

Who Remembers...Penny Candy!

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right or by clicking **here**. These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

This installment of "Who Remembers...?" is kind of melancholic. Visiting Penny Candy is a bummer, since there are only a few bastions of sugar remaining. While you certainly may find packages of old penny candy favorites, or even "2 cent candy" or "nickle candy," you'd be hard pressed to find PENNY candy. Regardless, it's just not the same. It wasn't only about the candy. It was about the experience.

I guess, identifying with penny candy and waxing nostalgic about it simultaneously outs one as "old." It's how I felt when I told my daughter when she was 8-9 years old about pay phones and she thought I was pulling my leg. "Why would you put a coin in a phone, when you have a cell phone." Remember the spiral chords? Rotary dials? If you remember cranking the phone to get an operator, then you are positively Jurassic. Anyhow, that's another article for another day.



Bazooka Joe's: gum, advice and a comic!

As a kid, there was something special about being gifted with a dollar. Heck, even fifty cents. When that George Washington was put in your palm, you could feel all the neurons in your brain fire at once. Your salivary glands would explode in anticipation. That boring, dull day just became one of the best days ever. The first thing I would think of was finding my brother or a good friend to share in the stroke of good luck.

Penny candy wasn't just about the candy. It was about the experience. It was about taking your sibling or best friend with you. It was about racing into the store to gaze at the shelves of what – in my mind at least – was a million choices of candy, stacked to the ceiling! It was about grabbing a brown paper lunch bag and trying to fill it to the brim. It was when you didn't need safety seals. It was about the trust that the proprietor extended you – he didn't watch over you. He *knew* you would taste the merchandise, but that was OK.

You can head to that chain to buy the 99 cent bag of assorted fish, spice drops or circus peanuts all you want. It just isn't the same.

As those of you who are regular readers may recall, I lived a sort of gypsy lifestyle moving all around the the greater New Bedford area. This meant I became an expert at penny candy. A connoisseur if you will. A grandmaster of Squirrel Nut Zipper-Fu. My fondest spots were Bob & Eileen's on County Street and Chris' Variety on Main Street in Fairhaven.

Do you remember the paper receipts with the small dots of hard candy? I think they were called Candy Buttons. There was Abba-Zaba, atomic Fireballs, Bit-O-Honey, Pixy Sticks, Bazooka Joe bubble gum and Baseball chocolate balls. There were candy necklaces, chocolate coins, red hot dollars, Mexican hats, root beer barrels, nonpareils, Göetzes, and Mary Janes! The list goes on and on!



Mexican hats were my personal favorite. Especially the green and black ones!

Of course, there was always a few extra coins about, so we'd purchase more than we could...or should have. But that was also OK, because it just meant we had to shrink the packed bag down before we got home for the "mom inspection." It was fun to have her inspect the lot and "steal" a few of her favorites – always followed by a playful "HEY!" from us.

The vast majority of the time, the best way to polish off a bag was to race to the bedroom and pull out some comic books, sprinkling each page with sugar!

Then one of the most glorious treats of all: the medley of crumbs, bits and sugar that sat at the bottom of the brown paper bag. I wonder how many times we've straightened that bag out, and formed a funnel to savor those sweet remnants.

While candy goes back 5,000 years, Penny Candy made its debut

sometime circa 1896 with the Tootsie Roll at [Woolworth's Five and Dime](#). Of course, the popularity of the Tootsie Roll inspired Woolworth's to expand into an entire Penny Candy Aisle.

It's sad that the entire experience has disappeared. Penny candy no longer cost a penny, there are no more brown paper bags or "trusting" proprietors. No more sugar sprinkled comic book pages. No more testing the merchandise. The next best thing is a place like Emma Jean's or Billy Boy Candy. And we can always reminisce.

But it just won't be the same.

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