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"When I write articles for clients I am teaching from a transpersonal psychology basis. I believe that most companies do not understand the history of their own company, let alone the history of how products were developed. History helps us understand HOW A PRODUCT OR CONCEPT IS DEVELOPED.

For example, how many millions of dice have been sold, or toothpicks, condoms, and even Chapstick. We learn from viewing what was, what is, and what can be."

-Chip Evans



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The toothpick has been around longer than our species. The skulls of Neanderthals, as well as Homo sapiens, have shown clear signs of having teeth that were picked with a tool, according to anthropologist Christy G. Turner of Arizona State University. Since ancient times, men of note have used toothpicks. Agathocles, tyrant of Syracuse, died in 289 B.C. when he used a toothpick soaked in poison by an enemy. The prophet Muhammad assigned the care of this important tool to a servant called the "master of the toothpick."

For centuries, the upper classes used elegant toothpicks often made of gold, silver or ivory and inlaid with precious stones. The tool became so popular that a body of etiquette grew up around its use, resulting in books such as *The Tanhausers Court Manners*, which advised that poking around the teeth during the course of a meal was a grave offense. The permanent crafted toothpick also became a notable dowry item. When the infantia Louise Marie Therese of Parma married a prince of Asturias, for example, her dowry listed a dozen valuable toothpicks.

The largest toothpick manufactory in the United States was founded by one Charles Forster of Boston, who created a market for disposable toothpicks by having Harvard students eat at local restaurants, then loudly demand a toothpick after finishing their meals. The factory he founded, Forsters, Inc., still manufactures toothpicks in Strong, Maine, where Forster found the kind of wood he deemed best for toothpick making. There, it takes about ten people and a lot of computer-driven machinery to put out an average of 20 million toothpicks daily.

People have found far more elaborate uses for toothpicks than picking the teeth, however. A man named Joe King used 110,000 toothpicks to build a 23-foot-high likeness of the

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Eiffel Tower. Wayne Kusy of Evanston, Illinois, used 193,000 toothpicks to create a 16-foot-long replica of the British luxury liner *Lusitania*.

## Toothpicks

Supposedly, the toothpick was first used in the U.S. at the Union Oyster House. The oldest restaurant in Boston, it opened in 1826.

90% of the country's toothpick supply is produced in Maine.

### PEOPLE AND TOOTHPICKS MAKE HISTORY

Ever notice how many people reach for, or ask for a toothpick after a meal? Well, you may not have occasion to count, but the answer is thousands. Most all restaurants, whether of the fast-food variety, or more fancy places, furnish there beside the cash register toothpicks in dispensers.

Picking teeth becomes a habit. Toothpicks, for some people, serve the same purpose as a pacifier for babies. They are adult pacifier. When the adult becomes irritable or hard to please, he just sticks a toothpick in his mouth and savors a bit of sucking tranquility. It has been so for many years. Some people grow a long finger nail especially for picking teeth--which *have* to be picked.

Even in my life-time, when store-boughten picks were not so much in evidence, many people whittled kitchen matches to make their own toothpicks. There was a little hazard in that variety because they broke rather easily and splinters might be wedged between teeth--such a catastrophe can keep your mind occupied for hours, and the effort to get both hands in the mouth to dislodge the pick becomes quite a struggle. Never mind, the kitchen match could be chewed to a nice soft brush to pick and clean even without being whittled. So could a limb of a polecat bush, favored by snuff dippers in our neighborhood.

Evidence of picked teeth led anthropologist Christy G. Turner to declare, "As far as can be empirically documented, the oldest demonstrable human habit is picking one's teeth."

In 289, Agathocles, a tyrant of Syracuse, died when his toothpick had been soaked in poison. That was his own special, permanent toothpick, too.

People had toothpicks made from wood, ivory, silver gold, all with specially carved handles, even inlaid with gems. Muhammad had one carved from aromatic aloe wood dipped in holy-water at Mecca. He had a special servant, "master of the toothpick", who carried it for him--behind his ear.

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Special rules of etiquette grew up around the use of the little sometimes ornamental instrument. In 1393, rules were published about the ill manners of picking ones teeth during the course of a meal. But even manners change. In the 1700s the ornamental variety of toothpicks was worn about the neck on decorative chains. Ladies in elegant ballroom gowns felt they were not properly adorned without their ornamental toothpicks. Even a woman's dowry might include several gold or silver toothpicks which remained her own even after she married and all her other goods became her husband's.

