

## Broken Toys

*By Pete Clark*

After my release from active duty by the Air Force in 1967, I accepted a job at a big box department store. I began my abortive career in retail as an Assistant Manager of Division II, working in hardware and lighting. The inventory was maintained by hand. The order form for each supplier and each item in the department had to be checked and reordered if necessary, always being aware of under stocks that had to be checked. When I was told that I could merchandise some of my end caps, I began to enjoy my job, in spite of the hard work. The first promotion I bought was unthinkable. It was spring and the bugs were becoming ubiquitous, so I bought enough yellow bug lights to fill an end. With all of the moaning, groaning and tearing of hair, one would have thought I had committed high treason. When the following Monday came and the end of bug lights was almost empty, most of my superiors were claiming credit for the idea.

The Lighting Department was the most difficult to maintain as everything had to be done on top of the hanging display or from the top of a ladder. All of the lamps and fixtures on display were plugged in or wired up so customers could see them as they might appear in their home. Bargain hunters loved the lighting department because price tags tended to go missing. Bargain hunters were not my favorite people. They would find an item with no price tag and ask for the price. When the retail price was provided, they would then ask for a discount as the item was a floor model. To counter this, I began adding ten dollars to the sell price and would give the customer a five dollar discount upon request and we were both happy.

I broke one rule that was written in stone and I would do it again if the same or a similar situation should arise. I had been transferred to Division I and was assigned the Toy Department. One afternoon, an army officer wearing the gold tone bottle caps indicating the rank of major, came into the Toy Department and asked if he could speak to me for a moment. He said he worked with children in the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center Psychiatric Department and wanted to know if the store had any returned toys which could be donated for use in communicating with mentally and emotionally disturbed children. I told him we had nothing at that time. He left his name and telephone number with me, asking me to call if anything should become available. A day or two later, I received credit for a gross of defective toy helicopters and instructions to destroy them; instead, I called the major and told him they were his. I was almost fired before a letter arrived, from a colonel at Fitzsimons, praising both myself and the store for providing such great community support.