

Senior Momentum: A Series of Situations

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Abuse a la carte

The Full Meals and the *Specials* are glaring, dramatic and can be horrifying.

But what about those daily *small bites* – what I call the “*a la carte*” menu for elder abuse – little insensitivities, that happen all around us, maybe innocuous, but often painful?

Here’s one example (I see it often) that bank accommodation – you know, handicap sign by the chair, low counter where theoretically one can sit and do bank business comfortably?

The scenarios are amazing! Loud comments, rolling eyes, waits without being acknowledged. This “accommodation” can be easily distorted into humiliation, embarrassment and nervous fumbling.

I’ve witnessed many examples (and lived a few!) where a perfectly composed person is methodically reduced to a nervous wreck – with all eyes re-directed onto an errand-turned-predicament.

Have institutions merely complied with logo and set-up, but really view it as a big annoyance?

Are clerks and service folks trained to automatically assume anyone grey-haired and walking slowly is hard-of-hearing and must be addressed at full volume and in baby talk? Hello?

A recent personal experience went like this: I entered a bank using a cane, sat at the handicap window, and waited. . . Eventually, a woman in a big hurry zoomed by, then back-tracked, and asked me (loudly) if I wanted something! Yeah? Do bank business?

She replied again loudly: Is someone holding you a place in line “over there” (pointing across the room)? No. Well, can’t you step to the window? No, I’m seated here, and am waiting my turn.

Well, there’s no one at this window! Well, can there be?

Before moving on, she asked a teller: Can you take care of her if you get a chance?

(Even though the “window” is fully equipped, service there often consists of a teller running back and forth with your materials, processing your transaction away from your line of sight, then asking you to step to another window anyway to run your ID – even ‘tho there is a slide unit sitting right there!)

Despite unnecessary attention called to me, teller explanations to others, and loud comments about my transaction.... it finally gets done.

I can take care of myself in situations like that. I ask for lower voices and

respect for confidentiality. But, not all elders can or will bite back like I do. Many just take this kind of treatment on the chin. The list goes on and on: counting out change with shaking hands, struggling with electronics at check-out

WHY do these activities often invite vocal impatience, rude comment, and impudent suggestions from some insensitive younger persons? Do any of them have grandparents? More important, do they treat them that way? Are they just clueless?

I’ve watched elders reduced to humiliation and tears when made the focus of unnecessary attention; watched one frustrated woman simply walk away from her purchase, totally embarrassed.

An old gentleman ran out of a store; I found him sitting on the curb weeping. He’d handed the clerk a dollar coin instead of a quarter. The clerk laughed and proceeded to “educate” him, and questioned why he couldn’t see the difference.

Most elders don’t want to be mini-spectacles as they move through everyday life dealing with the realities of physical limitation. When I experience or witness one of these small indiscretions, I vow to raise my own awareness. When reasonable, I step in and advocate.

Of course, there are many positive examples, and I think it is too easy to languish in those (especially if they are what is closest to our experience and our circle)... and too often, we simply reminisce and wonder what has become of the structures, which assumed and fostered more respect and helpfulness for our elders.

We are outraged when we hear of gross physical, emotional, and mental abuse done to the old, weak, helpless. We should be. We should intervene, contact authorities, and do what we can to end such behavior.

In our everyday path *small* outrages are happening right in front of our eyes, which I believe are indicative of a coarse and insensitive societal shift.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR...from our grateful Staff & Residents



Adult Storytelling



truth presented in an intimate style.

Cathryn is a professional storyteller from Healdsburg who has been collecting and telling traditional tales around the world since the 1980s. Forestville musician Steve has performed with many groups including the **Hot Curtain Review** and is known throughout the county as **The Piano Doctor**. They have known each other for 30 years and will perform together for the first time **January 23rd, 7 - 9 pm at the Guerneville Community Church, 14520 Armstrong Woods Rd.**

It is not stand-up comedy! The stories are ancient and thought provoking, as well as entertaining. On **January 23rd**, storyteller Cathryn Fairlee and musician Steve Pryputniewicz will perform **Circle of Story**. Together they will present stories from Mexico, China, Persia, Ireland, Kenya, England, Germany and the U.S accompanied on piano, guitar and drum. Adult storytelling is drama and humor and

Refreshments will be served. After the performance, discussion about the role and meaning of the tales in their culture are encouraged. **Make reservations by January 20th to save \$2 and the performer’s peace of mind!** Cfair@monitor.net or 707-433-2297 or at **River Reader Bookstore, 16355 Main St. Guerneville.** RSVP by January 20th, only \$10. At the door, \$12.

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