

**N**OTHING – ESPECIALLY MONEY – was wasted in the Hatley household where I grew up. My parents taught me the fine art of finding the best bargains and making things last well past their expected life spans, a skill they honed during the Depression. Paper sacks, aluminum foil, wax paper, Mason jar lids and

that carry the standard staples, cater to interesting and diverse residents and quite often have the best bargains.

Jan's shopping list was divided into three categories: Must Have, Could Use and Would Be Nice. I argued that hot dogs and other basic foodstuffs such as Ding Dongs, Cheetos and macaroni and cheese are Must

flavorful than the packaged stuff available at traditional supermarkets. You only have to hit me with a silver spoon a couple of times to get my attention so I gladly accepted the fact that mac and cheese didn't have to come from a box.

Cassano's has sold authentic Italian food since the 1920s and is packed with pasta,

# STRETCHING your money

## HOW CREATIVE SHOPPING CAN MAKE YOUR DOLLAR GO FARTHER by Toby Hatley

glass bottles were carefully folded, rinsed, washed, sterilized and used either until they fell apart or broke. We always had a garden, as home cooked meals and sack lunches were always preferred to eating out.

So I thought myself well prepared for the challenge of stretching a \$100 grocery budget during these days of rapidly increasing food prices and \$4 a gallon gas. First things first, though. You can't go shopping without a list and the best person to make a list is my wife Jan. Well organized, efficient and precise she believes planning is essential to a full life and that leaving things to chance only applies to casinos and golf courses.

Jan's upbringing is also quite different from mine. I was born with a tin spoon in my mouth; she's used to a bit more polish – sterling shall we say? She looks at me with pity when I ask whether a plastic bag can be washed and reused or when I instinctively migrate toward the store brand goods in our local supermarket.

But we do agree on a few fundamentals despite the clear cultural and philosophical differences about how, where and on what money should be spent. You have to read a book before judging its cover, and well-lit, glitzy grocery stores with soothing music, free samples and espresso machines may be convenient and comfortable but lack a certain atmosphere that's necessary for creative and money saving shopping. Spokane has several excellent small markets

Haves. More pitying looks from my wife as she created an entirely new column entitled Would Be Nice for Toby.

Our neighborhood grocery near our downtown loft gave us a baseline. The bill was just under \$100 and included all of the necessities from our list, save for a 40 oz. bottle of Pabst which fell victim to cat food. My pets always ate table scraps – Jan's silver spoon kitty does not.

Sonnenberg's Market and Deli was next. This East Central store has an atmosphere and personality matching the neighborhood's diversity. All of the basic items on our list were available and in many cases cheaper than our store. But meat is king at Sonnenberg's. Ten people swarmed behind the old fashioned butcher's counter grinding, cutting, sawing, weighing and wrapping T-bones, chucks, flanks and skirts for a long line of eager but patient customers. You can't beat the prices and the quality also meets my wife's high standards, although she thought the Oxtails were a little off at \$3.99 a pound so they stayed next to the ground pork display sculpted into a pig and sporting a pair of Ray-Bans.

Going straight to the freezer in Cassano's Grocery, a few blocks away, Jan pulled out a couple of packages of tortellini and calmly explained that at \$8.00 a pound this ring shaped pasta filled with Parmesan cheese made from owner Carl Nacarrato's own recipe was less expensive and certainly far more

pecorino, polenta and porcinis – everything for an inexpensive yet sumptuous meal. Cassano's also stocks traditional Italian meats, wines, sweets and olive oils many of which were added to our basket and did not blow the budget.

Herbs and spices were the only things left on the list so it was off to among the more exotic, eclectic and inexpensive stores in Spokane: the Oriental Market. The yellow Quonset hut which sits in the middle of the East Trent industrial zone is something special – unfamiliar aromas; items that I'd never heard of and can't pronounce, but I liked the prices!

Eggs? We paid \$2.99 for a dozen at our neighborhood store – quail eggs are \$1.75 at the Oriental Market. Rice is only \$14.50 for 25 pounds; garlic is \$.37 a bulb. We finished filling our list with basil and paprika. \$2.89 bought us three times as much paprika as the traditional stores and basil went for \$5.50/lb compared to almost \$20 a pound elsewhere.

The bottom line: our initial grocery basket total of just under a \$100 stayed the same, but we were able to add a dozen more items and at least that many unanticipated experiences by looking a little deeper into what Spokane has to offer. And my tin spoon sensibilities didn't suffer enormously – although I will have to do more research to see whether there's an Asian, Italian, Russian or German equivalent to Ding Dongs.