

Peace and Cribbage

by AJ Dresser

"Cribbage is for old men," Dad used to say as he dealt the cards. It was always a ratty old deck we'd gotten from a long-defunct airline back in the heyday of flying. Time was, they'd give out wings pins to all the kids, decks of cards to the men, and vodka tonics to the moms. All for free, even the smile.

We'd play cribbage to pass the time. The game taught me to count and add and read a person's tells. He often let me win. The board was always homemade, drilled and polished in someone's garage with colored bowling shoe eyelets to finish off the holes. The pins were cut-up knitting needles.

We'd play for fun or we'd play for pennies. I didn't realize then that we were playing for the memories. It was our rare few moments without mother passing out orders, lifting our feet to obsessively vacuum, or yelling at us for undone work. When the cribbage board came out, I knew peace.

Dad's officially an old man now but he doesn't play much anymore. He still uses a ratty old deck of cards despite new packs sitting in the drawer. The board is still shiny. When I do find time to join him, I usually let him win. Who says payback's a bitch?

