

Memories Are My Favorite Possessions

By Hap Hansen

Memories are my favorite possessions. Grade school, high school, The U.S. Army, being married to a wonderful woman for nearly 60 years, three marvelous children, seven equally marvelous grandchildren, a successful and rewarding career. Here's one of my favorite memories from my long-gone youth.

It used to be fun to buy gas for the car. Of course, it didn't seem like fun way back then, when gasoline cost 19 cents per gallon, or 35 cents, or seventy-five cents, depending upon one's age or the depth of one's memory. My memory goes back to about 19 cents per gallon, give or take a penny or two. I remember my Dad driving up to the single pump, the really big outfits had two pumps, one for regular gas, one for ethyl. Dad, Mom and my sister were in the front seat, my four brothers and I were scrunched up in the back seat. The smiling attendant would rush out saying, "Fill 'er up, sir?" While waiting in the car, Dad would pass the time of day with the attendant while he washed the windshield, and if he was really ambitious, the rest of the glass too. During the conversation, he would also check the oil, coolant level, brake fluid and the air pressure in the tires. Some would even open the trunk, which was rarely locked and check the air pressure in the spare tire. The amount of gas purchased was paid for in cash, or if you were a good customer, by signing the slip on a charge account. All of this was done without the customer ever leaving the car, although there was usually some conversation Dad had with some of the locals, who were visiting over a Coke or a Hires Root Beer while sitting in the shade on used tires that had not yet been discarded.

Contrast that low-key, easy-going method of buying gasoline with the hurry-up, hustle-bustle way we do it today. Now, the customer roars up in a modern auto, jumps out of the car, inserts a credit card, grabs the pump, opens the gas cap, inserts the nozzle, then waits impatiently for the minute or two it takes to fill the tank. After filling, the customer tears off the receipt, or leaves it, jumps back in his car and drives away. If the customer wants the windshield washed, he or she must do it themselves. No friendly service has been provided, no thank-you's or howdy-do's have been shared. Most important, very little human interaction has taken place. Another American tradition has been lost, shoved into the belly of the computer and will never return. I hope the values received in money and time saved are worth more than the customs and quality of life that has been lost. But I don't think so.