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The Inconvenience of Convenience

Have you heard the latest craze for your aging parents? MEDCottages! They are little pop-up rooms that you put in your backyard to house your “loved ones.” I think they call ‘em MEDCottages because it doesn’t sound right to say “Grandma is sleeping out back in the tool shed.” Also, I’m guessing they used the word “med” in the product name because it sounds like “medicine,” which sounds like it might be good for you, or maybe it’s that you’ll need to pop a med (like Valium) to live in there. I’m wondering if they have different sizes: the small Medicine Cottage, or the more spacious Medicine Cabinet???

These MEDCottages are supposed to be a convenient way to deal with your elderly parents, but I think they’re really giving us baby boomers a chance to get revenge on them for making us share a room with our sister growing up.

Okay, maybe the med cottages are fine (health care people agree?), but how come some things that are done for our “convenience” seem so wrong (and funny!)? Take my grocery store for example: they bend over backwards to be convenient. Every employee I walk past asks if they can help me. *Every employee!* I tell the first few

people that I’m fine. . . but by the fifth person, I’m not so fine. And if I do ask where an item is, they don’t point to it, *they take me there!* I’ve never been married, so I’m worried that the only person who will ever offer to walk me down the aisle is the produce manager at Kroger! They’re very helpful all the way up until the hardest part: check out. Then I’m supposed to “do it myself” because that’s more convenient; don’t bother the checker, she’s busy working the grocery escort service. But it’s not convenient to scan my own groceries, because I can’t calculate produce. Of course when I get a real checker they, again, try to make things way too convenient. They *always* ask, regardless of what I bought, if I need help to my car. That’s nice, but I bought an apple—I think I can handle it.

I was just in Mexico, and their car rentals are very convenient—they also sell beer! Hmm, perhaps it’s a ploy to make you buy the extra insurance?

We’ve got convenient TV stations that we really don’t need. My dad watches the Weather Channel so he knows the temperature everywhere in the county, yet he only goes outside about once a week. This isn’t information he needs, unless his roof opens up. . . and as far as I know, he’s not planning on flying Southwest.

And when a company implements a new program “for your convenience,” you can bet it’s going to be inconvenient. For a

brief period, my former bank had a deal where I could avoid a service fee if I had direct deposit (I can’t because I’m self-employed) or if I only used the ATM machine. . . in other words, it cost me money to talk to the teller. I’m not sure what it cost to just smile or wave at her, but I guess the bank reasoned that if fewer people went to the teller, then it would be more convenient for customers because it would cut down on long lines. And it did cut down the long lines. . . because people like me stopped banking there. Wow, things have changed. Five years ago I could get a \$300,000 mortgage loan by flashing my library card, now it’s two bucks to chat. That same bank also had a convenient savings plan called “Keep the Change” in which they’d round up your purchases to the nearest dollar, and put that money into your savings account. Cool. By the end of the year, I had saved up enough money to talk to the teller TWICE.

And sometimes we have convenient signs telling us things that, well, go without saying. I saw one at the airport kindly explaining that “All animals must be kept in carriers except service animals.” All I can think of is the poor seeing-eye dog trying desperately to do his job from a crate! Forget the dog, how about someone telling the guy who brought his pet snake to the DMV that he’s not allowed to do that. I know about the snake because I was sitting next to him last week. If the snake had been a dog, the guy would’ve been tossed out. A friend suggested that maybe it’s a seeing-

eye snake, which would explain why it wasn't in a crate.

We baby boomers actually invented some very convenient things—like identity theft! Remember back in the day when we used our Social Security numbers as our ID numbers? How convenient was that for criminals! We'd put it right there on our checks next to our address and vacation dates. The only way we could've made it more convenient was if we drew a map to where we hid the house key. And in college we wrote our SS# on *everything*: checks, applications, tests. . . there are janitors still living off the numbers they harvested from the trash after exam week.

Convenience is spilling over into every industry. As I'm writing this, I got some great news about a new convenient program from

my health insurance company. If I want to pay the monthly premium over the phone, then there will be a \$15 "convenience fee" for talking to their customer service rep. The bank marketing guys must have gotten jobs in health care.

Being "green" by recycling isn't super convenient, though the people in charge of making us "green," whoever they are, are trying harder. They're now coming out with "green burials." That's right, green burials: being buried without a casket. What do the Pall Bearers hold on to??? Actually "buried without a casket" sounds like the way I felt during a really bad day at my last job when I was snowed under with paperwork. But what it really means is that you get the exact burial you'd get if you were the target of a Mafia hit. And you don't even have to be Italian!

I don't know if all of this "convenience" is really helping us buy our groceries, pay our health care premiums, save the planet, bank better or whatever. But I do think they are giving us a lot more things to laugh about, which should, in turn, help alleviate the stress they're causing us. How convenient!



With gas prices over 4 bucks a gallon, I did something very convenient and bought a motorcycle!



Jan McInnis is a comedian and professional speaker who has shared her customized humor keynotes with thousands of associations and corporations. She is also the author of "Finding the Funny FAST; How To Create Quick Humor To Connect With Clients, Coworkers And Crowds," and she was featured in the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post for her clean humor. Jan and Kent Rader are performing The Baby Boomer Comedy Show in theaters around the country. (www.BabyBoomerComedyShow.com) From a health care client: "Jan McInnis was the keynote speaker at our conference in Anaheim. She did a fantastic job! Not only did we laugh heartily, but we gained insight into how to use humor to improve communication, particularly in the workplace. I heartily recommend Jan and would enjoy having her present to our organization again in the future."

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