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Liberal Ontario

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On a forum that I frequent, one of the categories is travel.

A question was asked about the most unusual custom you have come across while being in a foreign country.

One person replied that he had lived in Germany for a couple of years and was surprised to find the country basically shuts down on Sunday. No stores are open; in fact, pretty much everything is closed.

He described Sundays in Germany as excruciatingly boring.

There has to be some Germans who wish things were open. Maybe they are so accustomed to it that everyone just keeps with the plan.

That got me thinking about how boring and rigid Ontario used to be.

It wasn't that long ago that Ontario also shut down on Sundays. You could fire a cannonball down the main street of major cities and not hit anything

because there was no one there.

It was finally decided, following the American lead, to start allowing some Sunday shopping. There was some good in this, but at the same time, there was a downside to it.

I was working for a retail corporation in a support role at the time when it was announced we would be opening on Sunday. At first, we were told working Sunday was voluntary.

Of course, the writing was on the wall for that one. We all knew it would become the norm, and for many people, that meant the end of their weekend.

The alcohol business in Ontario was also strict ? to the point of being ridiculous.

There was only one place to buy beer ? The Brewer's Retail ? as it was called at the time. Because of the way things worked, many people thought Brewer's Retail was a government-run organization. But it wasn't. It was a monopoly run by the major brewing companies, which pretty much stopped any other company from selling a beer product if the Brewer's Retail wouldn't let you in.

At the time, there were even regulations about the shape of a bottle, so all Canadian beer came in those older stubby bottles.

Now I can buy beer in my grocery store, and the choice of products is huge compared to the time when you were pretty much limited to Labatt's and Molson's products.

The LCBO was another Ontario horror story from the Dark Ages.

Considering they were selling a legal product, they did it in such a way as to make you feel you were doing something wrong just by entering the store.

You may remember the LCBO stores that had no shelving or products on display. The last version of this nightmare retail outlet

closed not that long ago in Toronto.

You would enter the store, and an angry older man would stare you down from behind a counter.

The choice of products ? and they were very limited choices ? were on a listing on the wall. You had to fill out a form, then walk up to the counter and hand the slip to the angry man.

There was no ?hey, how are you today?? type of banter. It was all business, and you better not say too much while you're in there, or you might be considered some kind of troublemaker.

He would disappear into a secret back room and return with your bottle tightly wrapped in a bag because it was some kind of offence to actually be seen on a public street with a bottle of wine.

When he handed the bottle to you, he would glare at you like you were doing something wrong. That went double for those of us who just turned legal drinking age and wanted something to take to a party.

Thankfully, the LCBO finally decided to try selling its products in a proper retail environment. Now, you have to leave the store carrying your bottle of Jack Daniels openly because they no longer supply bags to hide your shame.

I'm not sure why Ontario was so far behind the times. It was pressure from the public that finally made the province change in many ways. After all, what business is it of the government if you want you go to a shopping mall on a Sunday afternoon?

Sunday in Ontario used to be like a lazy afternoon in Mayberry. I guess there is some good in that, but I would rather have some options.

I don't know what people in Germany do on Sundays for fun, but I also wonder if some of them ever thought it might be time to start exploring some new ideas.