

Getting Old – Forget That

By S. Mel le Katte

A friend told me that as long as I was unemployed, I should write a book. After all, it’s what career criminals/politicians do, sitting around all those months in jail/out of office. She said I could write about getting old and how life sucks. Well, I’m not getting old, and life doesn’t suck, so forget that.

But she might be right about the first part– I could write. I could tell everyone about all the wisdom I’ve accumulated over the years, and how tough it was to live through all that crap that teaches you stuff. About the girl who broke my heart, my first car that never ran, how far I had to walk in the snow, blah, blah, blah. One of my earliest memories is of old people telling me how hard they had it when they were young, so forget that.

I could write about my profession, computer science, and about all the changes I’ve seen as the industry has grown up: the rise and decline of IBM, the creation of home computing and the internet, the rise and impending decline of Microsoft, the looming emergence of Linux. But my career basically ended when the tech-bubble burst and has been dying a lingering death ever since. So forget that.

I could talk about my search for someone to represent my particular, individual, political beliefs. How Democrats cannot seem to satisfy my need for order, and Republicans cannot meet my standards for tolerance. Which seems to make me intolerant, so forget that.

I could write about the great loves of my life and how each affected me, how each added to the being that I have become and that I will be. How each took something from me to add to themselves and gave more in return to keep within me. How the sharing of life is true magic. But I’m getting divorced, so forget that.

I could write about the passage of time and the changes that it brings, how, over time, one comes to realize that they shouldn’t have pursued their chosen profession with all its challenges and rewards and costs, but should instead have been either a rock star or a secret agent. Yeah, well, too late now. Forget that.

The biggest problem has been choosing a topic about which I have something to say, that someone else is going to want to read. Every life is filled with experience, learning, suffering, joy-- but how much of that is interesting to someone else, whose pain and happiness are different? Does anyone really want to hear about my personal, spiritual journey? Does anyone care that I should have married some girl, but didn’t? That I wrote some great piece of software that helped change the technological world? That I am blessed with friends of extraordinary wit and intelligence and compassion? That I am now descending into physical degeneration and mental instability and emotional dependence? I can hear the thought reactions of everyone out there:

Forget that.

An Opinion: Do You Really Need That Right Now?

By Scott Laird

During the recent snowstorms and bad weather here in Vernonia--weather that lasted over two weeks and included power outages all of Christmas Day and Christmas Eve--many of us were highly inconvenienced. Roads were unsafe to travel, packages and mail didn’t arrive, we had to wait in line to shop in the market while there was no power, school was closed, people ahead of us drove much slower than we liked, businesses were closed when we needed them, garbage didn’t get picked up, streets didn’t get plowed, walks didn’t get shoveled. (Sorry to bring all this up again!) The list goes on and on and on.

In the couple of pieces I’ve written about this year’s emergency, I have been complimentary of the way Vernonians pulled together, worked together and looked out for each other. Many people stepped up and went out of their way to be of service to their community. But there is something else that’s been bugging me about how Vernonians handled this situation, and I feel I need to get it off my chest.

This was supposedly the worst storm in forty years. When I hear words like “worst in” and “forty years” in the same sentence, I start thinking I might be inconvenienced somewhat. And I expect that the services and the level of services I’m used to, might be diminished somewhat. Services like electricity, availability of groceries and supplies, mail and package delivery, garbage pick up. Yes, I had to haul my garbage can out to the street, and then haul it back again-- still full. But you know, it wasn’t the end of the world.

In my travels, I’ve heard various and numerous complaints about services that were late, that didn’t arrive, or that didn’t live up to expectations-- from complaints about snow from plowed streets blocking driveways, to late mail delivery, to no bread at the market. There were even complaints when the city tried to inform citizens that a flood warning had been issued for the Nehalem River by the National Weather Service, and what citizens should do in the event that we experienced another flood. Last year, the criticism was that the city didn’t give enough warning! This year, they were stirring up anxiety unnecessarily. Sometimes you just can’t win!

Now, I know it was Christmas and people get worked up emotionally around the holidays, anyway. Throw in a bunch of snow, poor-to-impassable road conditions, and no power for days and days, and people are going to get wound up a little tight. But I think some folks forgot about that Vernonia Resiliency we’re all so proud of.

(I want to take a moment here to acknowledge the people outside of town who suffered without power, with no heat and the inability to cook for at least a couple of weeks. These folks are a special case, and I understand and sympathize with your situations. You folks are the picture of resiliency, and our hats are off to you and all you suffered through.)

