



# Times-News

## The Old Ways Were Often Green Ways

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ECO NOTES



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Many consider environmental stewardship – from protecting land and waterways to limiting consumption and waste – to be a new idea inspired by long-haired tree huggers. This could not be further from the truth. In years past, being frugal, not dumping where you live and protecting the natural world around you (that you depended upon for survival) was as routine as breathing.

My dad, who was a child of the last depression, never threw anything away. Old fishing poles were transformed into garden stakes, worn out tires became flower pots, broken TV consoles (once the innards were removed) became puppet show stages for us kids. Coffee grounds and old food scraps were fertilizer for the garden.

He learned many of these tricks from his mom who was a master recycler. Old dresses lived again as window curtains. Tired old couches were “refreshed” by new hand-sewn slipcovers. My grandfather, a carpenter, turned old wood into exquisite desks, shelving units and tables. As grandkids, a visit to the grandparents meant diving for the “special cabinet” which was chock full of goodies grandma had recovered along her walks. It was always overflowing with old “pinkies”, those great pink balls we’d use to play stickball, pairs and pairs of sunglasses, toys, books and everything else imaginable.

Locating my grandmother was always an easy thing. Although short in stature, she was the only 80 year old wandering down Flatbush Avenue wearing a brightly colored pant suit sporting a large “Metallica” button on her chest. It wasn’t because she liked heavy metal music (I’m sure she didn’t know what it was), she just hated the button to go to waste and she liked how it looked over the polyester designs on her jacket!

In those days, living a prudent lifestyle wasn’t about being an environmentalist, it was about living within your means and enjoying the simple things of life without lots of packaging, plastic junk from China or wasting limited resources.

According to Louise Bailey, Henderson County’s resident historian, mountain people saved everything, because they didn’t have much. Extra vegetables and fruits were canned for winter time and of course the mason jars were always reused year after year. Garments were never thrown away but mended or reused in some way. Old-timers knew the value of protecting water and generally drank from springs where they knew no one had built a house above. No one would ever drink from Mud Creek because there were so many people living along that waterway.

Cliff Ruth, who traces his lineage back to the original settlers of Henderson County, recounts that cloth flour sacks were often the basis for clothes, quilts, and curtains. Cornfields in the old days weren’t plowed over, but instead were cordoned off so that livestock could clean up the residue, reducing the need for feed. The wood on old barns was always recycled to build new structures and newspapers and catalogs were used as insulation. Of course not everyone was a good land steward, but many strived to be.

Our affluence has made us forget how precious the resources around us are. But times are tough these days, and maybe its time to take a page from our past, to find ways to use less, reuse more and reclaim the rest.

Henderson County is well on its way to respecting those old values through its adoption of a Ten Year Solid Waste Plan. Last year, the county moved nearly 64,000 tons of municipal solid waste through its transfer station and another 23,000 tons of construction and demolition waste was buried in the C&D landfill until it was closed. Although only 6% of our waste is currently recycled into new products, the county is proposing to recycle 25% of our waste in 5 years and 40% in 10 years, a tremendous step forward. This makes green sense from the fiscal standpoint, since recycled goods make money for the county, and non-recycled waste costs us over \$2 million a year to ship and haul to a South Carolina landfill that might have only a five year life.

The hope for the county in the short-term is that all waste haulers may be picking up recycling at curbside which means a major overhaul of the convenience center at the transfer station is on the agenda. We will need to become more conscious of how we can lower our waste footprint. To get involved in becoming a better steward and to help advocate for better recycling policies, join ECO’s Recycling Committee. They can be reached at (828) 692-0385.

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