Disposable toothpicks were first made in Portugal where they were hand-whittled from wood, boxed and sold. In 1865, Charles Foster, who had bought some of the Portuguese made ones, decided to market disposable picks in the United States. He worked for a wooden shoe-peg manufacturer in Boston, and was allowed to experiment with the equipment until he developed a machine that could cut toothpicks mechanically.

Creating a market was a problem, but with the help of some Harvard students who ate in fancy restaurants and clubs and demanded toothpicks after dining, he established a market. The factory he established, in Maine, though it is no longer in the hands of the Foster family, is the biggest producer of toothpicks in the United States. The only hands to touch the toothpick after the logger who cuts the tree and supplies the birch log is the person who picks his pearly whites after a meal. Mechanically the plant produces 20 million toothpicks in an average day.

Did you ever look up at a tree towering over a picnic and wonder how many toothpicks it would make? That question was put to Richard Campbell, vice president of Maine operations. He couldn't answer that, but said that he once figured that one year's production, laid end to end, would circle the globe 30 times.

Consumer Products Safety Commission reports that 8,800 accidents are reported each year caused by careless pokings and piercings with toothpicks. That doesn't even include the professional baseball player that chews a toothpick for good luck--even when he goes to bat. What a target for a pitcher!

So whether you pick your teeth at the table, or behind a napkin, with a flat toothpick or a round one, disregarding what Miss Manners might say, or if you choose peppermint or cinnamon flavor for your teeth, or just as a pacifier with your store-bought teeth, you are not alone in your dire need to pick. Through the ages, the great and the not-so-great, have picked their teeth, too.

I found historical information in an article by Sue Hubbell in the January 1997, *Smithsonian*.

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## ***The Toothpick***

The **toothpick**, or Cure-Dent as it is known in the French language, has been around longer than most people think. In fact some say it has been around longer than the human species.

The use of toothpicks at the dinner table is a standard practice. As in most countries, the polite way to deal with lodged fragments of food is to cover one's mouth with one hand while the tooth pick is being used with the other. Toothpicks are frequently used between courses as it is believed that the tastes of one course should not be allowed to mar one's enjoyment of the next course.

### History

The skulls of Neanderthals, as well as Homosapiens, have shown clear signs of having teeth that were picked with a kind of tool, according to well known studies in anthropology. Since ancient times, men of note have used a type of dental hygiene device or **toothpick** to remove particles of debree from teeth.

### For Centuries

For centuries, the people in upper classes used elegant dental hygiene devices often made of gold, silver or ivory and inlaid with precious gems or stones. This device would become so popular that a body of etiquette grew up around its use, which advised that poking around the teeth during the course of a meal was a grave offense.

### Today

Today various forms and shapes of **toothpicks** can be found in different establishments ranging from Restaurants and Hotels to Airlines and Cruise lines to Resorts and Country Clubs. After a great meal, many people will use some form of Personal Dental Hygiene Device. It can be elegant yet versatile and will promote good dental hygiene and help prevent periodontal disease. Though remarkably inexpensive, the **toothpick** is one of the most effective personal dental hygiene instruments one can purchase.

A lawsuit involving toothpicks

#### THE PRODUCT

There are several types of toothpicks, including flat, round, frilled, coloured and plastic. The flat wooden toothpick is the most popular type in Canada and is the subject of this inquiry. Flat

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wooden toothpicks are made from white birch trees and normally measure about 2.20 in. in length, with a width of 0.10 in. at one end and a width of 0.05 in. at the tapered end.

The subject goods are sold predominantly by the manufacturer's agents to food and non-food chains as well as drugstore chains either on a direct basis or through the clients' warehousing system. The majority of sales by the manufacturer's agents are made through the clients' warehousing system. These orders are relayed by the agent to the factory and are then shipped to the customer's warehouse for shipment to individual stores.

The agent is responsible for ensuring that the manufacturer obtain and maintain the product listing with the chains. As well, the agent is required to promote the product along with the rest of the line through the chain stores. This is achieved through additional displays, increased shelf space, newspaper advertising, in-store features, etc.

The major market areas in Canada are Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes and British Columbia. Sales are seasonal in nature, with the heavy selling months being May to July and November-December.

