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Beware of

'Bidding Fever'

by Lindsay Eaglesham

Remember the old children's song that goes something like this:

...it goes zip when it moves,
Pop when it stops,
Whlrrrr when it stands still;
I never knew just what it was,
And I guess I never will."

The thing that zipped and popped and whirred was a child's toy; a kind of whimsy with no practical purpose or function. Despite that — or because of it — the thing was a constant object of fascination which provided countless hours of pleasure.

I thought of that silly rhyme after attending a farm auction recently. Now, it seems that the amazingly high number of farm auctions in this province is a kind of modern phenomenon. The reasons for this are probably complicated, having to do with factory farming, urbanization, and increasing debt loads. But that's another subject.

The point is this. The auction experience left me with a powerful impression.

Otherwise sensible, even cautious, people can experience the sudden flare-up of 'bidding fever'. This malady can afflict those of any age, sex, or economic level. However, its effects tend to be most disastrous for those in the lower economic brackets.

I was a victim of the 'fever' at the unfortunate outing in question. After standing in a freshly manured field, swatting blackflies for three hours, I left flushed with the victory of outbidding some other poor mesmerized soul for some nameless doodad that went whirr, pop and zip.

The rapid-tongued auctioneer was a positive Svengali. He seemed to lure you into a subtle but powerful desire to participate in the bidding.

He did this with the energy and rhythm of his vocal skills. It was a momentum he created. And the desire was not a desire for the item being sold. It was an uncontrollable desire to WIN! To win at the game!

The process was really an unconscious one. The auctioneer's hypnotic eyes bore in on me. Maybe I looked weak and indecisive; maybe I looked like a moneyed tourist who believed every cracked crock and broken bentwood chair had 'character'. Whatever it was, those eyes wouldn't let me go.

"Who'll gimme ten, ten, ten? Who'll gimme ten dollars? Do I hear ten?"

He got ten.

"Ten. I want fifteen. Fifteen, fifteen, fifteen. We're way off here! Twelve and a half! Twelve and a half?"



Auctioneer Cliff Gilbert charms the crowd.

Got it.

Then some lightning-fast syllables rolled off his tongue. Sounded like: "Whowouldagiddymeal Whowouldagiddymeal..."

Svengali was pleading with me. No, no pleading — demanding! What could I do, I was under his power.

Up to now my head had been nodding almost without my conscious will. Finally my mouth opened and I heard a voice from inside me say: "Twenty!"

"SOLD," was the shout from my hypnotist. It was also the suggestion — the command! — that awoke me from my semi-dream state.

What had I done? WHAT had I done?

The symptoms of the 'fever' were abating: the throbbing pulse in my neck; the hot

foreneag, dry throat and wet palms.

I found myself digging deep in my pockets for twenty dollars — plus TAX, I might add!

And what was the reward for this madness? What was the twenty dollar (plus tax) lure? What was the 'thingamabob that did the job' on me?

Who knows?

Call it a geegaw, a gimcrack, a thingamajig, knick-knack, jigamabob!

Suffice to say, I am now the reluctant owner of a whirring, popping and zipping device that could be for peeling apples, making spaghetti noodles, or rewinding fishing line.

Caveat Emptor ('buyer beware' — of silver-tongued auctioneers and 'bidding fever!')