



# Would You Want to Live Back in the Good Old Days?

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The phrase 'good old days' suggests that we're not living in the best time in history, but it often begs the question of when WERE the 'good old days?' Was it before our lives were ruined by technology? Was it during the derring-do age of knights in shining armor and the birth of romantic love? Or maybe the 'Roaring Twenties?'

In his 'Scaling Abundance' blog, futurist Peter Diamandis makes the case that our standard of living today actually exceeds any previous time in history, and he offers up some interesting contrasts between life today and life in some of the most romantic pasts.

Consider the days of knights in shining armor, when European lords and ladies were occupying castles and the citizens were living off the land, far from pollution and the hustle and bustle of modern life. Diamandis selects a random year—1523—and notes that a very VERY small percentage of the population were, in fact, lords and ladies in that era. Those who lived without healthcare (bleeding was considered an advanced therapy for disease and medical professionals kept leeches on hand), and of course without indoor plumbing, electricity, central heating, automotive travel or air conditioning. Install a chamber pot in your bedroom and shut off your electrical circuits to get a taste of their lifestyle—and don't forget to leave the faucets off.

A better gauge of life during those times is to look at the vast majority of citizens—the people like you and me—whose lives were tied to the land. The man of the house would be a gaunt, weather-beaten individual, his back bent from years of hard labor, whose workday began at dawn, seven days a week. The wife and children would join him, after a breakfast of stale bread and watered-down milk. On days of unusual luxury, the evening meal would be a thin soup of boiled potatoes and onions, supplemented by whatever wild berries or roots the children could forage.

Winters were especially difficult; the typical family would live in a dilapidated hut that offered little protection from the cold. Firewood was scarce, so the family would huddle together for warmth. Every day was a battle, and many children failed to survive past their fifth birthday. A third of all children died before they reached 16 years old, and if they did survive, their average lifespan was just 35 years. Frequent epidemics would raise the death toll considerably.

Okay, that doesn't sound dramatically better than our current standard of living. What about the Roaring Twenties? Were they the 'good old days?'

Once again, we are talking about a world where there was no central heating or air conditioning; heat in the winter was provided by coal, shoveled into a stove or furnace. Many people during that time period were moving from the rural areas into the cities, where they experienced overcrowding, poor sanitation, and 80-hour workweeks in the factory—ten to 12 hours a day, six days a week, with little safety regulation and no health insurance.

For able-bodied men, the median income in roaring 1923 ranged from 9 to 17 cents an hour, equivalent to \$1.48 to \$2.80 today. One in ten children between the ages of 10 to 15 were sent to work at much lower wages; children as young as 5-6 years old were sent to work in factories, mines, and farms.

There were, of course, no antibiotics to control disease (that discovery had to wait until 1928, and it wasn't until the 1950s that they were in common usage), and no pasteurization (finally made mandatory in 1987). The average life expectancy was 56 years for men and 58 years for women.

The point of these blog posts is to remind us that we, today, are rapidly escaping the brutal fight for survival, moving toward something closer to fulfillment for the average person. Today is not perfect, but even kings in their castles in the 1500s and the rare wealthy person in the 1920s were denied the privileges of travel by car or aircraft, of television, mobile devices filled with apps, computers, and the Internet, and modern healthcare.

Maybe instead of yearning for yesterday, we should be pining for tomorrow.

**Sources:**

<https://www.diamandis.com/blog/scaling-abundance-series-8>

<https://www.diamandis.com/blog/scaling-abundance-series-7>

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