## **THE DOMESTIC INDUSTRY**

Keenan, the sole domestic producer of the subject goods, is a privately owned Canadian corporation located in Owen Sound, Ontario. Keenan is owned by Atkinson Five Enterprises Limited which, in 1989, was acquired by L. Tanguay (1986) (Tanguay) of Sherbrooke, Quebec. Keenan was established in 1896 by John Keenan. Initially, the firm produced and sold native hardwoods, hemlock and cedars. Over the years, this company has produced a variety of products, including basket veneer, wooden screen doors, splints, crutches and toothpicks.

At the present time, Keenan carries out production at its 17,500-ft. facility in Owen Sound where it produces the subject goods, florist sticks, cemetery wreaths, iron wreath holders and Christmas wreaths.

In order to provide its customers with a broad range of woodenware, Keenan imports frilled toothpicks, clothespins, round toothpicks, coffee stir sticks and skewers. Its parent company, Tanguay, also supplies Keenan with round minted toothpicks. These toothpicks are imported by Tanguay and are minted and packed at its plant located in Sherbrooke.

Keenan sells flat wooden toothpicks through the manufacturer's agents to the retail and institutional trade. Volume discounts and promotional allowances are offered by the company. Promotional allowances may take the form of extra store displays, advertising or whatever is most beneficial to the customer.

## **THE IMPORTERS**

C&B is a privately owned Canadian corporation engaged in the sale and distribution of food and non-food products in both private label and national brands. This firm was Keenan's Ontario

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distributor of flat wooden toothpicks and other woodenware under the Keenan name for about 20 years. The responsibilities of C&B included soliciting sales from all levels of the trade, warehousing the products for shipment to customers, invoicing for shipment and collecting accounts receivable.

The business relationship between C&B and Keenan was terminated in January 1991. As a result, C&B began importing flat wooden toothpicks from the U.S. producer, Forster, in 1991. It currently sells Forster toothpicks along with its other disposable tableware to the retail and institutional trade under its private label, "Goodtimes." Products marketed under the "Goodtimes" name include foam cups and plates, plastic drinking glasses, plastic cutlery, plastic drinking straws, paper napkins and flat and round toothpicks.

## **THE RESULTS OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER'S INVESTIGATION**

The period of investigation selected by the Deputy Minister covered imports of the subject goods during the period September 1, 1990, to August 31, 1991.

In the final determination of dumping, the Deputy Minister indicated that 100 percent of the subject goods exported to Canada were reviewed, and importations by C&B, which represented 56 percent of the subject goods, were found to be dumped. The margins of dumping ranged from 16.6 percent to 17.1 percent with a weighted average margin of dumping of 16.9 percent. The remaining 44 percent of the goods were imported by Liberty Home Products Corp. (Liberty) at undumped prices.

## **THE COMPLAINT**

In argument, counsel for Keenan submitted that the dumping of the subject goods by Forster had resulted in the loss of business by his client in Ontario as well as in the Maritimes. This loss of business by Keenan was caused by C&B's artificially low prices which were made possible by the significant margin of dumping. This lost business resulted in a sharp decline in production, a significant loss of market share, increasing inventory levels and a utilization rate that dropped to the lowest level in Keenan's history.

Counsel argued that while the material injury has been felt in Ontario and in the Maritimes, these low prices will spread to Quebec and the rest of Canada. This pattern has already materialized, as C&B's agent in Quebec is currently offering these low prices to Keenan's customers in that market. The effect of these dumped prices will have a serious impact on Keenan's production, sales, market share and utilization of capacity. In addition, Keenan's profits will decline to levels that will result in the delay of future investment plans.

## **THE RESPONSE**

The representative of C&B indicated that poor economic conditions in Canada over the past 18 months has been the primary cause of volume declines as well as of lost customers by Keenan. C&B has had a very modest impact on the domestic market to this point in time, and the loss of

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business by Keenan has been quite minimal. With respect to the firm's pricing policies, C&B's decisions have been made in the past and will be made in the future based on long-term business strategies. If this causes the firm's selling price to be, at times, lower than its competitors find comfortable, then these competitors must decide whether they want to compete for this business.

## **THE REASONS FOR DECISION**

Under section 42 of SIMA, the Tribunal is required to determine whether the dumping of flat wooden toothpicks, as found by the Deputy Minister, has caused, is causing or is likely to cause material injury to the production in Canada of like goods.

