

VOICES OF AGING

VOICES OF AGING is a blog and newsletter created by Marian L. Knapp supporting those who are aging and those who love someone who is aging. Please visit us at voicesofaging.com.

A NOTE FROM MARIAN – MAY 2018

Well, spring has finally arrived here in New England. The sun is shining; leaves are popping out in psychedelic green bursts; and there are only the dirty remains of one gigantic snow pile in a parking lot near my condo building. It is traditionally a time for sneezing, tick warnings, and hope. We have the sneezing and tick warnings, but I wish I could feel hopeful.

It is so hard to believe what is going on in our government – a calamity in sick cartoon-like format. With each new unbelievable Washington action or declaration, I hear people say that the current national administration “is beginning to unravel.” Based on logic and common sense, it should be unravelling, but it feels as if it has been unravelling for about a year. Is it really crumbling or is it just becoming more tangled and impenetrable? Racists are still getting votes in local elections, traditional international partners are still being bewildered and insulted, and people are still trying to carry on good works in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear.

I am one of the people who is trying to keep going, but it is not easy. I wonder if what I work on and advocate for will make any difference at all. It is beginning to feel like a fruitless slog. On the other hand, I have no choice. I can't stop. I can't ignore what is going on. I have to say what is on my mind and say it in public. So, I am still here speaking into the wind. It is far better than doing nothing.

So, I look out my window and it is beautiful and bright green outside. Spring is here – finally – and I hope for a little hope.

Marian

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED ARTICLE

Is it Ageism or Bad Manners?

By Marian L. Knapp

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Have you ever been in a situation where someone says something to you that is unsettling, but you're not sure why you feel that way? It is only after such an incident that you identify the source of the discomfort and only then begin to figure out what could have been a good response. When this happens to me, I try to come up with clever words to counter what the person said, and play out different scenarios in my head. I think about snappy lines from plays and TV shows that are perfect in the situation and wish that I could be as quick-thinking and creative. I chastise myself that I couldn't come up with a slick retort. Of course, I realize that plays and TV shows are scripted and my daily life isn't. Also, it is a useless exercise to try to recreate a situation that will likely never happen again. But still – I can't hold myself back.

I had two experiences in the past few weeks that left me wondering if I was experiencing ageism. Maybe ageism wasn't behind the words that were said and maybe I am being too sensitive, but here goes.

The first incident happened in a shoe store. I admit that I am often filled with trepidation when I shop for shoes – especially dress-up ones. The reason is that I have small feet. Some manufacturers have actually stopped making my size. They must believe that small-footed people are disappearing. Some shoe companies do have my size but the selection is relatively limited – especially in styles that are suitable for an older woman – ones in which I wouldn't break my leg in a few steps. I talked to the salesman, and amazingly they had a few pairs for me to try on. Unfortunately, none of them were comfortable. When I told the salesman that he said, "You should have your feet examined. Lots of people buy these shoes, so you must have a foot problem. You should see a doctor about your feet." I muttered that there was nothing wrong with my feet and walked out in a foul mood. Afterwards, I thought of some potential zingy replies like, "you should have your sales skills examined," or "you should have your attitude examined." I wondered if he would have said this to a person who didn't have grey hair.

The second incident happened just a few days ago when I was on my way to my recycling location holding my reusable cotton bag filled with bottles and cans. A woman (some years younger than I am) asked if I was recycling. I said yes and that I was a 'good doobie' (or something inane like that). She then proceeded to point her finger at me, almost yelling in my face, that "it was nice

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that you are a good doobie, but that recycling was a bigger problem than not recycling; that it was better to have plastic containers in our regular trash. Think about it, she insisted aggressively – all those trucks and the air pollution!” I really didn’t have a chance to respond, except to ask her name in the hopes that we could have a reasonable conversation after I had a chance to check out her statements. She shouted that I didn’t need to know her name and walked away. If I didn’t have grey hair would she have challenged me in the same way? Did she assume that I didn’t have a brain?

My response in the first incident is that I will never visit that shoe store again. As a bit of a pay-back, I found in a New York shop a fabulous pair of silver shoes, with a little heel, that are my size and are amazingly comfortable. The salesperson was terrific. The next time I am in NYC, I will definitely revisit that store.

Regarding the anti-recycling individual, I went on line to learn about her claims and found that there are complicated pros and cons on recycling. But, on balance, it is probably worthwhile. If I encounter this woman again, I will tell her my name, even though she refused to give me hers, and offer to have a civil, informed conversation. Shutting down the potential for dialogue, no matter what the reason, is bad manners.

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Marian has also been featured on Huffington Post.