

The Green Generation, and Yesteryear

Earth Day Network's Green Generation campaign launched in 2009 and culminated on the 40th anniversary of Earth Day in 2010.

Similar to *The Greatest Generation* that confronted the challenges of World War II and inspired the major societal changes that followed, the Green Generation includes ordinary people who are engaged in individual and collective activities to improve their health, to improve their schools and to participate in building a solution to urgent national and global issues, such as the world's water crises. These are laudable goals, and worthy of our attention and involvement.

This week, I received an article from Dr. Peter Johnson, nursing home specialist at Life Care Center of Attleboro, Massachusetts, which brought some chuckles and a walk down memory lane for me. Its author is unknown, but here it is:

I remember back when ...

Checking out at the store, the young cashier suggested to me that I should bring my own grocery bags, because plastic bags are not good for the environment. I apologized to the young girl and explained, "We didn't have this 'green thing' back in my earlier days."

The cashier responded, "That's our problem today! *Your* generation did *not care enough* to save our environment for future generations!"

I said that she was right – our generation didn't have the "green thing" in its day; however, back then, we returned milk bottles, soda bottles and beer bottles to the store. The store sent them back to the plant to be washed and sterilized and refilled, so it could use the same bottles over and over. So they really were recycled. But we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Grocery stores bagged our groceries in brown paper bags that we reused for numerous things. Most memorable besides household garbage bags was the use of brown paper bags as book covers for our school books. This was to ensure that public property (the books provided for our use by the school) was not defaced by our scribbles. Then we were able to personalize our books on the brown paper bags. Too bad we didn't do the "green thing" back then.



We walked upstairs because we didn't have an escalator in every store and office building. We walked to the grocery store and didn't climb into a 300-horsepower machine every time we had to go two blocks. But she was right. We didn't have the "green thing" in our day.

(more)

Back then, we washed the baby's diapers because we didn't have the throwaway kind. We dried clothes on a line, not in an energy-gobbling machine burning up 220 volts. Wind and solar power really did dry our clothes back in our early days.

Kids got hand-me-down clothes from their brothers or sisters, not always brand-new clothing. But that young lady is right; we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Back then, we had one TV or radio in the house – not a TV in every room. And the TV had a small screen the size of a handkerchief (remember them?), not a screen the size of the state of Montana. In the kitchen we blended and stirred by hand because we didn't have electric machines to do everything for us. When we packaged a fragile item to send in the mail, we used wadded-up old newspapers to cushion it, not Styrofoam or plastic bubble wrap.



Back then, we didn't fire up an engine and burn gasoline just to cut the lawn. We used a push mower that ran on human power. We exercised by working so we didn't need to go to a health club to run on treadmills that operate on electricity. But she's right; we didn't have the "green thing" back then.

We drank from a bubbler when we were thirsty instead of using a cup or a plastic bottle every time we had a drink of water. We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blade in a razor instead of throwing away the whole razor just because the blade got dull. But we didn't have the "green thing" back then.

Back then, people took the streetcar or a bus and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their moms into a 24-hour taxi service in the family's \$45,000 SUV or van, which cost what a whole house did before the "green thing."

We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances. And we didn't need computerized gadgets to receive a signal beamed from satellites 23,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest burger joint.

But isn't it sad the current generation laments how wasteful we old folks were just because we didn't have the "green thing" back then?



That's a look back in time. No doubt, those of you closer to my age can relate to these observations better than the younger generations.

One thing is certain, however: No matter what period of time in which we live upon this earth, we have an obligation to care for the environment.

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter