

Cowboys and Indians

Around the wild and wide-eyed age of 7, *Cowboys and Indians* was the game of choice for this little porch monkey. The best part was, like *Calvinball*, Cowboys and Indians had no rules! We made them up as we played. Still, Michael Cursner and I had one own version of the game we used to play religiously at his house, preferably with no one home. First, we'd set up all of the plastic 'good guys' and 'bad guys' in various offensive and defensive stances- lots of them! And everywhere! So many in fact that Michael's Mom could often be heard yelling, "Michael, why is there a damn Cowboy (or Indian) in the damn¹washing machine!

It was a constant challenge to find new hiding spots for our plastic heroes. I guess we crossed the line the day Mrs. Cursner was ambushed by a posse hiding out in her underwear drawer. She didn't see the funny in it, but boy did we laugh! Poor Mrs. Cursner couldn't even ground Michael to the house since it was more of a reward than a punishment where we lived. The streets of inner-city Philly (Philadelphia) weren't so inviting in those days and going out would sentence us to a lot of running from much bigger boys, who we guessed wanted to be scientists when they grew up since they were always "volunteering" us for their fun experiments like, 'How small of trashcan can we fit in' and 'How many punches in the same spot on the arm can we take before crying.' We weren't the warrior types.

Nope, we were too busy being Super-Smart Generals (much smarter than Real Generals of course) who could outthink, outmaneuver and outgun any enemy regardless of age, race, religion, or alien status. We'd even set up circles of covered wagons just like they did in the old western movies when the cowboys were surrounded by the Indians. Plastic men, horses and wagons were everywhere-- up and down the stairs, under the beds, on top of furniture and cabinets, hiding in plants and shoes, and even behind Michael's sister's Barbie dolls-- casualties of war we called them.

When it was time for the Really Big Battle to start, it wasn't Cowboys versus Indians. It was us versus them. So, we put on our half-pint cowboy hats and cheap plastic holsters (modeled after the kind the Duke, John Wayne, himself wore), then we loaded up our dart guns and crammed as many darts into as many pockets as we could. If we ran out of pockets then we shoved them down socks and pants. Michael liked to keep one or two hidden in his cowboy hat. "No dumb Indian would ever expect it," he used to snicker. My own secret stash, tucked under my belt and T-shirt, was an emergency stick of dynamite. Empty toilet-paper rolls had loads of possibilities, especially when

¹ Household location could and would change without warning

filled with shaving cream! Often, in the case of all-out warfare, even a close friend could turn on you and I wasn't taking any chances. I would be ready.

Let the Battle begin!

We jumped, ran, crawled and sneaked our way around the house dodging the hundreds (bazillions to a 7-year-old) of arrows and bullets that the small, but very deadly figures were shooting at us. One by one (sometimes a lucky shot would take out two) we'd shoot up all the Bad Guys and Stupid-Barbies-that-Must-Die until...well, until they were dead, or at least knocked over enough to look convincingly dead.

At last! Glory was ours! Or was it? Perhaps the thrill of victory over small inanimate plastic toys could only satisfy the blood-thirst of a 7-year-old for so long. And then *it* happened.

That sad day came. We were in the thick of a long, intense battle. At first, I didn't even realize I was hit. Inside all the chaos, I barely noticed the sharp sting of rubber on the back of my head. And then, I heard it. The sinister, heartless laugh came from behind me. To this day, it haunts my dreams, or when I'm eating a cream-filled Twinkie. As I turned around slowly, my worst nightmare had come true-- my own comrade and best friend had turned on me. I couldn't move, too stunned from the shock of what I had discovered and also, I was kind of stuck behind the sofa. Taking advantage of the situation my friend-turned-enemy unloaded two more shots, both straight into my chest. Finally, with the threat of imminent doom (or at least imminent humiliation) casting its beady eyes and peanut-butter grin my way, I took action.

With ²Spidey-like reflexes I launched myself from behind the sofa while unloading my last dart as cover-fire (I had no idea what this meant but it was cool enough for GI Joe). Speed-crawling across the floor, I barely managed to escape into the kitchen where, after replenishing myself on a handful of Juju Bees and Cheetos, I remembered my secret weapon. Almost instantly, an evil grin (similar to the one Joker or Skeletor used when they had the upper hand) rose from the very depths of my vengeful soul. It was soon followed by an almost equally evil laugh...MWAHA-HA-HA-HAAA! VICTORY WILL BE MINE!

Wasting little time (except to grab another handful of Cheetos), I pulled out the Shaving-Cream Dynamite (simply known as 'The SCD') and positioned myself behind the wall nearest to Michael, at that moment being addressed as Snot-head, Fart-knocker, Booger-mouth, or Poop-sicle. Properly insulting your

² Reflexes akin to those of the one-and-only Spiderman of course

enemy was not an option – it was an essential part of any game. So after tossing a few more insult-grenades to demoralize my enemy, I knew it was time. Heart racing and breath pumping, I performed my best Starsky-and-Hutch roll, stood up and lobbed The SCD right at Michael's head which was poking up from behind the loveseat. And then something magical happened...

Time itself (not those cheap impersonators) had slowed to a worm-like crawl as if to mark that day forever, or at least until I became a grown-up and stupid-grown-up things took control my brain. With mouth opened larger than head, I watched as the SCD landed squarely on Michael's forehead, split open, and released a shower of shaving-cream shrapnel. Michael was covered from hat to holster in the glorious white foam. And me, I was busy ROFLTNTCOJJB (rolling on the floor laughing, trying not to choke on a JuJu Bee). I was so lost in my own hysteria, I didn't see Michael run upstairs to retrieve his own SCD...well, minus the toilet paper roll since he went for the whole can! A giggling chase ensued, followed by more tossing of shaving cream, a few slightly-deformed Barbies, some throw pillows (gotta live up to their name right), one unsuspecting cat, and whatever else could be picked up and tossed while running through a house laughing like a hyena.

Eventually, we settled down enough to consider the mess we had made and the parents that would want to punish those who made it. After careful scrutiny, we decided that we couldn't blame the dog since chances were strong that Goober couldn't operate a can of shaving cream with his paws (don't think we didn't experiment!). Then we remembered Greg! A kid from school who used to come over to play until he lost too many WWF wrestling matches against Michael "The Wedgienator" and myself, "Elbow Slam". We understood. At age 7, there were only so many wedgies a boy could stand. And now, one-too-many wedgies would finally pay off, for Greg was our answer to total mayhem and half-shaven furniture. The perfect alibi! *insert evil laugh*

After the Really Big Battle was over and the fallen were buried inside their cardboard boxes, there was nothing left to do except raid the fridge and reward ourselves with any victory spoils we could find. As we slopped down Bologna sandwiches and Popsicles (not to be confused with Michael's in-battle nickname) we planned our next Big Battle. We thought, maybe next time we wouldn't be so lucky. Maybe Barbie would fight back, or even worse, Barbie's owner, Evil Big Sister, would come home and find the decapitated dolls out of their pretty pink case and chase us around the house with a broom. Either way, we thrived on the danger. And at the ripe age of 7, danger was always just around a corner, under a bed, hiding behind a Malibu Barbie, or wielding a deadly broom-spear and chasing two giggling John Waynes, maybe out of ammo, but never out of fun.