



# The Keynote Chronicle

*Humor News from Jan McInnis  
Co-Star of the Baby Boomer Comedy Show*



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## White Elephants, Cuss Boxes and Cheating Jerry Lewis!



### White Elephant Sales ROCK!

Have you ever had a heavy, soaking-wet sponge hurled at your face WITH YOUR CONSENT? Well, I have! Back in the 60s, backyard summer carnivals were all the rage, and as kids in elementary school it was one way we could make some money. My older sister Debbie, my brother Dan, our friend Susan, and I used to put one on every summer, and we drew in big neighborhood crowds. Each of us had our stations at the carnivals with Susan manning the haunted house, Debbie telling fortunes, Dan running the penny toss, and I sacrificed my face for the wet sponge toss.

It's exactly what it sounds like: people paid a nickel to toss/hurl a wet sponge at my face. Stupid, I know (now)! In addition to these duties, we all also pitched in working the baked goods sale and the white elephant sale, which was crap our neighbors donated—anything from furniture to clothes. The white elephant sale got interesting one year when a friend of mine gave us some stuff from her house without her mom's permission. The most memorable item was a wooden box of her mom's with the words "Cuss Box" carved on the side. You were supposed to put in money every time you cussed, and judging by the amount in there, apparently her mom swore like a sailor on leave. We gave her the money that was in there and then displayed the Cuss Box prominently at our white elephant sale table. Her mom arrived early and paid big bucks to get it back before the neighbors saw. I'm also pretty sure when my friend got home, her mom added a lot more money to that box.

Our mom and Susan's mom always attended. They showed up to play the carnival games and buy back the brownies they had baked for the bake sale. I think Susan's mom may have even had to pay the admission fee to get into her own backyard. There were no free rides at our carnivals!

As we prepared for our third annual summer carnival, we hit a snag. We had gone to five or six houses asking for donations for the white elephant sale, and no one was giving up their loot. This was a problem: while reading palms and tossing pennies at floating trays in a kiddie pool brought in a few bucks, the neighbors buying each other's crap was the REAL money maker.

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## Spotlight

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**The Work Lady** by Jan McInnis, Comedian



Kids today have all sorts of things we didn't have -- like the "No Child Left Behind" policy. When I went to school, that was the motto for the school bus driver! ©2015

As we approached the seventh house Susan pulled us over for a caucus. She said that she knew how to get the donated items, so we should follow her lead.

At the very next house, Susan gave the woman a pitch for donating items. The woman started to brush us off and close the door when Susan pulled out the big guns. She blurted out, "Our carnival is for muscular dystrophy!" What?! I wasn't 100% sure what muscular dystrophy was besides a telethon run by comedian Jerry Lewis that my parents watched on Labor Day, but apparently the lady of the house DID know because she immediately lit up, ran off, and returned with some GREAT loot—we're talking better-than-a-Cuss-Box loot.

Whatever those magic words "muscular dystrophy" implied, I didn't care. We used them on every single house, and it worked every single time. Our white elephant sale that year ROCKED. We had a HUGE turnout from the neighborhood, and we made a BUNDLE. (FYI, in 1960s dollars a "bundle" equaled about \$35.)

That night we sat in Susan's basement bouncing off the walls with excitement. This was a huge take for our summer carnival. I don't think we'd ever broken the \$30 mark. And just as Susan began to divide up our bounty, her mom came down the steps. She said, "Didn't you all tell people this was a carnival for muscular dystrophy?" Without even looking up from her counting, Susan said, "Yeah." Her mom asked, "Well, aren't you going to mail that money to them?" Susan brushed off her mom with a "no" and kept counting. With that, her mom reached down, grabbed the whole wad of bills, and said, "Oh yes you are. I'm mailing it tomorrow." And then she was gone. We all glared at Susan. What do you mean muscular dystrophy is an actual thing and we can't just say it to help with OUR donations? Her brilliant plan had just cost us our summer earnings. . . I was hit in the face with soaking wet sponges all day for NOTHING! That evening went from a high to a low pretty quickly.

We eventually forgave Susan and continued our carnival-hosting tradition for the next few summers, but we never raised anything close to muscular dystrophy money.

I tell you this story, not to brag that we almost scammed Jerry Lewis out of \$35, but to remind us all that our words matter. In the last 18 months, when we could all probably fill a Cuss Box or two (or three if you're involved with conferences), we need to remember that the words we use in every single interaction, small or large, can make or ruin someone's day.

My advice as we travel through the next few months of the unknown: fill your brain with nice thoughts, your mouth with kind words, and keep your Cuss Box semi-empty.

*Jan has shared her customized humor keynotes with thousands of associations and corporations, and she is the author of 2 books: "Finding the Funny Fast" and "Convention Comedian." She was also featured in the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, & the Huffington Post.*

*From a recent client "I booked Jan McInnis as a closing keynote for school transportation officials and she did not disappoint! She came out of the gate on fire and she really energized the crowd with her humor and comic wit! It was a blast! I would absolutely recommend Jan to be your next keynote speaker!"*

***BABY BOOMER COMEDY SHOW:** Jan co-stars with Kent Rader in this hilarious clean comedy show. Check out their schedule and book them for your event. at [BabyBoomerComedyShow.com](http://BabyBoomerComedyShow.com)*

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## About Jan . . .

Jan McInnis has written for Jay Leno's Tonight Show monologue as well as many other people, places, and groups – radio, TV, syndicated cartoon strips, and even guests on the Jerry Springer show (her parents are proud). For over 26+ years she's traveled country as a keynote speaker and comedian sharing her unique and practical tips on what business leaders can learn from comedians (no, it's not all about telling jokes). Her latest keynote "Flourishing From Failure – Managing Mistakes Like a Comedian" is coming soon to a microlearning course near you! She can be reached at [www.TheWorkLady.com](http://www.TheWorkLady.com), or [Jan@TheWorkLady.com](mailto:Jan@TheWorkLady.com)