

What Was it Like Selling Real Estate in 1977?

When I came back from college and became a full time agent in September of 1977, the town was very different. There were only two high schools, Naples and Lely, and Lely was brand new.

There was no I-75; we used US 41 for all points northward. We did have a two-lane US 41 going to Miami and the two-lane Alligator Alley to Ft. Lauderdale, which would later be expanded and become I-75.

There was no SWFL International Airport. Naples Airport had the famous Naples/PBA Airlines, with their fleet of aircraft left over from WWII. Most of the flights went to Tampa or Miami, where you would connect with jet flights to other locations.

Pelican Bay was still mostly a forest, although some infrastructure work had begun. But sales would not start until 1978.

The first gated country club communities were just starting to appear. I believe that Wyndemere was the very first one in the area, and Quail Creek was not far behind.

Coastland Mall had just opened in Naples. Previously, shoppers often went to Edison Mall in Ft. Myers, if they couldn't afford 3rd Street, or if they wanted a larger selection of clothing than what the small boutique stores on 5th Avenue offered.

NABOR consisted of about 550 members, as compared to the 6,000 plus that we now have. Real estate was simple. Contracts were short.

The attorneys and title companies used abstracts to research the title to properties. An abstract was a collection of several hundred pages that told the total history of a particular property. Most real estate attorneys had dozens of abstracts stacked in their office at any given time. Just be glad that we don't use those any more, they were a pain.

Anyway, you get the idea. We were slightly larger than Mayberry, and we probably did have a few Barney Fife's on the police force.

Real estate methods were equally primitive. When you wanted to show properties, you called each listing office and reserved the key. You would then drive to each office and pick up the key, meet your buyer and show the properties, then return each key to the individual offices. Thankfully, gas was much cheaper then.

Just as it is now, we often had buyers or sellers who were out of town while negotiating a contract. Counteroffers were handled by telegram. Since there was a charge for each word, you tried to keep the telegrams as short as possible, while identifying the property and the price or other short changes to the contract.

The buyer or seller would send the telegram, then we would be notified and would drive to the Western Union office on Davis Blvd. to pick it up. You might repeat this process 3 or 4 times during a contract negotiation, until you hopefully had a meeting of the minds.

Perhaps the most important thing of all was the MLS system, and it was very manual.

Each agent maintained their own small 3 ring notebooks with the listings. 2 or 3 times a week, a MLS courier from the Board would deliver a packet for each agent---it had new listings, with each one on a half-page piece of paper. The info was on the front and the photo was on the back.

Most of kept our 3 ring notebooks organized mostly by area. So we might have a section for “West of 41 houses”, and another divider for condos in that same area. We all had dividers for various land, because selling lots and acreage was a major part of the overall real estate market.

The packet from the Board included a list of changed listings---solds, expireds, withdrawns, price changes, etc.

- If it was a price change, you just wrote the new price on the listing sheet.
- If it was sold, expired, or withdrawn, you wrote on it and moved the page to another section of the notebook.

Most of us did not keep every single listing in the county; it just was too much. We might have two notebooks that we used, one for actives in the areas that we wanted to work, and the second one for the withdrawn, expired, etc.

Most companies would keep a master set of notebooks that were more complete than the agent versions. And most importantly, the company kept years and years of sold listings, by neighborhood, in small file drawers. So if you had a potential listing in the Moorings, you would grab the 10 or 20 most recent sales from the file, work up a simple CMA, and then return the sold sheets to the file.

But things began to change.

The Board went for a new MLS system with dot matrix printers. You could print out a listing, without photos, in about 2 minutes. They were very slow.

In conjunction with the system, we each had a MLS book. A new complete book, with every listing in the Board, would be delivered every 2 weeks.

In the off week, a much smaller book of only the changed listings would be delivered. The print in the books was crude, the photo of each listing was even worse, and very tiny. The photos were still in black and white; that had not changed. There was a Board photographer who took a photo of every new listing, and that's the one that would appear in the book.

For the companies and the agents, most of our property advertising was classified with no photos, but if we did any display ads, we would use a Polaroid camera to make a photo.

Since then, we've been through half a dozen or more MLS computer systems at NABOR. Some of you remember that we even developed our own at one point, Sunshine MLS. But eventually, when we had a chance to create what is basically a regional system.

We've come a long way, baby!