from Paris or maybe ordered from Neiman-Marcus.

As if to reward my above-average marks in Miss Evrage's first-grade class, Mom bought a six-bottle carton of the six-ounce extravagance. I was euphoric, eager to open my very first bottle. I drank it slowly--this wonderful beverage that made Kool-Aid (called "polypop" at the time) taste like swamp water. Grapette had to be the refreshment of angels.

I never wanted Kool-Aid again, even though Mom started making it stronger. Once I overheard her bragging about "Vacation Bible School" Kool-Aid. "The directions call for one packet in two quarts of water," she prattled. "But at VBS, it makes a gallon."...

What, you may reasonably inquire, does this have to do with sibling resentment? Since you asked--or even if you didn't--already meager budgets tighten with the arrival of a second child. When Fred became a two-year-old, he was rewarded with a sip--just a sip, mind you--of MY Grapette.

I could see it in his eyes; I could hear it from “lip smacks” louder than fights over prize finds at an Easter egg hunt. He, too, was hooked, but the resentment thing didn’t start until our next visit to Piggly-Wiggly....

Racing to the drink aisle, I grabbed a carton of Grapette.

“Put that back, Son,” Mom voiced in a tone not to be considered jocular. “From now on, we’ll buy Pepsi-Cola. Bottles can be shared so each of you will still have six ounces of soda.”

It’s probable that I snarled. I had hoped Mom hadn’t heard the radio commercial: “Pepsi-Cola, hits the spot, 12-ounce bottle, that’s a lot, twice as much for a nickel, too; Pepsi-Cola is the drink for you.” She’d heard it, alright, even humming the jingle when we passed the Post Toasties. “Don’t even think about that fancy cereal,” she said, apologetically, “You’ll have to make do with biscuits, eggs, sausage and gravy,”

Grapette never had massive advertising campaigns, but I do remember its big splash on billboards. (Pun intended.)

Maybe if they’d taken a page from the Budweiser ad book they could have capitalized on thinking “inside the box.” Instead of big wagons powered by handsome Clydesdales, they might have used a quartet of goats pulling a little red wagon.

Those “nickel drinks” of the 1940s now cost three or four dollars in restaurants, so look for a Kool-Aid come back. Fearing backlash when soft drink prices went from a nickel to six cents in the 1950s, some restaurateurs kidded about it. Some had signs reading, “Our Drinks Are All Sick Scents.” Another said, “We Don’t Know Where Mom Is, But We Got Pop On Ice.”...

PepsiCo, pushing healthier beverages, recently purchased Poppi--a prebiotic soda company--for the whopping sum of \$1.95 billion.

As to the resentment thing, I finally accepted “soda-sharing” with my brother, Dr. Fred Newbury, a distinguished economics professor still dispensing knowledge after 53 years at Dallas College’s Richland Campus.

A textbook author, he can buy as much Grapette as he chooses....

*Dr. Newbury, a speaker in the Metroplex,
may be reached at 817-447-3872,
email:newbury@speakerdoc.com.
Audio version of column at www.speakerdoc.com.*