

Marbles?©

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee Florida – January 27, 2021

From the perspective of my soon-to-be 77th birthday, I often wonder if some of today's "sundry variety" of people amongst us have "totally lost their marbles" and are not "playing with a full deck of cards", as related to overly complicating their current lifestyles and events!? This I think is a very valid and important question; well, never mind, this article is about the glass marbles of yesterday, when things were so very-much-less complicated!

To begin with, the marbles to which I refer, are those that I and my male classmates as youngsters truly treasured and were readily available at our northwest-Iowa's F. W. Woolworth store in the small town of Estherville. As I recall, this "five-and-dime store" had glass marbles in different-sizes and colors that were available in various-sized bags at very low costs; in fact, I remember that some bags of marbles could be purchased for only 25 cents or less.

I and many of my young friends at the time actually loved our marbles so much that we collected them in all sizes and colors. At one time my collection probably numbered 200 or more marbles, all safely kept in a cigar box. My personal favorite marbles were known as "purees" that were mostly clear, but with a blotch of color inside. I believe the larger sized marbles in everyone's collections were simply called "boulders" and the smallest of the lot were called "pee wees".



A Typical Collection of Marbles

There are a variety of Wikipedia sites about marbles, but none of these sites address the points that I want to make in this article. One such Wikipedia site is:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marble_\(toy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marble_(toy))

I believe that all of my “mental marbles” remain intact because my memories of the glass types of marbles go back to the year (1951) when I was aged 7 in second grade at McKinley School in Estherville. Although I still remember the names of my teacher and my classmates there, it is not my intent to list their names in this article. Instead, I want to address the serious aspects related to the game of marbles that we young boys played most mornings before we were all beckoned inside the school after a teacher pulled the rope on a mechanical call-to-class bell.

Many of us young guys actually arrived early in the school playground – just so we could have a “game of marbles”. So to begin with, we brought our bag of marbles and, within each person’s bag, there was a specially-selected marble that they considered to be their shooter”. So then, to begin the game, a 16-20-inch diameter ring was drawn in the dirt. (There were no exact specs for the size of the ring.) Next, each player in the game threw at least 5 marbles into the ring. Finally, each player placed a marble in his hand near the edge of the ring and with a flick of his thumb and forefinger began to fire away at the marbles in the ring. Each marble knocked out of the ring was the shooter’s prize to keep and as long as the shooter kept knocking marbles out of the ring, he continued. Otherwise it was the next player’s turn. At the end of each game before being called to class, the person (shooter) who had won the most marbles was considered to be the champion. There was never ever any ill-will nor animosity amongst us marble players. Quite the contrary; whomever of our classmates ended up with the fattest bag of marbles was accepted by all to be the champion!

In some not-that-much-later years, the Estherville Parks and Recreation team arranged a yearly marble championship. I’m not sure about my classmates but I never competed in these events. For one thing the ring was a much-larger set diameter meaning that powerful shooters were required to “blast” marbles out of the ring.

Hey, given today’s generally-mostly-askew state of affairs in our country (at least in my opinion), it’s hard to believe that anyone could ever derive the simplest of pleasures by playing a game of MARBLES, but we did just that! (And, our beautiful young girl classmates spent hours playing “HOPSCOTCH” and loved every minute of it!)

