

# Hang the Expense-- It's Worth It to Me

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MY FRIEND Jones, whom I don't keep down with, is very price conscious.

We were shopping in the same supermarket, and I had just dropped a package of Grandma's Oats in my cart.

"That," said Jones, "is an example of the way the consumer is gouged on the cost of living. Grandma's Oats — maybe four cents worth of oatmeal in a fancy package, nineteen cents! Four hundred per cent profit. It's a stick-up. It ain't worth it."

"It's worth it to me," I said. "I'm not paying nineteen cents for four cents worth of oatmeal, I'm paying 19 cents for oatmeal I know is accurately weighed, free of dirt and worms, cookable in five minutes instead of five hours, and put up in a convenient package to use or store in the cupboard."

Mr. Braley continues free-lance writing after fifty years as author, correspondent, and poet.



"Using Grandma's Oats instead of loose oatmeal saves on my gas bills, saves my wife labor and time, and adds maybe one cent to the cost of our breakfast. If the manufacturer and the retailer split a 400 per cent profit in furnishing me these advantages — they're welcome to it. So, 19 cents for Grandma's Oats — it's worth it to me."

Maybe our food cost runs a little higher than the Joneses — though I doubt there's much difference — but it's worth it to me in time and trouble saved by *not* worrying whether I could have got something two cents, or two dollars, in some cases, cheaper by bargain-hunting. It's worth it to me in the convenience and ease of shopping where pre-packaged and wrapped goods are all ready for me to pick up and take home.

So when Jones and I met again at the milk counter — I think he was haunting me to see what next

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extravagance in buying I would commit — and as I put a container of homogenized milk and a half pint of heavy cream in my cart, he said, "Two cents extra for homogenizing — which probably costs half a cent. Another stick-up!"

I said, "It's worth it to me. I'm not too lazy to shake up the milk each time I use it, but I don't like to be bothered, and it's worth two cents a quart to me not to have to."

"Is it worth ten cents more a half pint to buy heavy cream instead of light?" he protested.

"It is to me," I replied, "I like real cream in my coffee, not fortified milk. Also, it's worth it in the economy sense. First, I need only half as much heavy as light cream to get the same effect, or better, in my Java. Second, I can get the same consistency as light cream — if I wanted it, which I don't — by mixing heavy cream with milk, at a mingled cost less than the light stuff."

In the vegetable department, Jones loaded a five pound bag of potatoes into his cart and I did likewise, only, as Jones pointed out, I was paying two cents a pound more than he was.

And I pointed out that I was getting selected, sized, and washed potatoes, in a transparent bag through which my wife could see

to pick out the particular potatoes she wanted to cook; while Jones was getting a heterogeneous lot of spuds that had to be dumped out to determine their size, and scrubbed by Mrs. Jones before they could be used.

If that extra work and bother to the Joneses is covered by the ten cents they save on the bag, it isn't worth it to me. And, again, if the potato-packer makes eight cents out of this "fancy packaging," he's welcome to it, as far as I am concerned.

However, Jones to the contrary notwithstanding, there are very few swollen profits wrapped up in packaged and frozen foods. With the competition as fierce as it is, the greedy purveyor would find himself out of business in a month if he tried to mulct the buyer for more than the packaging is worth.

And in pre-cut and wrapped meats, for instance, I find a saving not only of time, but of money. In my supermarket — which is typical — I can find exactly the kind, cut, quality, and quantity of meat I want, visible and easily handled in its cellophane wrapper, labeled with its weight, price per pound, *and* a guarantee as to quality. And I don't have to accept the extra ounces that a butcher frequently adds as he cuts to fill the order, or watch to see that he doesn't weigh his hand with the