

All-Weather Inner Tubes

By [Diane Webster](#) (March 2023)



Backyards, Greenwich Village, John Sloan, 1914

All Weather Inner Tubes

In the winter we'd carry them up the hill,
jump on them and speed downhill.

We found out the best way to ride inner tubes
was to grab the stem. This worked in two ways.
For one it helped you stay on the inner tube
and not fall off. Kind of like a handle.

For the second reason if you didn't find that stem

and landed on it or sat on it, it poked a good hurt on you.
Ow!

A small hill sloped in front of our house
between the main road and our driveway.

We tried riding tubes down it, but it was too short
and not enough drop to make it worthwhile.

We'd tie a rope onto the tube and pull each other
around the yard, but unless you were the one riding,
it wasn't much fun.

In the summer inner tubes turned into horses.

We'd tie a piece of string around the rubber
and use that as the horse's bridle.

The inner tube was doubled over and we rode the horse
by bouncing up and down and hopping around
as we galloped with each other in a posse or rodeo.
We'd get bucked off sometimes and roll around on the grass
until we caught our ride and off we'd go again.

We played ring toss. Someone would stand out in the lawn
and the rest of us would fling our inner tubes at him—
trying to build up enough inner tubes to completely cover him.
Yes, the guy being tossed at got hit in the face and gut,
arms, legs, but that was his job. When he was covered,
someone would run at the tower of inner tubes
and knock them and the guy inside down
where everything and everyone sprawled and rolled
across the yard. Next!

A time came when the inner tubes lost their air and flattened.
We could have tied a rope to it and tried to lasso each other
as we ran around the yard. Being horses ourselves and if
caught,

pulling and bucking and jumping for freedom all the while
holding the inner tube up around our waist so it wouldn't fall
down.

Sometimes we'd get the tire pump out and sweat over it
by taking turns trying to fill the flat with enough air,

but mostly we waited for Dad to get home.
He used his air compressor, and within minutes we'd be playing again.

Homemade Slide

My dad made us a slide out of scrap metal.
It was 20 feet tall. Okay, maybe from a kid's perspective it was 20 feet tall. Maybe 15, maybe 10. It was big!
The slide part was a continuous sheet of aluminum or a tougher metal than that. Let's call it thick aluminum.
It was hotter than hell in the summer so we kids had to make sure we pulled up our bare legs so they wouldn't get burned on the way down.
Somehow, we learned a great trick.
If we got sheets of waxed paper and rubbed them all over the slide part, we could go fast.
Better than jumping from the top step and vaulting onto the slide like a running start.
I mean fast! All of us would take a section of the slide and rub that waxed paper on metal.
Shorter kids near the bottom. Taller kids near the top.
Somebody maybe leaned from the top step and waxed the top section as best as he could.
We'd shoot down that slide!
But do you know what was even better?
We'd get it all slicked up, climb up the steps, and arrange a piece of waxed paper under our butts and push off! Swoosh! Down the slide we'd go!
Scrambling when our feet hit the dirt at the bottom not to sprawl head first on the ground.
Man! We were fast!

Close to Death

I joke that being seasick is the closest you can come to dying without dying, and it would be better if you did.

I suppose if this is the closest I've come to dying, I should be grateful. When I was about 15, my family booked a trip to Newport on the coast of Oregon. Once there one of the activities was a fishing trip on the ocean.

I was already hesitant about that; I get motion sick easily.

Back up fast in a car, and I'm sick.

Drive a curvy road too fast; I'm sick.

Funny. If I drive, I'm fine.

Maybe it's a control thing or my mind is busy driving and I have a grip on the steering wheel.

Anyway, a four-hour fishing trip on a small boat.

Before setting foot on the dock, Mom gave me Dramamine.

Yeah, right. We didn't get passed the breakers before I was sick.

Chumming the waters so everyone else could catch fish.