The Tribunal notes that, for almost 20 years, C&B was Keenan's exclusive Ontario distributor of flat wooden toothpicks and other woodenware products. In late 1990, the principals of Keenan decided to sever this relationship as they had become dissatisfied with sales levels achieved by C&B for subject goods as well as with the lack of sales growth of the new products introduced by Keenan to expand its woodenware line. Although a one-month notice of termination is typical for this industry in this situation, C&B requested, and Keenan granted, a three-month extension. The reason for this action was to minimize disruption in C&B's sales program during the heavy buying period of Christmas.

In terminating the services of C&B, Keenan had arranged to retain the services of a new distributor, Michael J. Firestone & Associates (M.J.F.), which was initially scheduled to begin representing Keenan in October 1990. By granting the extension to C&B, Keenan deferred the M.J.F. arrangement until January 1991.

According to the evidence, it was during this three-month period that C&B began offering dumped Forster product in Canada. Specifically, the evidence shows that, while C&B continued to be Keenan's exclusive distributor in Ontario between October 1990 and January 1991, it took advantage of the situation by undercutting Keenan and offering Forster products to Keenan's Ontario customers.

Keenan began to realize what was happening in January, when its new distributor, M.J.F., began calling on customers. M.J.F. was advised by many customers that Keenan's prices were no longer competitive, and one major Ontario account delisted it as a supplier. As a consequence, Keenan began to lower its prices and offer rebates to customers in Ontario.

Although some smaller accounts were lost through price reductions and rebates, Keenan managed to retain or recapture its large accounts until mid-1991, when a major account in Ontario switched to C&B. In obtaining this account, C&B undercut Keenan's reduced price by over 20 percent. In June 1991, Keenan lost a large account in the Maritimes to C&B. This event was particularly troublesome to Keenan as it showed that C&B was capable of undercutting its prices for all its accounts across Canada.

The selling of dumped goods by C&B affected Keenan's performance. Market data show that the first nine months of 1991 were relatively good, with sales being 11 percent higher than for the

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comparable period in 1990. However, Keenan did not share in any of this market growth. Its sales declined over the period as did its market share; there was a decline in production, inventories climbed and utilization of capacity dropped to its lowest level during the inquiry period. However, profit levels did not decline due to the major cost-cutting program which was implemented by Keenan in late 1990.

The Tribunal has no doubt that dumped imports were responsible in part for Keenan's unfavourable results in 1991. However, there were other factors at play. About half the market share lost by Keenan in 1991 was the result of undumped product brought in from Forster by Liberty. While Keenan did experience declines in production and utilization of capacity, and inventories increased, this was largely attributable to the sharp decline in Keenan's export sales. On balance, the Tribunal considers that the injury inflicted to date has not been of a material nature.

However, it is the view of the Tribunal that the degree of injury to Keenan will become material if the dumping is allowed to continue. In arriving at this conclusion, the Tribunal notes the testimony provided by the President of C&B who stated that his firm's primary goal is to capture market share. He indicated that subject goods represent a very small proportion of his total business and he is prepared to price the subject toothpicks, in effect, as a loss leader in order to sell accounts a wider range or package of goods. To this effect, he has set his 1992 prices substantially below his 1991 prices in order to entice accounts away from Keenan.

The Tribunal notes that, ordinarily, the imposition of provisional duties would be expected to raise market prices to some degree. However, this has not happened in this case. Indeed, C&B's 1992 prices are substantially lower than its 1991 prices despite the imposition of provisional duties in November 1991. This suggests that C&B may well be selling the subject goods at a loss, confirming the aggressive pricing strategy outlined in the testimony of the witness for C&B. It suggests that the prices could be even more aggressive and Keenan's injury more severe in the foreseeable future if anti-dumping restraint measures are not in place.

## **THE CONCLUSION**

In view of the foregoing, the Tribunal finds that the dumping of flat wooden toothpicks originating in or exported from the United States of America and produced by or on behalf of Forster Mfg. Co. Inc. of Wilton, Maine, its successors and assigns, has not caused, is not causing, but is likely to cause material injury to the production in Canada of like goods.

## **SOMEONE'S THOUGHTS ON FREE TRADE**

How do we adjust prices so they begin to reflect the full costs of producing items for commerce? The Business Council says, "The first priority must be to abolish subsidies so that prices at least reflect the full economic costs of energy."<sup>[5]</sup> If a toothpick is manufactured from wood that has been transported a thousand miles, the cost of that

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transport needs to be reflected in the price of the toothpick. This means the true cost of fuel (petroleum) needs to be factored into the price of the toothpick. So long as the price of oil is kept artificially low by hidden subsidies to the petroleum industry, the price of toothpicks is kept artificially low and the true costs of producing toothpicks will not be reflected in the price paid by the purchaser of toothpicks.

