

ALL IN THE FAMILY



Sarah Child

Another school year is fast approaching and to say that I have mixed feelings about it is understatement.

I love summer and I love having our kids home and around me. They are excellent company, innovators and architects when it comes to planning a day or even a whole week, infectious in spreading enthusiasm, cheerful and chipper most of the time.

On the other hand they too have their off days. A combination of not having enough sleep, thwarted plans, sibling rivalry can turn the trio into the kind of termagants that only a parent could love. And I do, I do. Even when the need to escape the yammering, the infighting, and the bickering becomes so strong that I feel the maternal instinct is the creation of some p.r. outfit.

Locking oneself in the bathroom at those times is futile as any mother knows. They either pound

on the door, sit outside and moan piteously or threaten to run away by hitching a ride with the ice cream truck.

I have found two better solutions. One is to start the rider mower and cut the lawn. Insulated from their noise by the machinery's racket, it gives a harried parent time to sort out who's right, who's wrong and how to deal fairly with all concerned.

The other is to take advantage of the adult swim at the pool. With one's head underwater it is impossible to discern the most strident "Mom" and happily the lifeguards are superstrict about not letting even one youthful toe in the water during the 15 minute stint.

In another few days I will not have the problem of searching for a

quarter-hour surcease. I will have a six-hour break every day. And frankly I am a little uneasy about it. Our youngest enters first grade and for the first time in nearly 12 years I will be on my own for the major portion of the daylight hours, a situation further intensifying the ambivalent feelings.

For years the knowledge that this time would come kept me sane, particularly during the period when all three were under six and one of them thought he was a one child circus act and persisted in swinging from chandeliers, dousing the baby in her playpen with buckets of water and escaping sans clothes from the house at 7 a.m. before anyone else was up.

I made lots of plans, wove many dreams during those years. I would go to graduate school, I would get a

glamorous job, I would write 10 best sellers — all as soon as the kids were in school for a full day.

Now the hour draws nigh and while I've still got lots of long range plans the only immediate thing I can think of to do is go to the Monday morning shopper's movie. And I can't even tolerate most of the current film output.

On the plus side the kids are all wild with anticipation about returning to the classroom. Secondly it will be lovely talking to some adults in the neighborhood again. During the summer as the tumult ebbs and flows, the mothers do little more than wave to each other. And finally with no one around to pull out the peanut butter and jelly jars at noontime maybe at last I'll be able to take off those last 10 pounds.

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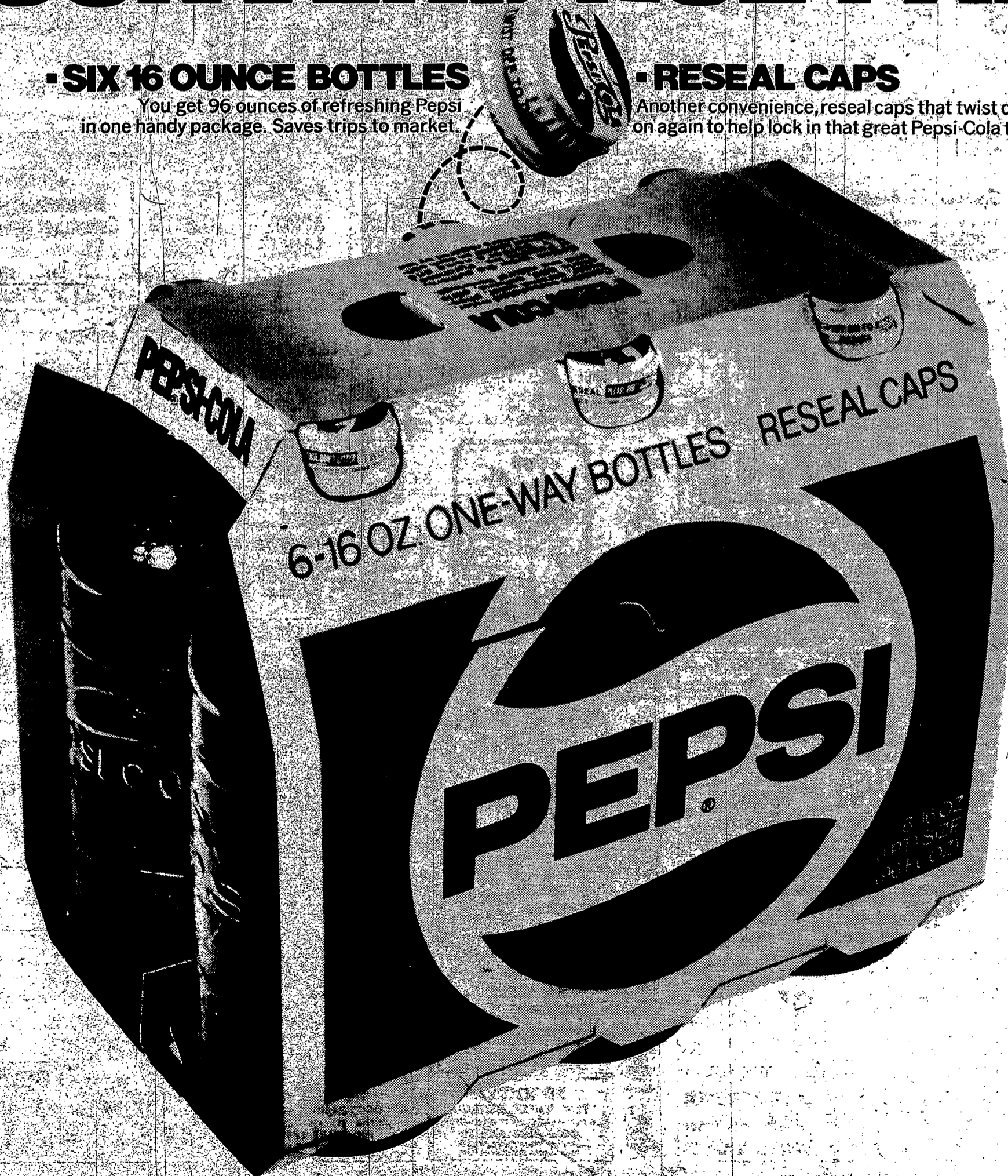
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