

## ***The Everlasting Lollipop***

By Paul Averitt

Johnny found a magic nickel! So, off he went to Mr. Denny's candy store.

"I'll take that big, red lollipop, please," he said. "It will last longer than the others."

"It's a very long-lasting lollipop," said Mr. Denny. "Why, if you don't lick too much at one time, it will last almost forever!"

It was, indeed, a very long-lasting lollipop. The first day, Johnny licked it on the underside only, and at bed-time it was as big as ever. The next morning Johnny took the lollipop to school in his back pocket with the stick sticking up so he could reach it easily. Through the day the lollipop seemed to get heavier and heavier. Johnny had to lick it all recess time to keep it from growing. Then, just to make sure, he licked it all through lunch and all afternoon. When school was over, he rolled the lollipop in some paper, and took it home in his book bag.

The next morning was Saturday. Johnny

thought about the lollipop after breakfast, and hurried to take another lick. Sure enough, the lollipop had grown in the night, and it was as big as a dinner plate.

Johnny took the lollipop out to play. It was hard to run or slide with the big lollipop in one hand, so most of the time he just stood around licking away. He licked away all morning and all afternoon. He gave Mary and Bobby and all of his friends free licks. But the lollipop grew bigger all the time.

All the next week, Johnny kept licking the magic lollipop. Each day he grew a little fatter, and the lollipop grew bigger. Soon the lollipop was so big that Johnny had to carry it over his shoulder like a gun. When he walked down the street all the boys and girls followed along behind. "Give us a lick, Johnny," they shouted. "Come on, give us another lick."

Johnny was happy to share the big lollipop. Sometimes he stood it on the ground while all of the children stood around and licked away together. But it bothered him to have them follow him everywhere. Sometimes he tried to run away. But the lollipop was getting too heavy, and Johnny was getting too fat to run very far.

So Johnny took the lollipop home and stood it in the umbrella stand. His mother found it almost at once. "Johnny," she said, "that lollipop is making my umbrellas sticky. You must take it out to the shed and put it beside the rakes and hoes."

A few days later, the lollipop had grown taller than the rakes and hoes. It was pushing against the roof of the tool shed.

"That lollipop is growing like a bad weed," said Johnny's father when he saw it. "Why, it's about to go through the roof of my tool shed!" He pulled it into the back yard.

"Johnny," he said, "we'll have to stand your lollipop out here. Run and get the shovel." Then Johnny's father dug a hole in the back yard, and planted the lollipop stick in the ground like a tree.

Johnny hadn't had a good lick for two or three days. He started at once to climb the lollipop stick. But he had grown too fat! Poor Johnny! He was too fat to reach his own lollipop to lick it.

One day Mr. Denny from the

candy store came walking by. When he reached Johnny's house, Mr. Denny was so surprised that his mouth fell open, and his hat jumped off. "My goodness! My goodness!" he said. He walked over and felt the lollipop stick. Then he looked up at the shining red candy on top. "My goodness," he said again softly. He stood and looked at Johnny for a minute.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at last. "You give me this lollipop, and I'll give you one, regular-sized, guaranteed - not - to - last - more - than - one-day lollipop every Saturday morning."

"That seems very fair," said Johnny trying to be as grown up as Mr. Denny. "I'll take it, beginning next Saturday."

The next day two men drove up to Johnny's house with a big crane. They backed the crane into the yard, picked up the lollipop, and drove away. Johnny ran along as they moved slowly down the street with the lollipop stick dragging

along behind.

The crane went right to Mr. Denny's store.

There the men got down and dug a hole in front of the door. Then they moved the crane over, and carefully set the lollipop in the hole, just as it had been in Johnny's backyard. Next two painters came with long ladders, and painted the word "DENNY'S" on both sides of the lollipop.

Then Mr. Denny rubbed his hands together happily. "That's a very fine sign, men!" he said. Then he turned to Johnny. "Come in, young man, and get your lollipop for the week."

Johnny took another red one. "It's nice to know that I will be seeing you every week, Mr. Denny," he said. "It's almost as good as having an everlasting lollipop, isn't it? Thank you very much."