



## Monthly Musings

# Max's Hardware Store by Jane Bailey

Today, the day before Father's Day, I needed some paint, so I headed down to the local hardware store. It was closing time, so I literally ran into the store and asked where the spray paint was kept. The clerk quickly steered me in the right direction. I ran back through the stacks of lawn equipment, light bulbs, plungers, and the bins of screws and nails to grab my spray paint when I suddenly stopped and caught my breath. Not because I had been running, but because I was suddenly transported back 55 years or so to when I was a young child on Staten Island, far from the Connecticut town in which I stood.

Dad would periodically say "Hop in the car, we've got to pick something up at Max's." And off we'd go, a dozen blocks or so to a small storefront on Watchogue Road. We'd walk through the door and a tinkling bell would alert Max he had a customer. Dad would head right for whatever he needed, some nails, some tubes for the television that was on the fritz, or best of all, some paint. I would wander around Max's labyrinth of hardware which was packed into every square inch of that small store. There was barely room to walk the aisles, and the hardware was literally draped to the rafters. My small eyes would lift to the ceiling, amazed to see hoses and baskets, wires and coffee pots, everywhere I looked.

The smell of sawdust (or maybe just plain dust) permeated the air. The light was dim and the store was a cave of the most interesting stuff a child could imagine, though having no idea what any of it was for. Max knew it all; he may have been small in stature, but he had a head crammed with inventory. Dad would explain his

project and Max's mustache would twitch happily into a smile as he went running off to find just the widget or gadget Dad needed. And if by my lucky stars, Dad needed paint, I got the thrill of watching Max load the paint mixing machine—the gadget that shook, rattled & rolled the paint can until the paint was just right. That was the highlight of any trip to the hardware store.



It seemed like we always left the store with Dad whistling. He'd have his tv tubes or can of paint and I'd have had my trip with Dad. I knew then I had ahead the happy time of watching Dad do his project, making the tv work, changing the color of the wall, or fixing a broken door; making our world at home just a bit better or brighter. "Thanks Max" Dad would call, before the tinkling bell ushered us out.

As I caught myself in the reverie of Max's hardware store, I headed back to the checkout with my simple can of spray paint, sorry I didn't have a can to put on some shake-rattle-roll machine. I was glad though that some other child had a hardware store to go into that still sells individual nails and screws of all shapes and sizes and still has shelves laden with all types of widgets and gadgets. As I paid for my paint, I had to put my sunglasses on to hide my wet eyes. "Happy Father's Day," I said to the cashier, not even knowing if he was a father. It didn't matter; "Happy Father's Day" indeed Dad. You may not be here anymore, but I can still go into a hardware store and remember....and then go home and paint.

Jane Bailey is a retired educator who enjoys writing essays of the heart. See more at <http://janembailey.com/publications/>