

Ripped off, five bags at a time

I'm an avid tea drinker.

For years now, I've drunk tea instead of coffee. Oh sure, I have the occasional coffee, usually at a restaurant, but not that often. It just doesn't appeal to me anymore, and also plays hell with my acid reflux. So I drink tea.

On top of that, I'm a discriminating tea drinker. I choose my tea with care, and usually purchase decaffeinated tea at that.

For years now, I've been a fan of Twinning teas, more specifically Twinings English Breakfast Tea. (I'm equally smitten by Twinings Irish Breakfast Tea, but it's not available in decaffeinated, so I usually drink it earlier in the day.)

The Irish blend is more full-bodied than it's English counterpart, but I enjoy them both.

So, having a bit of a passion for these two teas, I was a tad worried last fall when I saw them both priced to clear at my local A&P store.

Knowing tea doesn't exactly go bad, I stocked up on both blends, to make sure I was covered until I found out what was happening to my beloved Twinning tea blends.

A couple weeks ago, I was happy to see there was another load of Twinings teas occupying that familiar place on the shelf.

It was perfect timing, as I had just finished my last box of English Breakfast, and my Irish Breakfast was running pretty low too.

I grabbed one of the newly-packaged boxes and tossed it in the cart. I was pleased they had kept the same colours— red for English and green for Irish.

The little individual tea bag packets had undergone a change too, making them a bit more ornate.

I got home, boiled the kettle and plopped one in the pot, letting it steep while I watched it transform the water to that golden brown colour. I read the new box. It seemed the same— same words, same ingredients, same tea.

At that time, I would have carried on like all the rest of my tea-drinking colleagues, feeling secure in the knowledge that Twinings tea had simply undergone a packaging redesign.

Except for one small thing. I looked at my

Ted Brown



box of Irish Breakfast, still in the original packaging.

"Contents: 25 bags." caught my eye.

As the English Breakfast sat beside it on the shelf, my eyes naturally roamed in that direction.

"Contents: 20 bags"

I was being ripped off by 20 percent, every time I purchased a box of Twinings. Total package weight has gone from 50 grams to 40.

I was annoyed beyond words. My longtime favourite tea company was putting the screws to its consumers, ripping them off for five bags a box.

I did some quick math— a box a week, equals 260 tea bags a year that I'm NOT getting like I used to. At the new quantity (20) that's 12 and a half more boxes of tea that I'm buying in a year. At \$3.29 a box, it works out to a bit more than \$41 a year the Twinings company gets from me, simply by cutting back by five tea bags per box.

And I'm only one consumer!

I guess it's the old story of supply and demand. Whatever the market will bear, the company will extract from the consumer.

I'll probably still buy the tea, but a little less freely, simply out of principal, and limit myself to a box a week, cutting back that five bags a week.

It's the same old story, we pay more to get less.

But Twinings certainly ain't the first to do it.

Case in point:

Remember the size of the original Big Mac?

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

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