Here Comes 'Popsicle Pete!'

At age 7, the best job in the world was
helping the ice cream truck man.

By Joan Flickinger Keller, Fredericksburg, Virginia

IN THE SUMMER of 1954, air-conditioning was still a novelty in my hometown of Reading, Pennsylvania.

Businesses that had invested in this phenomenon hung neon signs in their windows bragging, "We have air-conditioning" or "It's COOL inside."

Of course, there were several tried- and-true methods to combat the intense summer heat. You could invest in a fan, which cooled you if you were right in front of it. You could have a cold drink and immediately sweat it out

Or you could eat ice cream—my preferred method for cooling off.

My absolute favorite food is ice cream—always has been, probably always will be.

That summer, when I was 7, my dad decided to take a part-time job. I wasn't happy since I adored spending time with him, but when he told me he was going to drive an ice cream truck and that I'd ride with him, I loved the idea.

My dad was going to be "Popsicle Pete," and I would be his assistant. My dream job—at 7 years of age! Life was just about as good as it could get.

I couldn't wait to get started. The tan truck with "Popsicle Pete" emblazoned on the side was the most beautiful vehicle I'd ever seen.

I even loved hearing the truck's music box play Some Day My Prince Will Come over and over, telling the children that Popsicle Pete was on his way. By the end of the day, though, the song had lost its thrill for Dad.

When Popsicle Pete came to the neighborhood, the excitement was like a birthday party and parade in one. First, kids heard the music. Next, they saw the truck.

Then all the kids in the neighborhood seemed to be running toward the truck, laughing and shouting, even before it stopped at the curb.

I'm sure that I cut into Dad's profits because I ate lots of ice cream and other frozen treats, but I also have many priceless memories of that summer.

Imagine being the 7-year-old whom everyone envies because your dad is Popsicle Pete. Imagine spending hot summer days riding in a truck filled with ice cream and ice pops. Imagine feeding a frozen treat to a dog whose owner bought him one every day.

Yes, one of our regular customers was a dog! Things were very different in the 1950s.

The dog's owner paid Dad for the treats for the whole week. If the owner was not home, the dog walked out to the truck by himself, and I gave him his goody.

If the prepayment ran out, Dad still gave the dog his treat; the owner then paid us when she saw us.

Simpler times, happy times. Dad is gone now, and has been for years, but my mind still drifts back to our Popsicle Pete days, and I smile.