

I Just Have **1** Question

Would You Mind Spelling That for Me?



by Doug Carpenter

Part 1 of 4

Sure. It's "N-O-R-M-A-L." Just like — you know — *normal*.

It's OK. With so much talk about the so-called "New Normal," it's only natural to be a little nervous at the thought of having traded in a reality you've inhabited for years for a new and, in a lot of ways, dramatically different one. But it's not like everything has changed. You still spell the names of the things that are important to you with the same letters of the alphabet you've always used. Where you *are* most likely to notice change, however, is in the *meanings* of those highly-personal words.

After all, when you experience something as undeniably transformative as the health crisis

we've just been through, how you define yourself and even the words you use to do it are bound to be affected. And while learning a brand new "language of you" *can* be a bit challenging, it can also be a lot of fun, as it was back in 2018 when I playfully reintroduced you to your ABCs "Baby Boomer" style in an installment of my *Everyboomer* column entitled *B Is for Boomer*. [If you'd like to revisit it, it's still posted on-line at www.after50news.com/newsstories/every/nov18.pdf.]

This time, however, it's the rapidly-expanding reality we're calling the "New Normal" that's inviting us to reframe our beloved alphabet's 26-character lineup in terms of what they'll soon very likely begin calling to mind as we venture onward into what will surely be continually-uncertain times. A fresh set of illustrated

words to help you recognize and appreciate a new symbolic beauty in each letter. [And you'll probably want to pay close attention. There may be a quiz at the end.]

And since the "New Normal" isn't a "one and done" proposition and will be with us until, I suppose, a "New New Normal" presents

itself, this alphabetical roll call isn't a one shot process, either. This month's installment covers the first six letters and invites you back to explore the remaining portions in follow-ups that will appear over the next three issues of *After 50*. But for now, it is my great pleasure to present...

The ABCs of the "New Normal"

Letters A through F



A
is for
Apple

That's a nice, traditional start, don't you think? It could also be for Android, if that should happen to be the way you roll electronically. But regardless of the operating realm in which your wireless device dwells, your cellphone, tablet, laptop and/or desk computer are now your co-dependent besties for life. Unless you'd rather not be *bothered* communicating with the rest of the civilized world, that is.

But if we've gained any insight over the past year and a half, it might well have been that too much of *anything* — even solitude — isn't always quite as blissful as we thought it would be. [By the way, if you were surprised that "A" wasn't for "Amazon," I figured Jeff "Rocketman" Bezos already has enough of everybody's money that he can get along fine without any free publicity from *us*.]



B
is for
Bitcoin

Early on in Mike Nichols' 1967 cinema classic *The Graduate*, we see 21-year-old title character Benjamin Braddock — played with equal parts mock modesty and post-adolescent puzzlement by a very young Dustin Hoffman — being celebrated for successfully dragging his privileged preppy butt through college. In one particularly memorable scene, a family friend corners the bewildered guest of honor insistent on imparting "just one word" of success-guaranteeing career advice.

The singular and presumably-profitable wisdom he whispered in boyish Benjie's ear back then was "Plastics." But if they were making the film today, it could very easily be "Bitcoin" — one of a growing assortment of totally-digital, computer-

Continued on Page 11

THE BEST 55+ SENIOR COMMUNITY

1 & 2 Bedroom Apartments

Crestmount Senior Apartments

285 Crestmount Ave., Tonawanda, NY 14150

716-743-2450

crestmount@clovergroupinc.com



- Open Floor Plan
- 2 Elevators
- On-Site Manager
- Emergency Pull Chords
- All Utilities Included
- Indoor Mail/Laundry
- Van Service
- Social Activities
- Exercise Room
- Pet Friendly
- Beauty Salon
- Private Patio/Balcony



OPEN HOUSE
Wednesday, Aug. 11th
10am-12 Noon
Friday, Aug. 27th
10am-12 Noon

Come Join Us!
Flea Market
August 7th
10am-2pm

Would You Mind Spelling That for Me?

Continued from Page 10

based “cryptocurrencies” that also go by whimsical names like “Dogecoin” and “Ethereum” and can only be acquired and spent electronically online.

As monetary commodities go, that certainly makes them unique, especially in that you can neither physically hold them in your hand nor even see them — triggering an understandably-hot debate among economists and possibly even a few philosophers over whether or not they *actually exist*. [Of course, any ordinary person could tell them that the answer to that question is simple. If you *have* some, then *yeah...* they *exist*. If not, what *difference* does it make?]



