

“Let’s Go Kroger-ing” by Carol (Klenk) Heck

Does anyone remember that slogan? It went on to say... “The Happy Way to Save”. Saving money started at the first Kroger store in Madeira located in one section of the Julius Fleishmann Building, seen here, on the northwest corner of Camargo and Miami. The entrance to Kroger was on the far right-hand side of this old building. The front doorway was turned at an angle. You will find a couple of metal benches and a “Madeira” sign there presently, in a pretty park-like setting, with Walgreens’ parking lot behind there. In the top picture, you are looking through the baseball backstop of the old school yard, on the southwest corner, with Camargo Road running in-between. This next picture is a close-up of the doorway, taken in 1998, long after Kroger’s had moved out and as demolition of the whole building was beginning.



The Fleishmann building was erected in the mid 1920’s. Kroger’s was here at least by 1931. The store was 40 feet wide by 70 feet deep. On the left front as you walked in, were open, wooden bins with potatoes, turnips, onions, red beans and hard root vegetables. Down the left side, was a counter that had soups and a few canned goods and Wheaties. No one was allowed behind the counter except clerks. Grabbers were used by the clerks to reach things high on the shelves. On the right-hand side of the store were the leafy vegetables that were on ice, or had to be sprinkled with a watering can to keep them fresher. There was a butcher shop at the far end of the store. Wieners came in bulk and were connected together, and bananas, not always available, came on the huge stalk they grew on. There was one full-time clerk, one part-time clerk, one store manager, one butcher, and one cashier.

The Barney Kroger Company instigated two concepts which led to their popularity; meat and groceries under one roof and their own bakery that could produce bread cheaper than other bakery businesses. These conveniences made Kroger stores very profitable. But you better get your food by Saturday because the stores were closed on Sundays.

Shopping then was a little bit different. You would tell the clerks what you wanted and they would retrieve the items for you. Hardly anything came in a box or package. As items were collected, a running price list was written down on the brown paper bags used for carrying the groceries home. That was your receipt. Payments were made using cash. There wasn’t a lot of refrigeration in Madeira in the 1930’s, so shopping was done about 3-4 times a week. And only enough was purchased that could be eaten relatively quick. Women did lots of canning. Fruit, berries, and vegetables were picked from backyards and farms.

Ninety percent of the shoppers were women. But when men came in, or chauffeurs of Indian Hill families, they would drop off their list and go to wait at the ice house on Miami Avenue. There were outside benches where men sat and sometimes whittled. It is reported the Indian Hill drivers bought larger orders, probably because their employers had electric refrigerators.

The store manager would get a daily newspaper to see what prices the other Kroger stores in Cincinnati were running. He would then tell the clerks to either raise or lower the prices of the food. There wasn’t any

other source of communication or managing between the Kroger stores. There was one telephone but, it cost 5 cents to make an outgoing call.

A new Kroger store at 7011 Miami was opened in 1948. It is almost exactly where Subway is currently. This new store had three cashiers! When the electric power went out, (approximately once every six months), the registers had to be cranked by hand. This was not an easy task for the women. This store had one manager and one co-manager, a produce manager and a part-time produce man. Here's a picture of the head



meat-cutter from about 1951-1961, my dad, Bob Klenk. This picture was taken in 1956 during Kroger's "meat sale". My dad won the contest and many other display-case contests.



Meat was cut by hand, generally, and wrapped in butcher paper. The price was marked on the wrapper with a grease crayon. The customers were catered to, as the women were very particular about the money they spent. Meat was a treasured staple.

In this meat department out on the floor, there was a 12-foot service case for whole chickens and fish on ice, and a triple decker case for fresh sausages, bacon, hams and lunchmeat. Behind the counter, they had round butcher blocks and a meat grinder for ground beef. Clean sawdust was kept on the floor. In the back room, there was a 6-foot by 8-foot walk-in cooler for meat, and an upright freezer. Outside there was a small shed with a padlock that would hold 100 dressed turkeys if the weather was cold enough to keep them fresh. The turkeys were for Thanksgiving and Christmas. They also sold an average of 4-5 sides of beef every week. It was a friendly store. My dad reported his hours verbally to the store manager and he was paid in cash.

And how about those Top Value Stamps? According to the amount spent during your shopping trip, you would receive stamps. You would take the gummed stamps home and fill up booklets for redemption of great catalogue items. We got folding chairs, a Scotch picnic thermos, roller skates, and a wagon; great stuff!



In 1962, the third Kroger store was built. This had a huge impact in my personal life. Three homes were torn down, or moved, to build this store. My house was the middle house, meaning my family had to find another place to live. To me, it seemed like I had to move very far away. Our house had been right across the street from the present day Brockage (Landscaping) home.

The new address of Kroger became 7725 Laurel Avenue. Today, this Kroger store building is McCabe's Hardware. This next photo was taken twenty-one years after this Kroger store's opening. The store was an



improvement over the previous store and I'm sure more modern upgrades were made. There were large loading docks in the back of the store, for one thing. More cashiers and employees were needed and somewhere along the timeline, Kroger initiated Sunday hours.

The last chapter of this story goes like this: The George Meyer Hardware Store, a long-standing business in Madeira, had been on Miami Avenue, behind the Laurel Avenue Kroger store on the south side of the railroad tracks. In 1984, Kroger and George Meyer switched places. The building on Laurel became George Meyer Hardware before it became McCabe's Hardware. Are you still with me? And Kroger built a new "superstore", as they called it then, at 6950 Miami. This is the Kroger store that you love and shop at today. Seen here is the flyer that ran for their Grand Opening.

According to YouTube, another motto that Kroger still abides by today is; "Be particular; Don't sell anything you wouldn't want yourself". I think that's a pretty good approach to doing business in this friendly town.

It's been fun telling you what I remember and what I have researched. Thank you for sharing and please keep saving memories.



Credits go to the late Mr. Bob Wick and the late Mr. Bob Klenk. (Madeira Historical Society has their interview on DVD.) Credit also goes to Regina Villiers' article published in The Suburban Life, 2-11-2004.

Photos courtesy of Cliff Behrmann, Maderia Historical Society, the Klenk family, and Cleo Hosbrook.

Originally written May 2022. Afterward, I learned that there was an earlier location of Barney's Grocery store about 300 feet west of the corner of Camargo and Miami.

Also see, "As Madeira Kroger Celebrates Nearly 100 Years", a re-written rendition of this story used at the 2023 birthday celebration at Madeira Kroger.