

## Being a Soda Jerk was hard work

Many of you probably do not know the definition of a **soda jerk**. Where did that term originate? And what did they do?

Apparently the term “**soda jerk**” came from **jerking** the draft arms on old fashioned drugstore fountains. The old fountains not only had numerous syrups such as lemon, root beer, cherry, creme, vanilla, and simple syrup (sugar water, the sweetener), but then there were draft arms for either plain water or carbonated water, which was added after the ice and the syrups. A stir with a long spoon and the soda was ready for the customer.

Most people living in the 1900’s – 1960’s who wanted ice cream or sodas came into drugstores where they had soda fountains. The **soda jerk** could make all kinds of sodas, as well as limeades and lemonades, milkshakes, malts, ice cream sundaes and banana splits, to name a few.

Here is an interesting anecdote about **sundaes**. **Apparently in years past, a great handmade ice cream soda, --the epitome of the soda jerk art—is so good it’s sinful which is why certain religious groups forbade them to be consumed on the Lord’s Day. This is how the sundae, an ice cream soda without the soda, was born.**

Source: Ben & Jerry’s Homemade Inc.

You may wonder how hard it can be to make a soda at the old style soda fountain. You put in a small cup of ice, lightly **squirt** the cherry syrup nozzle, add a couple **squirts** of simple syrup and then use the draft arm for the carbonated water and stir with a long spoon. Walla! You have a cherry soda. Or take a vanilla coke, for example, put in the ice, fill the coke up at the old coke machine and put in just a slight **squirt**

of vanilla syrup into the coke mixture for a vanilla coke. Or you could make a cherry vanilla coke. The combinations are endless.

Now to make a limeade or Lemonade, we would squeeze fresh limes and lemons. So, the mixture would be, the ice, the juice, 2 or 3 squirts of simple syrup, depending how sweet they wanted it, and the water, either plain or carbonated. These fresh drinks were just like you made at home!

To be a really good **soda jerk** you not only have to know about the **jerks** but the **squirts**.

**You see it is also about squirts, how to squirt the nozzle, how hard, how soft, how many times, where, and so forth. I learned that the hard way.**

Well, I can tell you of one of my most embarrassing moments working as a **soda jerk** at my Dad’s drugstore in Safford. This was in the early 1950’s before McDonalds and other fast food joints dotted the land.

This really good looking football player who was a senior came into the drugstore in the early evening. He sat down at the counter and ordered a banana split.

I must confess right off that I had a huge crush on this Safford High School football player, so some of my most vital brain cells were not operating at full throttle. Or my mind was elsewhere and not on banana splits.

I safely retrieved the banana split dish, sliced the banana very efficiently in two long pieces and then put three very nicely arranged scoops of different ice cream flavors in the middle of the dish. All I had to do now was to **squirt** on the whipped cream and top it off with nuts and a maraschino cherry. How hard could that be?

I got out the can of whipping cream and shook it really well, took off the lid and gave the nozzle a hard **squirt**. However, I had failed to keep my mind on my business and the whipped cream nozzle was pointed at my face. Well, you can imagine how I looked. Just top me off with the maraschino cherry and I am good to go!

The customer, my heartthrob, laughed so hard that he fell off the stool. I got my ire up and aimed the nozzle at him ready to give him a good **squirt**, but then I came to my senses. After all, you know the old adage: the customer is always right! If the floor could have opened up I would have been long gone; however, I finally gathered my wits about me. Half of my wits, that is; I had probably **lost** the other half when my brain became mushy from the **squirt** of whipped cream!

Upon proceeding to finish the banana split, I very carefully **squirted** the whipped cream on the top of the ice cream and topped it off with the nuts and a cherry.

When I placed the banana split before him, he gave me a very secretive, mischievous smile. You know, the kind of smile that interprets to "I have something good on you..." Darn him, he probably remembers that experience to this very day. I am so lucky he does not still reside in the Gila Valley.

**I told you it was all about the squirts; oh yes, and jerks, too, even the two-legged kind.**

Following is a picture of the newer soda fountain in Crandalls Pharmacy in the late 1940's, early 1950s. Burdette Crandall the son of Stan who had bought the store in June of 1918, was the sole owner in 1942 after the death of his father.

In 1948-1949 he had the fountain updated, the floor changed, the stools covered and the front of the store remodeled. I think this is a photo close to the time of the change. Note the bouquet of flowers in the front of the store.



Soda Fountain: Soda Jerk: Beth Hawkins

Here is a photo of a very early soda fountain at Crandalls:



Fountain in the 1920's: owner Stan Crandall at extreme right

In this photo you see the draft arms. I am not sure why there are three; however, in the early days, beer was offered at some soda fountains.

This next photo shows the location of Crandall's Pharmacy at 417 Main Street. The building in 2012 is currently vacant. One can see Holladay's Photo Emporium at the end of the block.



Crandall's Pharmacy at 417 Main Street  
1960-1970

For the interested reader I do have a photo of me working behind the counter and also to prove to my grandchildren that I was once a **soda jerk**. The photo is fuzzy, but I am there, nevertheless. I am busy washing dishes. My brother, Curtis is sitting on the end stool. It was probably around 1954.



Crandall's Pharmacy 1954

Burdette and Fern Crandall had ten children. Dad always said he could not have afforded to hire help so he produced his own. Each of us had our opportunity to work at the drugstore. Oftentimes we moaned and complained, but for

the most part it was a good experience which taught us all how to work hard and how important it is to serve people gladly and with a smile. I enjoyed so much the interaction with the townspeople and the other business owners. It was a time when the main street was thriving. There were so many memorable experiences.

If any interested reader has some experiences about Crandall's they would like to share, the writer would appreciate their input. Submitted by  
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