

Checkin' Out

OK, I'll admit it, I seldom go to the grocery store. It's taken a lot of whining over the years, but I've convinced Mrs. Dave that for one reason or another I would not be helpful nor appreciated in a food market. On the few occasions she has forced me to accompany her, I've sulked the whole time, murmuring under my breath, "Middle-aged Irish men do NOT go into supermarkets!" (That's "Irish" pronounced in one long, withering syllable.)

Turns out I got hungry the week my beloved had a brand new titanium knee attached to her leg. So when the hospital's cafeteria staff and I parted company (Day 2), off I went to my local Price Chopper with hat in hand. I stood in the supermarket's dreary parking lot that night, fear almost getting the better of me. The bright red neon sign seemed to teeter toward me, mocking me in my discomfort. But I swallowed hard and shuffled on toward the store and to my fate.

Well! Things had changed since 1978! Right out front were these little go-karts that looked like fun, so I jumped on, pulled the plug and zoomed through the automatic doors, right into a pile of Golden Sunrise Grapefruits. Sheepishly backing away from the mess, as an older woman rolled her eyes and pushed her cart off in the opposite direction, I lit out for the far wall of meats and crackers. I can survive a whole week on baloney and crackers. In college, I once did it for a month. Luckily, at this stage of my life, I can afford to have some blocks of cheese, too, and maybe a little bit of peanut butter for dessert.

With such an efficient menu and a scooter to zip me down one aisle and another, my shopping didn't take very long. I was quite taken with the little vehicle, and had thoughts of buying one for use around the back yard. I'd even renamed it Old Scout, and thought it might be easy to fix up a

tiny stall in the garage for the little feller. When I pulled up at the Express Checkout on my trusty steed, the clerk scrunched up her face in disapproval as I hopped off Scout and bounced my victuals onto the conveyor belt. The young woman laboriously counted up the groceries.

"Sorry, Sir. You've got thirteen items."

"Yep," I said.

"You're allowed only ten."

Confused, I replied, "But I can pay for all thirteen.

Look, I've got enough money in my wallet."

"That's not the point, Sir. You can only have ten items here."

"What the hell kinda tradin' post lets you buy only TEN ITEMS!" I said, beginning to get a little hot.

"You don't ..." she began, but I interrupted her.

"OK, OK!" I said, starting to get loud. "Take back your damned donuts, I'll stop at the Dunkin'.

Here's your olives in water, and the marmalade I hoped would brighten my breakfast on the trail. But I'm keeping the damned baloney and the Ritz crackers."

"Yes, Sir," she replied, somewhat peevishly I thought.

It would be a quiet day in Purgatory, as Sister Mary Kemosabe used to say, before I'd darken this automatic doorway again. But on second thought, the poor lass was only doing her job, making sure that everyone in town got their fair share of groceries, ten items at a time. So, I let bygones lie sleeping and I gave her a winning smile.

"I'm sorry if there was any confusion," she said, handing me my change.

"Don't ya worry yur purty little head about it, Missy" I said in my best John Wayne accent. And brimming with cowboy savoir faire, I climbed back on Old Scout and rode off into the sunset. A pile of Golden Sunset Apples, I think they were. What a mess.



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