



When Lucy first hung up her shingle, she charged five cents. The last time I saw Lucy at work, the cartoon noted that she had raised her advice to a quarter...yet her wisdom was still worth a million!

Ralph Finch reverts to his childhood

(And Janet Finch whispers: "He never left.")

By Ralph Finch

Oh, baby—there is so much infantile stuff to collect that garners adult interest. How about antique baby bottles, old dishes, bowls, Victorian cups imprinted with nursery rhymes or scenes of animals, or old quack cures for youngsters that caused more harm than health? (How about the 1885 “Cocaine Toothache Drops Instant Cure” showing images of children?)



COCAINE TRADE CARD. Cocaine for hurting kids? It's the tooth, says this 1880s Albany, N.Y., firm's ad.

But have you considered something more...wholesome? Something more...adult? How about antique bibs and aprons?

OK, *anyone who has ever visited the Finch Funhouse knows that we collect stuff. LOTS of stuff. Serious stuff, and...stuff beyond even our understanding.

The following admission almost makes sense. (If Charlie Brown's friend, Lucy, were here and I had a quarter, maybe she could help me explain it.)

In early March, I came across an auction offering of a circa 1870s child's bib. I went to bid, but...once again, I messed up, and the auction closed.

It was described as a “Rare child's bib illustrated with circus scenes and text: ‘A VISIT TO THE CIRCUS.’ Printed red and black decorations on light-colored cotton fabric, which is about 11 by 14 1/2 inches. A nice frameable size for display. Machine hemmed edges, light soiling, minor stain, edge wear/loose hem stitches at corners. Reserve: \$185.”

The item didn't sell, so Janet contacted the auction house and made an offer (and got our offer counter-offered). The apron is now ours for a mere \$199 (including all fees, shipping, etc.). \$199? It's a strange world; \$199 could feed a lot of babies.

But the 25-cent question, as Lucy might ask, is: “Why does an 82-year-old man want a child's apron?” (At this point, Janet would inject: “You need one when you eat,” and I would reply: “I'm vision impaired!” Jeeez.)

And this child's apron is now next to my other child's apron. I've had it for years, don't remember when or where I acquired it, but— when I look at it— I still remember the nice feeling I got when I saw it, and its sewn-on advice: “Eat Nicely.” I can imagine, a hundred-plus years ago, a loving mother putting it on her child and...hoping for the best.

I don't remember wearing a bib as an infant but maybe subconsciously, I do. Maybe I liked mushed peas. (I don't like mushy peas, but that's an English thing.)

I do still have my teddy bear from that period...and I have more hair on my body than the bear does, but maybe we can put the bear on the psychiatrist's couch and ask it why I like aprons. (The apron could go next to my 1940s toilet paper holder that, when used, plays *Whistle While You Work*.)

My new bib has a circus scene and could be better if it showed target ball shooting! The one at right is designed to attract every

little boy's dream. (Ask me to tell you about the time I ran away and joined the circus—it was for an article for the *Detroit News*).

Come on, confess what's in your childhood memories; share the history of what is under your chinny-chin-chin...or in your drawers that is...a bit odd. Tell me, and I'll spill the beans—or peas. Email me at rfinch@twmi.rr.com.

Editor's note: We enjoy collecting and sharing these stories hoping that you will enjoy them, too. And, found on the Internet: "The word "bib," reported in English since 1580, probably stems from the verb bibben "to drink" (c. 1380), from the Latin bibere, either because it was worn while drinking or because it "soaked up" spills. Also: "In 17th-century Europe, when men and women were invited to dinner at a nobleman's house, it was expected that they would take their own bibs to protect their clothing (dry cleaning was some years away)."

*And everyone is invited to visit the Finch Funhouse. (But bring your own bib; you can't use ours.)



[Above] The two new additions to the Finch trough of collections. The bib on the left probably stitches every young mother's wish. The bib on the right is designed to attract every little boy's dream.

The baby bottle is embossed RALPH'S NURSERS, and the sticker says it's from a Garth's (Ohio) auction and states: "Alberta Rodgers Patterson Collection." And in May 2002, the papers reported that Alberta Patterson of Slippery Rock, Pa., had died at the age of 90. She was a member of the Pittsburgh Early American Glass Club, the Opera Guild, and the D.A.R., among other groups, including the "State Polled Hereford Assn." (Huh? For you city folks, it's a fancy cow.)

Trade cards courtesy of Joe Gourd.



PROHIBITION TRADE CARD No. 2
Better than mother's milk? Cheers to a happy mom,
a contented child.



PROHIBITION TRADE CARD No. 3
"Against" drinking, or is it OK for toddlers
to drink?