David Morris--one of the most thoughtful and interesting critics of free trade--recently wrote,[\[6\]](#)

A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS EATING AT A ST. PAUL RESTAURANT. AFTER LUNCH I PICKED UP A TOOTHPICK WRAPPED IN PLASTIC. ON THE PLASTIC WAS PRINTED THE WORD, 'JAPAN.' NOW JAPAN HAS LITTLE WOOD AND NO OIL. NEVERTHELESS IT HAS BECOME EFFICIENT ENOUGH IN OUR GLOBAL ECONOMY TO BRING LITTLE PIECES OF WOOD AND BARRELS OF OIL TO JAPAN, WRAP THE ONE IN THE OTHER AND SEND THEM TO MINNESOTA. THIS TOOTHPICK MAY HAVE TRAVELED 50,000 MILES. BUT NEVER FEAR, WE ARE RETALIATING IN KIND. A HIBBING, MINNESOTA FACTORY NOW PRODUCES A BILLION DISPOSABLE CHOPSTICKS A YEAR FOR SALE IN JAPAN.

IN MY MIND'S EYE I SEE TWO SHIPS PASSING ONE ANOTHER IN THE NORTHERN PACIFIC. ONE CARRIES LITTLE PIECES OF MINNESOTA WOOD BOUND FOR JAPAN; THE OTHER CARRIES LITTLE PIECES OF JAPANESE WOOD BOUND FOR MINNESOTA. SUCH IS THE LOGIC OF FREE TRADE.

Such absurd trade goes on because the full cost of transportation (chiefly the cost of burning oil, including the cost of warming up the whole planet--see [RHWN #300](#) and [#301](#)) is being subsidized so the purchasers of Japanese toothpicks in Minnesota are not paying the true costs of those toothpicks. Mr. Morris gives half a dozen other examples of costs that are not reflected in price and thus prevent market mechanisms from helping humans achieve sustainable communities.

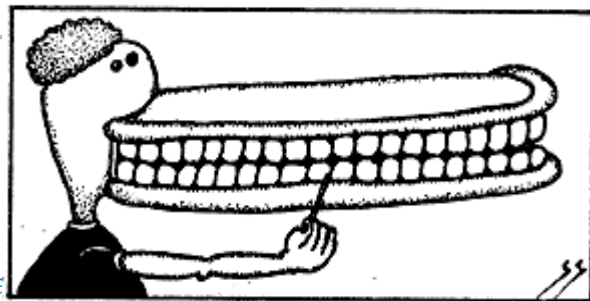
## Are wood toothpicks made of real wood?

10-Aug-1979

Dear Cecil:

Since I gave up smoking cigarettes three years ago, cigars, joints, and women

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**have been surrogates for my oral fixation. However, I find the substitute that spends the most time in my mouth is toothpicks. This intimacy has stirred my curiosity as to their origin. It's hard to imagine a crew of minimum-wage craftsmen whittling perfect little javelins from tree branches, so I assume they have some sort of processed wood product that they press into forms. But how do they maintain the grain? I rest my dilemma in your hands, Cecil--and while you're at it, find out what family of tree it is that regularly lies twixt cheek and gum. --Todd F., Dallas**

Cecil replies:

I don't know that I would go around resting my dilemma in other people's hands if I were you, Todd. You could get arrested. Toothpick makers get wood grain into their toothpicks by the simple expedient of not taking it out in the first place. Remarkable as it may seem in this synthetic age, the modern toothpick is made out of unreconstituted virgin white birch, just as its predecessors have been since after the Civil War, when Charles Forster invented the automatic toothpick-making machine.

Toothpick manufacturers (most of them are in Maine) steam birch logs to make them easier to cut, then "vener" them, which means they peel each log into a thin sheet, sort of like unrolling a roll of paper towels. Flat toothpicks are simply stamped out of the sheets, while round toothpicks are first cut into oversized blanks, then fed into a milling machine called a "rounder," which grinds them down into little javelins, as you put it. No reconstituted toothpick has ever been made that matches birch for strength and low cost. You see plastic toothpicks occasionally, but they are hard on the gums and periodontists discourage their use--as do the makers of wooden toothpicks, not surprisingly.

--CECIL ADAMS