I sprawled on the edge of the boat,

my arms folded to rest my head on so when I had to,

I could throw up quickly into the ocean.

And the crew said it was a calm day that day. HA!

The onboard radio reported a whale in our area,

and I prayed, I hoped it would come alongside the boat

and open its mouth. I would see it gaping, and I would slide down

its tongue into its stomach, and that would end my misery.

This was before Jaws and before sharks were the rage.

I would have gladly given my life for the rest of the boat just to end the torture of being there.

I slept a little; sunburned one side of my face as I drooped on the boat side. "How long has it been now? Can we go home?"

Four hours. Four hours! It was days! Bobbing up and down. Up and down. "Watch the horizon and it won't be so bad." Yeah, right. Up and down. Up and down from my chair over the rail.

Barfing into the ocean. I saw the ocean all right. Up close and personal.

Didn't care if I fell overboard. Didn't care if I drowned. Didn't care if I died.

Finally, finally we docked. I staggered onto the pulsing dock mimicking ocean waves and heaved again. At the hotel room I dropped into bed and slept. Thank God it wasn't a water bed!

Haying Time

Grandpa grew hay for his dairy cows.

When it was time to gather the bales in the fields, my uncles and Dad helped. Grandpa had a wooden slip that he or Grandma dragged around with the tractor, and the men would load the bales of hay on it so it could be driven to the hay stacks. Once there, this four-pronged grabber thing would clamp onto four bales, lift them up high and swing over to the top of the haystack. Someone on the ground pulled the long rope which would release the bales to tumble on top of the stack. That was cool to watch, and we were told to stand back. We were little girls and didn't need to get in the way. I was impressed by the hay hooks stabbed into the bales so the guys could lift them from the field and put them on the slip. One time I sat on the empty slip with Ginger, the dog, and we were riding back to the farm. Either someone popped the clutch on the tractor or something like that, but the slip jumped forward and Ginger and I fell backward. I scraped my back enough to hurt bad.

Ginger and I didn't want to ride anymore.
I watched Grandpa gather hay bales by himself.
He shifted his pickup into low gear, left the driver's side door
open and let the pickup bump and jump across the field.
He'd grab the bales and throw them in the bed of the pickup.
Every once in a while, he'd have to reach into the cab
of the pickup and straighten out the wheel or turn the pickup
in the direction he wanted to go. I was pretty impressed.

Playing Army

I snatched Mom's aluminum colander from the kitchen,
grabbed my wooden rifle, threaded my belt that carried
my flashlight and buckled it tight around my waist.
I ran outside with my helmet/colander rattling around
my head, my flashlight beating against my leg,
and my wooden gun held in my hands ready to shoot
the enemy who lurked everywhere. The neighborhood
boys and I played Army. We hid behind cars and sprayed
the turf in front of us with machine gun fire. We hit the
dirt,
shot around bushes. We leaped into an abandoned car
we labeled our tank and cranked the steering wheel left
and right as we crashed over everything in our way.
I pushed and turned buttons and levers firing missiles,
bombs and arcs of fire. We rid the neighborhood
of enemy forces day after day.

The dirt on the road during summer powdered and puffed
into wonderful scrapings for Mom's colander
when the neighborhood girl and I planned on baking
mud pies and cakes. We sifted the dirt so fine like Mom
did flour when she made cakes. I loved how soft and fluffy

the dirt turned out and my friend baked cake layers in the sun.

Then she made frosting from stiff mud and let it bake in the sun.

It looked just like a tiny cake when dry! I made bricks or clunky molds

probably so I could use them as grenades when the boys and I got back to saving the neighborhood.

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Diane Webster's goal is to remain open to poetry ideas in everyday life, nature or an overheard phrase and to write. Diane enjoys the challenge of transforming images into words to fit her poems. Her work has appeared in *El Portal*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *New English Review*, and other literary magazines. She also had a micro-chap, *Between Journeys*, published by Origami Poetry Press in 2022.

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