

A Matter Of Convenience

by Michael J. Solender

“WHAT ABOUT TRANSFERS?”

I ask the pharmacist, a perky redhead with a ponytail swaying in perfect rhythm to a MUZAK instrumental of Norwegian Wood. The faux-Beatles version flows through the low fidelity speakers at Walgreens unrecognizable to all but the most ardent Lennon and McCartney fans.

“Excuse me?” she says, looking puzzled.

I pointed to her chest where her name in boxy letters is centered on a huge piece of plastic. It is sandwiched in between the question: “Transfers? Ask me!”

“Transfers. Your badge says ask you about transfers. Can you get me a job in Miami?” Being a weekend smartass flirt is one of the few pleasures suburbia and middle age affords me.

The light bulb goes off and she breaks a wide grin. She seems genuinely pleased that I'm not fixated on her chest for nefarious reasons. “Oh,” she says, hanging on that one syllable making it sound as if she is starting a clunker with a dying battery, “No one ever asks me. It means prescriptions, we can take a prescription filled somewhere else and move it here to this pharmacy where it's more convenient.”

Every retailer within my five mile containment zone is consumed with my convenience. It is incredibly comforting, this suburban fixation with access, proximity, speed, and ubiquity. If Marx were hanging out in American subdivisions today, he would likely say that convenience is the opiate of the masses.

“I see. Ah, I don't actually have a prescription to transfer but I do have one that needs filling for my daughter,” I shift back into my deferential, geeky dad mode and signal to the pharmacist I'll wait, pointing to the four plastic retro chairs arranged in a small square on a patch of chipped linoleum next to the pharmacist's high wall.

“OK, shouldn't be long,” she says, slipping on cheaters and eyeballing the scrawl by Dr. Lindbladt, an antibiotic cream for a

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nasty gash my daughter got from an out of position mid-fielder trying to reclaim position on the soccer pitch.

Noting neatly stacked rows of incontinence pads, hemorrhoid wipes and fiber therapy bottles that surround me, I rethink my decision to wait. A minor respite I think from an endless list of weekend honey-dos, my Walgreens detention is a minor distraction on a Saturday filled with inconveniences in spite of my area retailer's best efforts.

My mindless daydreaming is interrupted by the partially muted exchange between the pharmacy technician minding the drive-thru and a customer that I can't see but can clearly hear is unhappy about something.

"I'm sorry m'am we can't take them back once you've left the premises," I hear the technician telling a woman, I presume a senior.

Seniors are ubiquitous at Walgreens. They come in clutching circulars that market cans of tuna and other senior staples like apple sauce and caramel chews. The notion that drug stores even sell food is lost on me.

Coolers of beer and soda I understand. Chex Mix, baked beans and Triscuits hardly qualify as pantry necessities to me.

Yet the few times I am forced to stop for sun block or batteries, the shuttle-bus for Sunrise Assisted Living is sprawled out across three handicapped spaces in the parking lot. Blue haired women, in a five to one ratio with aged gents wearing toast colored sweaters, cram the aisles clutching walkers with faded tennis balls on the rear legs. Each of them pushes a buggy filled with mountains of chocolate and dozens of tiny, single serve cans of ravioli.

"No m'am we can't exchange these pills for new ones." I hear the pharmacist, the same one who I am waiting on for my prescription, talking to the drive-thru lady. I'm starting to get annoyed.

My quick run to the drugstore is now approaching one hour. OK, I did stop at the sporting goods store for golf balls but that was fifteen minutes, tops. I'm coming up on forty-five minutes at Walgreens and I start to pace in front of the glass partition, hoping the pharmacist will see and take pity on me.

She finishes up with the drive-thru lady, walks out from around the counter, my daughter's prescription in her hand.

"I am so sorry sir, unfortunately we are out of this cream," she pauses gauging my reaction which judging by the slack I feel in my own jaw, must be one of incredulity. She continues, "I can call it in over at Woodlawn, I've checked and they have it. It can be waiting for you when you get there."

"Woodlawn?" The Woodlawn Walgreens wasn't even three miles, but in a super busy strip mall that at this time on a Saturday would be jammed. "If that's my only option, OK, I understand," I was too frustrated to be a smartass. I took the prescription and headed towards the door.

I really just wanted to go home and then hit the range to bang a few balls. My weekend golf these days mainly consisted of an hour at the driving range. Five hour rounds on the course simply took too much of my precious time.

There was no way I could walk in the house with golf balls for me and no prescription for my daughter, my wife would be most displeased.

Off to the Woodlawn Walgreens I went. Lord knows what inconveniences await me there.

