Slinky Encyclopedia Article

Slinky

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Slinky

Since its introduction to the public at Gimbels Department Store in Philadelphia in 1945, the Slinky has been one of the best-selling toys in America. This simple, steel spring developed by Richard James, a naval engineer who was trying to produce an anti-vibration device for ship instruments, has become one of the most widely recognized toys, with over 250 million Slinkys sold by the time of its fiftieth anniversary. When James and his wife, Betty, first demonstrated the Slinky's rhythmical step-by-step movement at Gimbels, they sold their entire lot of 400 Slinkys in ninety minutes.

In addition to playing with Slinkys, innovative Americans have used them as pecan-picking devices, envelope holders, light fixtures, and during the Vietnam War as makeshift radio antennae. Since 1962, children watching television have heard the Slinky jingle with its famous lines, "It's Slinky, it's Slinky, for fun it's a wonderful toy/It's Slinky, it's Slinky, it's fun for a girl and a boy." In addition to being featured in television commercials, the Slinky has appeared in the films *Hairspray, Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls,* and as a leading, animated character, the Slinky Dog, in *Toy Story.* Slinkys have been manufactured in large-size, brightly colored plastic models for younger children, and the elite retailer Neiman Marcus sells an $80 gold Slinky. The original steel model sold in 1945 for one dollar. Fifty years later, in 1995, the same model (changed only by having its ends crimped for safety) sold for a mere one dollar and ninety-nine cents. Its low price has allowed for its presence, at one time or another, in nearly every American home.

Further Reading:

Panati, Charles. *Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things.* New York, Harper and Row, 1987.

The Slinky