

Head Case

Written by Donald Wright
Tuesday, 15 September 2020 13:03



Tuesday was partly sunny in the low 80s. On the two preceding days I'd talked myself out of running, using the usual excuses—recurring lumbago, high pollen count, unfavorable dew point, you name it—so by mid-afternoon I was intent on getting in a run.

Having two prescriptions to pick up at Walgreen's, two miles away—ones to keep my blood pressure and serum cholesterol within a range considered "normal" (making these the only aspects of my being falling anywhere close to such limits)—I decided I could run to the pharmacy, fetch them, and run home. I wrapped my credit card and two Colgate coupons (in the event I found toothpaste on sale) in a plastic bag and took off. It was a nice jog over, light breeze, birds flitting by. Once in the store I snagged the toothpaste (\$2 off each), got my prescriptions, paid with my card, and walked outside.

To reduce what I would be carrying on my run home, I went to the trash receptacle near Walgreen's front door, placed my credit card on top of it, tore off the packaging from the drugs and the toothpaste, and tossed the wad of paper and cardboard through the opening in the top. I put the medicine vials and toothpaste tubes into my plastic bag, but when I went to add my credit card, it wasn't there. I'd apparently tossed it into the bin with the wrappings.

When I peered in through the receptacle's openings, I could barely see what was inside, and when I reached in with my arm, I couldn't feel anything like a credit card. Then, I tested to see if I could get my head through the opening, so maybe I could see inside and, with some turning and negotiating, I got it in. It was still pretty dark in there, and after looking around, I

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couldn't see the card, while the position was quickly becoming uncomfortable. But when I tried to remove my head, I couldn't. I suddenly realized I was standing in front of Walgreen's wearing sweaty running shorts, bent at the waist with my head stuck in a trash bin.

I had a short moment of wondering if they'd made the receptacle openings like Chinese handcuffs, easy to slip fingers into but next to impossible to get them out of, and more difficult the more you tried. As I worked to remove my head, the edges of the opening cut into my forehead and the back of my head; it felt like I might be bleeding. And so involved was I in working to extract my head that I didn't pay attention to the people coming or going through Walgreen's front door. Finally, after what must have been two minutes, I turned my head almost sideways, which must have been the position I'd used to get it through the opening in the first place, and extracted it.

The rest is anticlimactic: I went inside and told an incredulous staffer my story. He shook his head, got a key, walked outside, and unlocked the trash bin. As he walked back inside to attend to customers at the cash register, I reached in and, fairly quickly, located the credit card, clinging to one side of the plastic bag lining the bin. I extracted it, closed the bin, and walked back inside to thank the clerk, waving the card at him.

"You get all sorts of people in here, don't you?" I asked. "Wonder what the police would have said had they spotted me with my head stuck inside your trash can?"

"They probably would've figured you were just another drug addict," he laughed.

I wrapped the card with my purchases and ran home. When I arrived and looked into the bathroom mirror, I found abrasions on my forehead and could feel worse ones on the back of my head at the hairline. After showering and getting dressed, I spent a good part of the evening wondering if somewhere a woman was saying to her husband over the dinner table, "You won't believe what I saw when I went into Walgreen's this evening. There was this old guy with his head stuck in the trash bin."

Her husband would have responded, "C'mon, Mabel, you gotta stop makin' up stories like that!"