



Betty Kaiser

## Betty Kaiser's Chatter Box: Life and Laundry Before Computers

Today's column subject was triggered by a cartoon in the *Register Guard* newspaper. "Another View" shows a man reading a newspaper headline that says, "Sears files for bankruptcy."

Sitting on the floor are two little kids. The boy says to his playmate, "My dad says that when he was a kid, they had to drive to a store to buy stuff." The girl, looking at Amazon on her computer screen replies, "People had it so rough in the olden days."

At first I laughed and then I said to myself, *life without computers was not rough.*

Computers make some things easy but they don't solve all problems. Shopping wasn't really a prob-

lem because we had people. Store clerks were your friends. They asked you how they could help, knew your dress size, advised you when something was going on sale and asked about your family.

As I recall, we lived simple, uncomplicated, organized lives using common sense.

Electronic devices didn't tell us what to do or how to do it. Our households somewhat followed these simple rules:

*Wash on Monday,  
Iron on Tuesday,  
Mend on Wednesday,  
Churn on Thursday,  
Clean on Friday,  
Bake on Saturday,  
Rest on Sunday*

Those rules are embroidered on a set of tea towels (aka dish towels) that I received as a bridal shower gift in 1958. In that era of homemaking, we took daily chores very seriously. I still loosely plan my week around the

above suggestions. Especially the washing, ironing, cleaning, baking and resting part. I was never very keen on mending or churning.

Again, life was not always easy but it wasn't for lack of a computer. Doing the laundry? Now that was rough. In fact, it was a homemaker's full-time, never ending job.

Come along with me as I reminisce about laundry day before running water or electricity.

For generations, washing clothes in a river was the normal way to get clothes clean — even when the river was frozen. Stains were treated at home by soaking in a lye solution, a washing bat or board was used to scrub them.

Soap was used sparingly and could be made at home by those who had ashes and fat mixed with salt. The clothes were rinsed in the river and spread on bushes to dry.

Women often didn't have time to wash clothes weekly.

It was hard, time-consuming work. You can imagine that clothes were practically filthy before being washed. Often, groups would get together and help each other at a big laundry session every few weeks or months.

Lee Maxwell is 87-years-old and vividly remembers when his family did the laundry. He says, "I remember my grandfather wearing his overalls until they literally stood up. Washing was washing."

Today, we don't really 'wash.' We kind of refresh. Your shirts don't get that dirty."

Lee has a Washing Machine Museum in Eaton, CO.

Some areas of the world still wash their clothes in rivers but most of civilization has progressed. Wooden tubs and factory-made metal tubs made the chore easier. Tongs replaced sticks for lifting the washed items.

Boxed soaps and starches were introduced in the 1800s. Clotheslines, pegs and pins

made drying easier. Women found employment as washers and had a box mangle to do ironing.

By the time I came along, my mother and grandmother were still in the wringer washer era. I remember being scared to death to go out to the wash house where the machine was located. It was dark and damp and creepy out there. The machine was plugged in and hooked up to the hot and cold water of a deep sink.

I think it took two people to do a load of laundry. Someone had to feed the clothes through the wringer to another person who caught them on the other side.

Then they had to be hung out to dry.

I'm told that early on (before my time), mother's long hair got caught in a wringer!

Fortunately, grandmother was there to quickly unplug the machine before she was scalped! By the 1950s, washing machines were greatly

improved.

A Speed Queen pamphlet touted that a 7-load washing could be done in one hour with one tubful of water! To my mind that's questionable but all women had to be thrilled and I'm sure my mother was over the moon.

A final word on shopping and the cartoon.

Chuck's dad worked for Sears and his mother introduced me to Sears catalog shopping. Over the years, we bought a lot of things that way — curtains, sheets, tools and washing machines. But our kid's crib and changing table came from Sears brick and mortar stores as did their clothing.

Shopping?

Catalogs and neighborhood shops were our computers.

No problem.

Contact Betty Kaiser's Chatterbox at 942-1317 or email [bchatty@bettykaiser.com](mailto:bchatty@bettykaiser.com)

## Voice of Democracy 'Patriot's Pen' contest now taking submissions

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veteran's of Foreign Wars (VFW) scholarship program.

This program provides high school students, from 9th grade to 12th grade, the opportunity to write and record a broadcast script on a

patriotic theme selected by the VFW each year.

Competition begins at the local post level.

A winner goes to the district level to compete with students selected by other posts. Those winners advance to the state level and

on to the national level.

State winners receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., and the top national scholarship prize is \$30,000.

The 2018-19 theme is "Why My Vote Matters."

Patriot's Pen is open to

6th, 7th and 8th grade students. This VFW sponsored youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on democracy.

All entries are at post level with students advancing through regional, then state

levels to national level.

First place award at national level is currently \$5,000, plus an all-expense paid trip to Washington D.C., for the winner and a parent or guardian.

The 2018-19 theme is "Why I Honor the American

Flag."

Deadline for entries is Oct. 31, at the VFW Post, 3160 Hillside Dr.

For more information, call 541-942-7099.

## Trick or Treat In Historic Downtown Cottage Grove Wednesday, October 31st 3pm - 5pm

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