

THE OLD DAYS WERE DIFFERENT BUT WERE THEY REALLY BETTER?

January 28, 2003

Gas was \$1.14 a gallon at this time last year. So proclaimed the headline on an article in the Tuesday, January 7, *Syracuse Post Standard*. It was a front-page feature, no less.

I remarked to the clerk as I paid for the paper that I could remember when it was a dollar for five gallons. Hon Hansen overheard me and remarked that I was dating myself.

Jon was right and I have come to realize people of all ages do it. The older we get the more we tend to do it. The wider the gap in time, the more pronounced the differential and the tendency to make note of it. It, in part, accounts for the nest exchange that prompted this article.

Ronny Parent and I grew up in the same era and when we met in the Big M a short time ago he suggested I do an article on grocery shopping when we were youngsters. It perfectly illustrates my statements in the first couple of paragraphs.

The stores were nearly an eighth the size they are today, if even that. The same goes for the number of items available. The only meats offered were canned or prepackaged, such as bacon or corned beef. In the smaller towns, like I lived in, most fresh meat was sold in a meat market. The one in our town also sold dill pickles from a huge brine-filled wooden barrel in which the pickles were cured.

While the meat market was staffed by at least three people, the grocery stores generally got along with only one full-time clerk. The clerk selected the items and placed them on the counter as you ordered them. I never recall anyone waiting on him or herself. One might say that they really gave the customer service.

The same circumstances were generally true for other retail and wholesale businesses. Your gas was pumped and the oil was checked in your car. Most villages had from two to five combination gas station auto repair shops. It was not unusual for at least one of them to be an auto dealer as well.

How many can remember the number of gas stations and auto dealers Old Forge once had? How many grocery outlets were there in Old Forge in the '50's?

People in my age group have seen the advent of a great many new products and improvements in those existing earlier. They, in turn, have necessitated far larger facilities in which the older traditional commodities

were sold. The new merchandise that has come into being with each new year has created new businesses and services that were never dreamed of in my formative year.

When we old-timers bring up the past, the inference is that somehow things were better in the old days. The longer you live and the more you think about it, you realize it's the farthest thing from the truth.

Things have never been better than they are today. We live far better and longer than we ever did and enjoy life more. Our work is easier and safer and we are comparatively better compensated for it.

With all that said, however, we old-timers will still tend to bring up the past, partly for the reasons I just stated. I guess it's because we are proud to have persevered through more difficult times and we did our part in helping to make things better today.