But back to those of us in town. When the snowplow piles snow up in front of your driveway, it’s your responsibility to get it clear-- no one from the city is going to come and do that for you. That’s not just in Vernonia-- that’s the way it is everywhere in the country. Did you know that the Postal Service is not required to deliver your mail if there is not a clear path to your mailbox? It’s your responsibility to clear it-- and yet I know the postal carriers trudged through piles of snow anyway to get your cards and packages to you. Even parts of the routes that are normally driven had to be walked, because the roads weren’t safe. Did you know that our mail arrives in Vernonia by way of the Scappoose-Vernonia Highway-- a road that was so treacherous at times that the delivery truck had to go south through Banks to find a safe route to get to Scappoose? When air traffic from all over the country gets canceled or delayed, that also effects Fed Ex and UPS deliveries-- meaning Johnny may not have gotten the BB gun you ordered in time for Christmas this year. (I know, it was actually probably some Wii game!) Did you know that workers at the Sentry had to stay and unload supplies from a delivery truck that was nine hours late arriving? Nine hours!

Two Major Changes Occur With Bottle Bill

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission reminds customers that Oregon’s Bottle Bill expansion went into effect Jan. 1, 2009. The bottle bill expansion, Senate Bill 707, includes two major changes that affect both consumers and retailers.

The first change is that water and flavored water will be added to the list of containers that can be redeemed for a 5¢ deposit. As of Jan. 1, the kinds (types) of containers that will be included in Oregon’s Bottle Bill are: Water/flavored water, beer/malt beverages, soda water/mineral water, carbonated soft drinks

All redeemable containers must be labeled with the OR 5¢ deposit on the label. Only containers purchased in Oregon are eligible for a 5¢ redemption.

The second change is that larger retail outlets of 5,000 square feet or more will be required to take back bottle and can returns of all brands and sizes of beverage containers for each kind (type) they sell.

For example, if a store that is 5,000 square feet or more sells water and soft drinks, then they are required to accept bottle returns of all brands and sizes of water and soft drinks – even brands that they don’t carry in their stores. However, they would not be required to accept beer containers, because they do not sell that kind (type) of product.

This change does not affect retailers under 5,000 square feet as they may continue to accept back only containers of the same brand and size that they sell.

Retail stores can limit how many containers can be redeemed per person per day.

Consumers may be limited to a maximum of 144 containers per person per day at retailers 5,000 square feet or more. At retailers under 5,000 square feet, the maximum may be set at 50 containers per person per day.

In anticipation of increased call volume, the OLCC has set up a temporary phone line dedicated to the bottle bill expansion. Consumers and retailers with bottle bill questions can call 1888-h2o-2009 (1888-426-2009) Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM January 1 through mid-February.

For more information about the bottle bill, please visit the OLCC’s web site at http://www.oregon.gov/OLCC/bottle_bill.shtml

Now can you see why your mail might have been late arriving at your box, or why Sentry might not have had the brand of cereal you like? In a small rural community we have limited resources, which may limit the level of services we receive when we are experiencing the worst snowstorm in a hundred years, or whatever it was.

Sometimes it takes a little extra thought during emergencies. Do I really need that thing today? Right now? Here’s another example. The Sentry Market had no power on Christmas Eve, yet remained open with personal shoppers who walked you through the store and wrote down what you purchased, which had to be paid for in cash. An inconvenience for the customers, but also a big pain in the you-know-what for staff. One guy went in and made some worker follow him over so he could get a bag of tortilla chips to go with the nacho cheese he was planning to eat for the holiday. And then he complained (a little) because they didn’t have the brand he wanted. Can you believe it! Well, believe it-- because that guy was me, and after having it pointed out to me later, I’ll think twice next time about what I really need in an emergency, and what it actually takes to provide it for me when I want it.

The flip-side of all this is that businesses need to remember that the customer is still the customer, and they are paying for your service. Yes, you and your workers are inconvenienced-- you all have to work longer than you wanted or expected. Employees can’t get to work. Equipment gets damaged. Utilities don’t work. Logistics for deliveries, and just about everything else are thrown out the window. Emergencies are tough on businesses and services. And yet-- those are still your customers out there. And as hard as it is to consider, you still might owe them an explanation about why their service wasn’t up to standards-- even during the worst snowstorm of the century.

Waste Management made automatic phone calls to customers explaining when and why their service wouldn’t be able to reach customers. For me, that went a long way towards easing my pain as I remembered carrying that trashcan back from the curb. Yes, it was the worst snowstorm ever-- (and we all know years ago Prohaska would have been there for us), but an apology or a sympathetic ear can still go a long way.

In an emergency, we all need to remember that patience is a virtue, one that often gets lost when we think we really need something or are expecting a certain level of service. Looking out for ourselves and each other and resiliency are a couple more skills that some of us can improve on. Grab a shovel, get out there, and take care of it! And if you’re able-- take care of it for your neighbors who might not be capable of doing it themselves. And, for you managers and businesses owners, don’t forget-- we’re still the customer. And as hard as it is to remember in certain situations-- the customer still always comes first.



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