

ME AND MY YO-YO

by Tony Beckwith © 2000

WE WERE STANDING AROUND THE OTHER NIGHT, waiting for the Children's Carnival to begin. Roy and I were running the Coin Drop. The other volunteers were all paired off and assigned to the Cakewalk, the Hula-Hoop contest, and the Bean Bag Toss. The face painters and caricaturists were settling into their booths at the other end of the Club ballroom.

Joe picked up a yo-yo from among the prizes on the table beside us. He checked the string, slipped the noose around his middle finger, and spun the yo-yo in a graceful downward arc. It had a see-through cover on each side, and when it reached the end of its string and bounced back up, a red light flashed, like a fire engine on the way to a fire. I suddenly realized that it had been nearly half a century since I'd played with one of those wonderful toys.

I took one from the table and slipped the string around my finger. I gripped it in my right hand, rolling it with my thumb till the string felt taut and springy. I bounced my hand a couple of times to loosen up my wrist. Then I popped the yo-yo. It spun down the string—the shimmering, silvery discs just a blur—and then the red light started flashing and before I knew it the yo-yo thwacked snugly

back into the palm of my hand.

Grinning all over my face, I looked up and saw that the rest of my colleagues had also helped themselves from the table. We were now all standing around very much as my little friends and I used to stand around in the school playground, playing with our yo-yos, all those years ago. I suddenly understood that I used to love the yo-yo because you didn't have to play *with* anybody or *against* anybody. Having a few like-minded companions to stand around with was certainly a plus, but even then you were on your own. Just you and your yo-yo.

There was a corner of the playground where a large, thick tree provided refuge from the mayhem of a couple of hundred little boys on break. A handful of us would gather there and, in relative tranquility, take our yo-yos from the pockets of our

gray flannel uniforms and spin them. There was a seriousness, a concentration on our artistry, and a restrained exuberance that made recess go by far too quickly. For some reason I never learned any of the flashier tricks, which is surprising since showing off was always my strong suit. But some of my peers were talented and imaginative; they could “walk the dog” and go “around the world” and do a lot of other impressive work as well.

It occurred to me the other night at the Carnival that I had stepped into one of those time warps that you read about. To my left, Amado was making his yo-yo hum and sing. Paul was “walking the dog” and laughing out loud. I could almost smell the dust of the playground. We were all standing around in a semi-hypnotic state, re-living a memory, transported far away and long ago by a tiny time machine spinning at the end of a string. ★

