

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

Another winter is giving us our fair share of storms leaving our county and cities street systems with lots of damage and high repair costs. That isn't anything new but the extent this year has been a little more than usual. Repair crews patch chuck holes when and where they can. Back in the nineteen thirties, when I was a kid, street and alley maintenance was a bit different. Eureka did not have many paved streets. Only certain thoroughfares were paved and many of those were paved with concrete rather than asphalt but most, including the street I lived on, were rock based and topped with a surface of fine gravel. The concrete surfaces were prone to cracking and were maintained by the pouring of tar into the cracks. That provided us kids with something to chew. We would break off small pieces to take the place of chewing gum. The flavor was not the greatest but it sure gave the jaws some good exercise. Never did hear how many dental fillings were lost. During the winter rains soft spots were filled with fresh gravel and spread with a motorized road grader. A heavy rain always provided a good flow of water in the gutters coupled with plenty of dirt and sand, great for kids' construction of mud dams. During the summer, dust and flying gravel posed a problem. Gravel also provided ammunition for rock fights with kids that were not on your friendly list. If we were having "friendly rock fights" we would seek out the softer dirt clods that would disintegrate on impact (dirty but a lot less damaging to the flesh). Auto paint jobs took a beating back then from the debris from the unpaved roads. Each unpaved street was graded at the beginning of summer and then received a coat of oil to keep down the dust. The oil truck was fun to watch but you had better not walk on the fresh oil for a few days because it made an awful mess if tracked in the house. Small rocks also were piled on top of a firecracker just before lighting the fuse. This type of sport taught you how to choose firecrackers with long fuses and run fast. Collateral damage such as broken windows, dented cars and cut up kids did keep the sport from growing. Public alleys were also maintained by the city. A fairly deep ditch on each side was kept open for drainage with city hand crews going through periodically with mattocks and shovels removing weeds and other debris. Any resident who used the alley for access to their property had to maintain a culvert or bridge of some sort so the water flow in the ditches would not be impaired. A motorized road grader would make periodic passes through the alleys to smooth the surface and fill the chuck holes. Those were the days.

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