

## DID I EVER GET A PRIZE

*By Mike Harris*

Did I ever get a prize? The answer, of course, is YES. Now to tell about a winning that I consider one of the dearest and in retrospect most memorable in my long long life.

To set the stage, we had just come off the farm. New family in town! Children enrolled in the public schools and in the synagogue. Our daughter, a strapping nine year old, made the change with apparent strength and confidence. Our son, small for his age, was not as comfortable with the change.

In order to help him integrate I joined with him in a Cub Scout group that was in existence in the synagogue. I attended meetings with him till I felt that he could manage by himself. The Cub Scouts have an event called "The Pinewood Derby." Each boy is given a package, a block of wood, four nails, four wheels ... object: shape the block of wood into the resemblance of a car, add the wheels via the nails and presto! you have a car. A date is set for the event. The competing cars are set behind a barrier on a broad slope with tracked runs. The barrier is raised, all the cars race down the slope to the finish line. Children were allowed to have some help in making their cars. This cub scout group had parents who were engineers, lawyers, medical doctors, and just working people; also several single mothers trying to raise sons.

My son was overwhelmed when he saw some of the beautiful car models, real works of art. Dispirited, he wanted to drop out. I kept telling him it was not beauty that would win but function. Finally I said, "You make the car and I guarantee that you will win." While I am more than ordinarily mechanically adept, I also do a lot of reading. A formula came to mind "slope + weight = distance" and I was gambling that the engineers would not remember this simple formula and that the other entries never heard of it.

With my son's model complete I took it to the post office. In the space in front of the hood I dug out a cavity; with a box of B.B. pellets I filled the cavity while the car was on the scales to within just under the maximum weight allowed, sealed the cavity with scotch tape.

The night of the event my son's entry, painted bright blue was in the third heat. Rick's entry was the most amateurish looking entry. "Dad, we do not stand a chance." I replied, "It's not over till it's over." The barrier was raised. Rick's car started a little slow, half way down it caught up, at the bottom of the slope it was moving fastest. P.S. he won the derby!!! The engineers as one came over to congratulate Rick and then took me aside. "You are one smart cookie! Where did you dig up that formula?" I'm a reader. To this day Rick will tell you, "If my DAD makes a promise he keeps it."