THE SQUIRREL CAGE

By Douglass Welch

A good day to you all, and particularly to grandparents who try hard to bridge the years between themselves and their grandchildren, but don't quite make it.

I want to tell you about this children's game I saw in an old-fashioned school primer. It sounded great to me and I could hardly wait for the next time my daughter and daughter-in-law left their monsters—good heavens, what am I saying? — their wonderful children with me to babysit.

The game is called "A Ride in the Cars" and it's like where you pretend you are riding a train. The primer said: "Arrange chairs like a train of cars, and have one chair with a table or desk for a ticket-office. Let the children make tickets and sell them to one another for passage on the 'train.'"

"Why, Great Scott," I cried out to myself, "this will keep the little beggars busy for hours!"

There was some dialogue in this primer, too. I am going to quote it in its entirety because I think it is tremendous.

Donald — Do you wish to ride in my cars?

Evelyn — Yes, thank you. I wish to ride in your cars.

Revealing

These two lines tell us an astonishing amount about the characters of Donald and Evelyn. First, Donald has created a "train" of chairs. He's imaginative, obviously, and he is equally open-handed. He invites Evelyn to ride in his train, and his invitation is without guile or artifice of any kind. He doesn't say 'Evelyn, you may ride in my train if you give me a dollar or a kiss.' He doesn't even say she will require a ticket. I think his basic generosity and good nature comes through clearly.

As for Evelyn, we know at once that she is proper, polite and grateful and is already practiced in the social graces. She is also direct. She doesn't say: "Well . . . maybe . . ." She doesn't say "No, I am not going to ride in your train because you are the baddest boy in the whole class!" She quotes his own words right back to him, which is the highest compliment a woman can pay a man. "I wish to ride in your cars," she says simply, thus becoming an equal partner in his fantasy.

Tryout

My four grandchildren range in age from 2 to 9, and two are boys and two are girls, which meant I had a mixed passenger list. I tried to explain the game to them, and I said: "We are not only going to have some big fun riding a make-believe train but we are also going to learn some new words today." And my grandson Willie, 9, said: "I know a new word." And he told me a new word. He had heard it coming home from school, passing a construction job where a fellow on a pole had just dropped a ladle of hot solder on a fellow below.

The fellow below had spoken the word, and immediately all the rest of my grandchildren were saying it, and I will never be able to persuade their mothers that they didn't learn it from me.

So I said: "Now, Willie, you are the oldest. You can be the conductor." And he said: "I wanna look at television." And I said: "You'll do what I tell you to do. It won't hurt you to play on old-fashioned wholesome game." And he said: "Sheesh!"

There was trouble about the tickets, too. Mimi, 2, wanted to cut them out, but if you give her scissors she cuts the draperies. She expressed her displeasure and disappointment in the most effective way she knows and the ride had to be delayed until I changed her. Actually she has outgrown diapers but when people leave kids with me I don't mess around with training pants.

Well, we got nowhere. Not once did anyone say "Do you wish to ride in my cars?" or "Yes, thank you. I wish to ride in your cars." The game got nowhere until I let them shoot Indians, and the only way I could keep my conductor was to promise him a dollar which I suppose he spent on marijuana at school the next day.

So when Green Eyes and my daughter and daughter-in-law came back from some riotous living at a ladies' tea, the three youngest children told them the new word they learned, and all I could say was: "We took a train ride this afternoon through some pretty rough country."

ADOPTIONS

HOUSTON (UPI)—The director of the Catholic Family and Children Service says it is rare in Houston for a couple to have to wait longer than a year to adopt a child.

Director Paul Waldner says Harris County residents adopted approximately 1,000 children in 1964—not counting those adoptions of stepchildren or other children already in homes where no placement was required. There have been cases in the county in which a couple adopted as many as six children, Waldner says.

White House Taps Averell Harriman For Top-Level Troubleshooter

WASHINGTON (UPI)—W. Averell Harriman, back at his old job as ambassador at large, will have less voice in day-to-day diplomacy but will be on tap as a top-level troubleshooter.

The White House says that Harriman will carry "quite a high rank in the post" and will be involved in top assignments both in the State Department and abroad.

He will work directly under President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk in the roving ambassador's job.

Harriman moved to the post Friday from the position of undersecretary of state for political affairs in a reshuffle of State Department personnel.

The staff changes also involved Thomas C. Mann, who moved up to the vacancy left by Harriman as the No. 3 man in the State Department. U.S. Ambassador to Panama Jack Hood Vaughn was named to fill Mann's place as assistant secretary for inter-American affairs.

The White House said the new appointments by President Johnson followed a request by the 73-year-old Harriman that he be relieved of the administrative burdens of his post, in which he was outranked only by Rusk and Undersecretary George W. Ball.

There had been persistent reports that Harriman, a tireless and respected diplomatic warhorse for three presidents and a one-time Democratic governor of New York, would be replaced by a younger and more vigorous man and one possibly more attuned to Rusk's methods.

These reports were vigorously denied officially. But in any case Harriman's voice will not be as in many State Department activities although he will remain available for whatever special assignments Johnson may see fit to give him.

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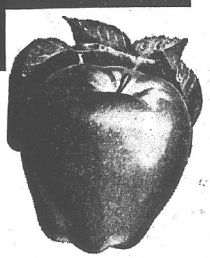

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