

OLD STYLE CONTAINERS PROVIDED MORE USE THAN THEIR CONTENTS

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Plastic wrapping is a parent's frustration on Christmas morning. Harder to open than my wallet at a jewelry counter, its cost frequently outweighs its contents. It is one of many modern innovative packaging applications that test both patience and ingenuity to access its contents.

It adorns the most mundane of objects, which causes me concern for my constant inability to gain access. This concern is further reinforced when I witness mere children effortlessly overcome the cause of my frustration. I easily accept my five-year-old grandchildren's ease in operating the VCR and intricacies of other electronic devices. It's humiliating to have them show me how to open a bag of chips or find the opening in a plastic trash bag. Scissors, knife and bolt cutter are needed to do what was once accomplished with tooth and nail.

Certainly the plastic wrap is an improvement over any previously available wrapping material, and my musings caused me to recall some of the substances it has replaced.

Waxed paper is one that comes quickly to mind. Until plastic's inception, wax paper was an exclusive wrapper for bakery bread (a term we used to differentiate store bought from our usual home baked.) The wrapper was reused as a lunch sack and then used to wipe the hot cook stove top to shine, clean and protect it from rust. I still prefer wax paper as a wrap from some food items such as fish and meat.

Many other items that were commonplace in my day are no longer used or popular for the same purposes today. Glass milk bottles are an example. There were two dairies in my small hometown of Phoenix, NY. Both Henderson's and Hughe's processed and bottled their own milk in glass bottles. They presented a wonder of automation to my young eyes before the conglomerates pushed them out.

Early feed bags were made of burlap and commonly recycled, much the same as today's beverage containers. Many feeds and seeds came in bags of finer fabric decorated with colorful patterns. They often were converted into clothing, curtains or

furniture covers and bedspreads. It was an effective ploy that enhanced the purchase of the enclosed product.

Several food items came packaged in cloth sacks – sugar, salt, flour – and other bulk products as well. The sacks later served a myriad of other useful purposes, especially for a young tad's booty, such as marbles or the occasional snake or frog. I constantly vied with siblings and other family members for empty sacks.

Newspaper lined garbage pails for those who sans pigs or chickens had to rely on other means of disposing food waste. Meats came wrapped in butcher or wax paper. Tissue paper was the universal gift-wrap. Pickles, sauerkraut and some meats were displayed and dispensed in wooden barrels. The fowl hung behind the meat counter New York dressed, unfeathered, whole and undrawn. They were cut up and readied to order.

Toothpaste came in leaden type tubes for those who could afford to buy it and were adverse to baking soda or plain salt. Iodine was the universal antiseptic; band-aids were a far cry from today's modern marvels.

Packing material was sawdust shavings, shredded paper or excelsior. Excelsior, for those who have forgotten or never knew, is fine wood shavings. I believe the old factory building on the river at Hawkinsville was an excelsior plant. It utilized the ready availability of our local aspen or poplar in its manufacture. Like the buggy whip, it was a victim of advancing technology.

Pipe tobacco came packed in tin cans that fit comfortably in the hip pocket and later served as excellent bait cans for young trout fishermen. Prince Albert, a popular brand, elicited many a laugh at unwitting store owners' expense. When asked if he carried "Prince Albert in a can," an affirmative answer was followed by, "Let him out, it's hard to breathe in there." Hey, I thought it was funny at the time.

Regardless of how practical and difficult they are to open, the hardest thing for me to reconcile is that the item entombed therein costs less than the package.