**MUSINGS OF AN AGEING WOMAN (5)**

I have developed some pet peeves as I have aged. They were minor irritations when I was younger but they have grown in size as the years wear on.

The first is ladies’ restrooms. The majority seem to have been designed by men, who have neither mother, wife, sister nor daughter, indeed, no female relative! Every lady goes to the restroom with her handbag, the holdall for a million toilet necessities. How many times, when there is no toilet paper, have we been rescued by a wad of tissue hidden in the recesses of our handbags? We ladies need our handbags but how do you use the toilet when there is no where to hang or rest your handbag?

The second is handrails in houses. Why are handrails only on one side of the stairs? They tend to be on the left side when ascending. That implies the following assumptions:

1. That only left-handed people need the rails when ascending;

2. That only right-handed people need the rails when descending and

3. That there is no 2-way traffic on the stairs.

What happens then, to the right-handed arthritic person who needs to push on the hand rails to propel themselves (against gravity) up the stairs? Or the left-handed person who suffers from vertigo, when descending the stairs. And as for the two-way traffic, who yields – arthritis or vertigo?

An aside – the two-way traffic reminds me of an incident in India. My two fellow West Indian friends and I decided to visit the Amber Palace in Jaipur, India. The Palace is a fortress at the top of a mountain and the anchor of a wall that runs on a ridge, similar to the Great Wall of China. There are two ways to get to the palace, via jeep or via elephant. We wanted the native experience and opted for the elephant. One of my companions was quite diminutive, unlike my other friend and I. The elephant dispatcher looked at us and said, “Big lady, big elephant” and assigned us to the largest beast available. We mounted (the platforms are built for easy mounting, and this was some years before the horse-back riding), I on the chair to the left and the other ladies on chairs to the right side of the animal, with the mahaut in front. And so we lumbered up the mountainside, on the left side of the road as expected in any British colony, with animal traffic returning from the palace on the other side. This meant that I was on the cliff side and I watched with growing anxiety as the terraced gardens at the foot of the mountain, grew smaller and smaller. Because our “transport” was so large and slow, the nimble elephant behind us attempted to overtake, in the face of oncoming traffic, inching us closer and closer to the edge. I spoke no Hindi and the mahaut spoke no English. But my sign language was very clear – if we go over, he and the elephant would be landing first to cushion my fall. We all stayed in our lanes. Needless to say, we took a jeep to leave the palace!

I guess as with all traffic, descending yields to ascending. So arthritic gets the hand rails first.

The third is name calling. As young girls, I don’t think we minded being called, “Miss”. A little older and we were called “Ma’am”. I startled to bristle a little when I was called “Mums”, especially by males who seemed almost as old as me. Then it changed to “Tantie” – I bristled even more but I comforted myself that at least, I was not being called “Granny”, at least not yet. I don’t know what I will do should anybody other that my grandchildren, be foolhardy enough to attempt to call me “Granny”. I love the Latin habit of affectionately and respectfully calling any mature female “Mami”. To that I will happily answer.

My fourth, and biggest peeve, is the absence of seating in supermarkets and large stores. One would think that they would want to encourage shoppers to spend as much time in the store, for the longer we stay, the more we are likely to buy. But elderly people can only stand/walk so long. In desperation, I have taken temporary respite in fitting rooms, at blood pressure kiosks and even on display tables of the right height. The supermarket that I use services several active adult (really 55+) communities whose residents are usually shuttled there by the communities’ buses. It is heart-rending to see the elderly leaning against walls or their carts as they wait for their buses. I’ve found another chain that thoughtfully has benches for its customers.

One good thing about being older. Many of us hold the purse strings, and we can talk with our purchasing power.