

Five Classic Toys of Our Youth

Ah, the days of youth, how quickly they flew away. They were the days that we spent hours of fun enjoying our toys of choice to the fullest. Here are five classic toys members of REO loved in the days gone by.

Slip'N Slide



South Carolina is insanely humid in the summers and while I was blessed to have a local public pool to go to and regular beach trips, some days you just wanted something cheap and convenient to help keep you cool (when you weren't working out in the field, that is). If whatever this was also happened to be fun, then you had done the impossible.

Enter Wham-O's Slip'N Slide, a marvel of an invention that millions of kids all over the US have enjoyed for decades now. The set up is so simple: water, a garden hose and a thin sheet of plastic a few yards long. Yet it felt like you had your own water park in your own backyard. Hours and hours of fun were to be had, changing up the way you slid and watching and cheering on others and they did the same. The very name conjures up images and memories that bring nothing but the joy of youthful innocence to this middle-aged heart. (Gowdy Cannon)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles



I'm still not sure exactly how much of my childhood fascination with the Ninja Turtles was fueled by how much I actually liked the show. I tried to go back and watch some of the original cartoons a few years back, and it hadn't held up in my mind exactly like I remembered it. The hype at the time, though, was real. And the toys that I played with gave an added physical dimension to the cartoon. One where I created my own stories and added to the lore that was already there.

My favorite toy of them all was the 1989 pizza thrower tank/van. You inserted little plastic pizzas into the top slot, and then a big grey button on the side would launch a pie right out the front, knocking down whatever toy was in its path. The poor foot soldier figurine that I had took regular pizzas to the face, only to be then pummeled constantly by the turtles and friends. Shredder usually put up a better fight, if I recall correctly. I would string zip lines up around my bedroom and have them slide down and crash into the enemies below.

For a kid my age, they were spot on. The toys articulated enough to show lots of expression. They came in tandem with a show that was marketed directly toward my demographic, and

they were bigger and bulkier than the G.I. Joes...but in a good way. I probably earned half of my collection by not crying when I had to get a shot at the doctor. My mom always promised me a new toy if I was tough. And for a brand new ninja turtle? Not a speck of moisture would dare pool up in the corner of my eye. (D. A. Speer)

Transformers



It's cool that the Transformer toys have come to the new generation. It really is. But the new vision has yet to become the bulwark of awesome that is the 80s transformers toys. Although I ever only owned one. It was Jazz – the greatest toy I've ever owned. Took me about two months to perfect the transforming process though.

I largely enjoyed every other Transformer toy through my friends. At my elementary school, Transformer toys were huge. Classmates were constantly bringing their newest robots in disguise to school to show the masses. If I was lucky one friend, in particular, would invite me over for a slumber party where we could play with his armies of Autobots and Decepticons all night long. My favorites of my classmate's toys included Optimus Prime, Megatron, Sound Wave, and all of the Dinobots.

It may be me just glorifying them in my mind, but the T-toys

of that era seemed so much cooler, more durable, and way more complex than the cheap stuff you see at the store now.

I also loved the cartoon, but somehow in my mind, I was able to keep the two separate. That is, I would have liked both just as much if the other never existed. But if I was forced to choose one, it would have been the toys. Truly, my friends, they were worth more than all the gold in Erebor. (Ben Plunkett)

LEGO



I grew up in Panama. The country. Not the city in Florida. Naturally, things were different for me as a child than for someone who grew up in the United States. With that said, I had access to pretty much all the popular toys. My brothers and I played with G.I. Joe, Transformers, He-Man, and anything else we could get our hands on. And we got our hands on a lot of toys. I probably owned as many as 70 different G.I. Joe action figures at one time.

When I was in the third grade, we spent half the year near Asheville, North Carolina and the other half in St. Louis, Missouri for what was called furlough at that time. (The name has been changed to “stateside assignment” for missionaries because “furlough” sounds like a vacation.) While in St. Louis, I attended a Christian school. My classroom had the largest collection of LEGO bricks I have ever seen in one place – outside of a store. Inspired by years of watching cartoons like Voltron – where five robot lions join together to form the giant robot Voltron – I decided to create my own giant robot made out of smaller robots all constructed using LEGO bricks. I spent hours working on it – every recess, every break. Each robot had the same design, though some were bigger than others depending on what part of the body of the giant robot they were to become. It was glorious.

I never completed the giant LEGO robot. I arrived at school one day, with just a few more parts to finish, only to discover that all of my robots had been dismantled and placed back in the bin used to store the bricks. To this day, I have no idea who decided to destroy my work. Why had they waited until I was this close to finishing? Why did they hate all the good things? It left my third-grade spirit broken and miserable. It was okay though as I learned an important lesson that day: Bad things happen and when they do, the best way to deal with the sense of loss and disappointment is to go obliterate all competition on the dodgeball court. A nice dodgeball to your opponent’s face is a healing balm. And trust me when I say this, I healed so much that day in recess playing dodgeball. So much. (Phill Lytle)

BRIO Railway



From 1985-87 my family and I lived in the St. Louis, MO area (across the Mississippi River on the Illinois side), and one of our favorite things to do was visit Union Station. My favorite part of Union Station (besides eating chili dogs at the now non-existent O. T. Hodge Chile Parlor) was visiting the toy train store. I enjoyed watching the model trains running all around the store; but, most of all, I loved playing with the BRIO wooden train sets. My parents could've dropped me off there and left me all day, and I would never have noticed they were gone. I'm pretty sure they never actually did that...

When I was a kid, those wooden train sets were exotic; and, as far as I knew at least, only BRIO made them. Now, of course, they are very commonplace and affordable. Many children own their own train tables and multiple sets of tracks and trains. I, however, had only the trains at the train store in Union Station, which I had to share with strangers and only got to visit once a month or so. Until...

It was either Christmas of '86 or my birthday in early '87, I don't remember which, I was absolutely shocked to receive not one, but two BRIO train sets of my own. I'm not sure how my parents were able to do it, but it was probably my favorite present of all time. One set was a figure eight track with a small bridge and a small station with little wooden passengers waiting on the train. The other set was a larger bridge.

I have played with those trains for countless hours, possibly more than I've played with Legos, possibly more than I've played video games. I've cared for those train sets with much love. Even the original packaging lasted until just a few short years ago. Yes, I still have them, 31 years later. I've passed them on to my own children, adding on some cheap generic trains and tracks from Ikea and many, many trains from the Thomas the Tank Engine stories. All of the original pieces from my childhood are still there, surviving the many purges of moving. And, now, I think I must dust off the conductor's hat and go play... (Nathan Patton)

In the comment section below, tell us about your favorite childhood toys. And if you enjoyed reminiscing with us, feel free to share this article with your friends.