

The Green Thing (Author unknown.)

Checking out at the store, the young cashier suggested to the older woman that she should bring her own shopping bags because plastic bags weren't good for the environment. (True!)

The old woman apologized 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."

She was right -- our generation didn't have the green thing in its day. Back then, we returned milk bottles, pop 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. We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blades 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 in our day.

We walked up stairs, because we didn't have an escalator in every shop 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 streets.

But she was right. We didn't have the green thing in our day.

Back then, we washed the baby's nappies because we didn't have the throw-away 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, not a screen the size of the county of Yorkshire. 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 post, 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 petrol 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 water from a fountain or a tap when we were thirsty instead of demanding a plastic bottle flown in from another country. We accepted that a lot of food was seasonal and didn't expect that to be changed by flying it thousands of air miles around the world. We actually cooked food that didn't come out of a packet, tin or plastic wrap and we could even wash our own vegetables and chop our own salad.

But we didn't have the green thing back then.

Back then, people took the tram or a bus, and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their mothers into a 24-hour taxi service. We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances. And we didn't need a computerized gadget to receive a signal beamed from satellites 2,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest pizza joint.

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

Remember: Don't make old people mad. We don't like being old in the first place, so it doesn't take much to annoy us!

Task:

1. Discuss this piece of writing with your group. Do you think that people were or were not green in 'the olden days'? (Ask your grandparents about it.)
2. What recycling did we do back then?
3. How did we keep car emissions down?
4. What about doing the washing? Do you ever use hand-me-down clothes? (Why not start a scheme at your school where parents could hand down clothes such as uniform that you've grown out of?)
5. How did we cut the lawn? How did people of our generation keep fit?
6. Do you buy water in plastic bottles? (Why don't you re-use them by filling them from the tap before you go out?)
7. Why is it better to eat fruit and vegetables in season? Do you buy 'ready-washed' salads, etc.?
8. Do you walk to school? If not, why not?
9. Do you think that old people really are responsible for all of the world's problems? (We are partly responsible, as *we weren't aware* of the damage we were doing to the environment by burning coal and from dirty industries – *you are aware!*)
10. In what ways could **you** do better with **'the green thing'**?