

# Try to avoid lawlessness in the supermarket

By Michele Gardiner

I like going to the grocery store. Each time I hear the whoosh of the automatic doors parting for my entrance, I feel a buzz of anticipation for the variety of choices available and the possibilities of what may happen inside.

Over the years, I've had enough interesting grocery experiences to keep me guessing. There was the day in 1999 when a man near the capers and pickles told me aliens would greet our planet on Jan. 1, 2000, or the time I accidentally rammed my cart into a display of champagne, creating a cacophony of exploding glass bottles, one after another. And the many times tiny, elderly women have asked me to grab items off upper shelves, leaving me warm with the satisfaction that I did something charitable.

Though some shopping days are more banal than others, I know an interesting interaction is always a possibility.

Unfortunately, a recent grocery debacle reminded me how, too often, there are shoppers who can squash the fun out of my supermarket experience entirely.

While I stood at the checkout worrying I might be late getting my daughter from school, a nicely coiffed and jeweled woman in her 60s squeezed in front of the man waiting behind me. She then proceeded to push her way in front of my cart, looked at me, held

up her can of coffee and shrugged, "Just one item."

The man and I looked at each other, our mouths hanging open in disbelief.

"I thought she was joining someone ahead," he said to me.

"Me, too," I said, and then turned to the woman, "Look, I'm late. You can't just push your way to the head of the line."

Without looking at me, she sang "Thank yooooooooou," and stayed put.

Flabbergasted, I said "What? No. I just told you I'm late. I ... I let people go ahead all the time, but..."

"It's the rude way you did it," the man behind me added.

"Exactly," I agreed.

Again, she sang, "Thank yooooooooou!" and waved me off as if swatting a fly.

Unless physically moved to the back of the line, she was not budging. I gave up. My shopping buzz had been so deflated, I couldn't even enjoy the rush of seeing my grocery total shrink after handing in my coupons.

That interaction got me thinking how a grocery store is basically a microcosm of society; the aisles, like our cities, are better places when people are considerate. And if a person can't get along well with others in the market, well, where can they get along? So I put together the following guide for those lacking in supermarket etiquette:

■ Curb your cart to the side of the aisle. Don't

make another shopper have to repeat "excuse me" louder and louder, only to have you ignore them until they need to move your cart themselves.

■ Wait to discuss who you hooked up with some place other than inside the store. Hearing your private details as I'm trying to decide whether I want meatless or beanless chili is distracting. I drift off fondly remembering how people used to step into telephone booths and close the doors for privacy.

■ Don't reach into the bulk-candy bins like you're digging into your grandma's candy dish. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. And that's gross.

■ When it's your turn at the register, keep the line moving. Put the plastic bar behind your items once they are placed on the counter; have your cards and checks out and ready; don't ignore baggers when they ask, "paper or plastic?" over and over.

■ Don't use your cell phone in line. You're usually so absorbed in your phone conversation you tend to mindlessly poke at the ATM/credit device, leaving the people behind you, and the grocery checker, frustrated enough to wonder who will do the right thing and wrestle the phone away from you.

■ And finally, please don't push your way to the front of a line — whether it's just one item or not. Most people love to be kind to others, but not when it's forced upon them.

A little grocery-store etiquette can go a long way.

*Michele Gardiner is a freelance writer in Winnetka.*

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