C
is for
Coloring

When you’re bored — and I mean truly, *desperately* bored — you’ll try just about anything. This goes a long way toward explaining the quarantine-driven surge of adult interest in a wide variety of distracting if sometimes frivolous activities. Some of them were conventional and fairly predictable. Others? Not so much. Binge-watching TV? A no brainer [...*most* of the shows literally.] Home repairs? Already planned, just hadn’t “gotten around” to

them yet. Yoga? Hardly a stretch. Jigsaw puzzles? In desperate times, desperate measures. But come on. *Adult coloring books*? [Who would’ve ever thought that the cure for the “Lockdown Blues” would be a field of Canary Yellow and a scribble of Razzle-Dazzle Rose?]



D
is for
-demic

I know. You can’t be any more ready than I am to never hear the word “pandemic” again for as long as you live, which — if we’ve all been careful, lucky, or most likely a combination of the two — will be a good, long time. And I’m happy to tell you that you’ll be getting your sick-of-the-sound-of-it wish. Or *half* of it, anyway.

If, as we appear to be poised to, we put the everywhere-you-turn virality of the pandemic behind us, the disease’s ubiquity won’t so much go away as be demoted to less threatening levels of infectiousness. When it’s referred to as an “*epidemic*,” it’ll be when it’s a sizable “outbreak” affecting large numbers of people in a specific region, while a disease’s “*endemic*” version — however severe it may be — will simply be one that’s a persisting part of a particular people or country’s chronic contagion landscape.



E
is for
Essential

Funny, isn’t it? We used to worry about being able to get our hands on the basics we considered essential to

life — things like food, shelter and safety. Now, though, in addition to worrying about all of that, we also find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of having to worry about whether or not *we’re* considered “essential,” a subject that became especially delicate to discuss when it involved the allocation of COVID-19 protection and treatment.

Placed at the front of the line were courageous and unquestionably-deserving people like our medical professionals and caregivers who, along with our brave first responders, placed *themselves* on the front line in our battle to contain the Coronavirus. But there’s also not a single question in my mind that during the ordeal, ordinary individuals faced with daunting interpersonal challenges likewise demonstrated one of humanity’s most essential qualities — selfless concern for others.



F
is for
Face

My trained writer’s ear couldn’t help noticing certain words that have stood out from the rest of the public prattle during the pandemic. My second favorite [...which would’ve made a dandy letter U if I hadn’t already found one I liked better...] was “unprecedented.” Having all but lost count of how many times I’d heard it repeated by the talking heads of TV news, I was admittedly grateful when I realized that while I may find the word mind-numbingly annoying, it’s ultimately self-discontinuing. After all, no matter how unlikely or outrageous an occurrence may be, it can no

longer be “unprecedented” *once it’s happened* [...and the relief can’t come soon enough.]

But for its sheer relevance and glorious, elegant variations, the word for the letter F simply *had* to be “Face.” Face *masks*, for protection. *Facetime*, for safely communicating. *Facebook*, for recklessly flirting. And *saving face*, for the incredible effort made to avoid *facing up to* what could’ve been done to address the disaster but wasn’t by people who, ironically, will never know if the public was buying their excuses or not. [Telling if someone wearing a mask is sticking their tongue out at you is *really hard*.]

That’s it for the list’s inaugural installment. My take on A through F may not have been letter perfect, but hopefully they provided you with a welcome distraction from what chances are was a typically hot and dreary August day.

But unless a lot more than even *I* thought has changed since I faked my way through kindergarten on my devastating good looks and snappy patter, there are still 20 more letters to go in our alphabet. And every one of them is the spokescharacter for another interesting aspect of the “New Normal.” So please join me right back here in *After 50’s* September issue for the second of the four-part ABCs of the “New Normal.”

© 2021 Doug Carpenter

Throughout *After 50’s* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he’ll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]

SAFE, AFFORDABLE

55+ INDEPENDENT LIVING

...IN A PEACEFUL, COUNTRY SETTING

Starting at ONLY

\$ 600

Includes ALL Utilities, Cable and Internet

Applicants with annual incomes below \$25,000 have priority access.

the BROTHERS of MERCY

BOM 55+ APARTMENTS
10500 Bergtold Road
Clarence, NY 14031

www.brothersofmercy.org | 716-759-2122