

THE GREAT SCAVENGER HUNT

Seek, and ye shall find.

--Matthew 7:7

The goal: to see the latest feature film at the Rialto Theater.

The problem: no money.

The solution: get quick cash by searching for that most liquid of all commodities, empty pop bottles, and returning them to stores for a refund of the buyer's deposit.

The driving principle: money can't buy happiness, but it can get you into the Rialto, which is basically the same thing.

The details:

Renovo parents didn't fund their kids' every whim. For instance, if it was a Friday and you wanted to see the Saturday matinee and you had already blown your weekly allowance (that is, if you were one of the fortunate few to get an allowance) on candy and a comic book, you were obliged to scrounge enough moolah to pay your own way into the Rialto Theater.

Resourceful Renovo kids in a pinch often resorted to the time-honored solution of hunting for discarded empty soda bottles and converting them to cash by returning them to stores for a refund of the deposit (2 cents for each small bottle and 5 cents for each large one).

Now, finding enough empty pop bottles to pay for an afternoon at the Rialto was a formidable task--not only because you were beating the bushes for a scarce resource but also because you were in competition with every other kid who was looking for movie money.

The first step was to check with relatives who lived in town--if you'd had the foresight to ask them to save empties for you. Then came the foraging. You rummaged through people's garbage. You scoured alleyways, picnic areas, the sides of highways, the riverbank, the waiting room and the grounds of the railroad station, underneath bleachers at baseball and football fields--any place that people were apt to discard bottles.

Next, you washed the bottles to make them look as if they had been in your home since the soda was consumed, and then you cashed them in at the appropriate stores. "Appropriate" here means that you had to know which merchant sold which brands of soft drink. See, the kind of thing you definitely didn't want to hear when you walked in with your haul of bottles was "Don't be bringing those Hires Root Beer bottles in here--I don't sell Hires." Therefore, sophisticated scavenger hunters would keep tabs on the current soft-drink offerings of the YMCA, A&P market, Weis market, Ryan's pool hall, Bratz's dairy store, Curran's confectionery, Harger's variety store, Hevner's newsstand, Gullborg's grocery store, and Malizia's and McGowan's mini-markets.

Needless to say, if you scraped together enough to gain admission to the Rialto to see, for instance, the movie Shane (plus a Looney Tunes cartoon, a Three Stooges short, and, of course, the all-important "Previews of Coming Attractions"), you were thrilled no end. And if you also were able to cover the cost of a bag of popcorn, a cherry Coke, and a box of Milk Duds or Junior Mints, well, it just didn't get any better than that.