

Revere Beach Incident

By Daniel Gewertz

People ask me why I don't gamble. It think it goes back to a visit to Revere Beach in the summer of '72. The amusement park by then was just a tawdry strip of fried food stands and games of chance. I was attracted by a ball throw game. "Three throws for a dollar. Win big prizes!" The attendant had a narrow, pockmarked face topped by a helmet of greasy hair.

In my first try, I won a stuffed bunny, which was small and unattractively rodent-like.

"That's amazing!" The attendant sounded enthused. "You got the hardest target right off the bat. You can take the bunny, or with just two more good ones knocked down, you could win a portable TV set."

I didn't occur to me to question what 'good ones' meant. All I thought was: My college dorm room could use a TV! I started to toss the balls at various targets, but I never seemed to hit the right ones.

"Good news. All you need now is two more good ones to win the TV and a stereo phonograph."

I already had a record player, but for once in my life I seemed to be on a lucky streak. I kept on throwing balls, three for a dollar. But the few targets I hit always ended up to be 'the wrong ones.'

"Good news, kid. Because of all the low-score targets you knocked down already, all you need is one more good one for the TV, the stereo, and an electric toaster oven. Deluxe model."

I had no need for a toaster oven, but by this time I was down too far to quit.

It never occurred to me that the game was rigged. As if I were in a spell, I just took more and more tosses. I was getting closer and closer to more and bigger prizes. But I also felt I was sinking.

Soon, I got down to my last dollar. My final three tosses were wild.

I stared into my empty wallet as if my money might magically reappear. I had spent \$20 in 9 minutes. Now put that in perspective. That summer, I was working as a shipping clerk in a maternity dress company for \$1.85 an hour. I didn't need a TV or stereo. I didn't even want a toaster-oven. I had nothing to show for my \$20 -- not even a mangy little bunny. Some lucky streak. The ball-throw guy was a con-man. And I was a chump, a dupe, a sucker. I had learned a life lesson: there were some real crooks in this world, and I couldn't afford to be an easy mark.

But there was one more thing I learned at Revere Beach in the summer of '72. I learned that kindness can come from strange places and even a con-man can have a code of ethics.

The attendant looked at me with something approaching pity. "Do you have enough dough to get home, kid?"

"No."

"Alright, here's a dollar. Now scoot, kid."

I did. And I've rarely gambled since.