

I Just Have **1** Question

Are You Sure You Have Everything?



by Doug Carpenter

Check your pockets. Check your purse. Check your wallet, your backpack and your tote bag. And while you're at it, you might as well check your book bag, your gym bag and your duffle bag, too, along with any of the various *other* personal containers you stuff your "stuff" into on any given day.

It *is*, after all, how we transport from place to place the enormous quantity of things each of us has accumulated — most of which, by the way, it would appear we can no longer *function* without if they're not in our immediate possession 24/7.

And whether it's out of practical necessity [...like hand sanitizer or your Apple Watch...] or merely an

indulgent impulse [...like all those cute cat videos you love showing everyone...], heaven *help* us if we can't put our hand on some thing or another that we desperately need *right now!*

Of course, if my mother were here to weigh in on this, she'd undoubtedly insist that the inventory of *my* personal "stuff" would *have* to include my *head* — which she was quite certain I would one day leave the house *without* despite the fact that — her doubts notwithstanding — it actually *was* "bolted on."

Now that we're supposedly self-reliant adults, however, we're basically on our own, with only our memory — such as it is — and the occasional hastily-scribbled checklist to help us keep tabs on the really *important* things — some of which it admittedly *is* more critical to know the whereabouts of than others. Take our personal identification, for instance.



Have you ever noticed how much a *Bugles* brand corn chip looks like a tiny *cornucopia*? Just add an itty-bitty pumpkin and a few micro-gourds and you've got yourself a perfect centerpiece for today's trend toward a "downsized Thanksgiving." [I'm not sure it's going to catch on, but no harm trying to keep up with the times, is there?]

No matter how often some sweet-talking flatterer may tell you what an "*honest*" face you have [...or how "*kind*" or "*dreamy*" those eyes of yours are...], sooner or later you're going to have to produce a driver's license or some other form of photo ID that proves you really *are* who you *say* you are.

This assumes, obviously, that the photo on it even *vaguely* resembles your real kisser. [And if you happen to be one of the miniscule number of people on the planet who miraculously looks *good* in the usually scary-bad pictures most of us walk out the door of the DMV hating, we'd just as soon *not* hear about it, thank you very much.]

And while we're discussing indispensables, how about your charging cord? Hopefully you keep that handy too because, as necessary an annoyance as it may be, the cell phone you're *also* wise to keep on

your person at all times won't do you much good if it runs out of juice.

In fact, even when it's fully operational, that little high-tech walkie-talkie in your pocket could still be virtually useless if you foolishly hit the road without your trusty but most likely *massive* list of the logins, passwords and security quiz answers they made you jump through mental hoops to come up with. [Some of us didn't *have* a "first pet" you know.]

As the annual season of gathering together to celebrate brings with it the resumption of travel, access to the electronic keys that remotely unlock your credit cards, bank accounts or other personal data — in short, the things that turn *human* you into *digital* you — is essential.

But those examples barely scratch the surface of the things that need to be on your "Don't Forget"

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list. Actually, you should probably make that *lists*, since we all know that the holidays have *never* been a “one and done” time of year.

In fact, they come wrapped up with enough competing priorities and unpredictability to rattle even the most diligent planner. But if you stay festively focused, you should be able to keep the fraying of both those multiple loose ends and your nerves to a merry minimum.

But if it'll help, here are a couple of modest but timely suggestions that might enhance your chances for survival.

Tip #1 • Travel Preparation: Streamline your packing list by grouping items alphabetically. M, for example, could be for money, medications and, obviously, M&Ms. [And even though they won't “melt in your hand,” it's entirely possible their airport gift shop price *would* melt your *brain*. So you might want to buy them in advance.]

Getting through airport gate security is where that “honest” face of yours could really pay off. Be as friendly and cooperative as you can manage [...popping a few of those M&Ms before getting in line might help...] when the just-doing-their-job TSA screener asks you to open your bag. [Your luggage, *not* your M&Ms. Nobody touches *those*.]

Also, don't overpack. You're going on a short and hopefully pleasant vacation. Not being permanently relocated by the Witness Protection Program. And if there's anything you're considering taking with you that the very thought of losing breaks your heart? [Well, if I have to answer

that question, you'll probably take it with you *anyway*.]

And finally, be careful not to mix up your packing list with your Thanksgiving shopping list. I don't know what the airlines' threat prevention protocols currently say about prohibited liquids, but being pulled out of line for attempting to smuggle giblet gravy onto a 737 bound for Phoenix could really put a damper on your holiday spirit.

Tip #2 • Holiday Shopping: Starting with Halloween — which officially begins when its pricey costumes, over-the-top decorations and giant bags of “fun size” candy hit stores around August 1st and staggers blearily to a loud, overproduced conclusion on New Year's Eve, the holidays have basically become a giant exercise in acquiring and distributing “stuff.”

I'm not saying that to diminish their emotional and even spiritual significance. I'm just saying that if you removed the giving and getting from the equation, the experience you'd be left with would be far different from what you've become accustomed to.

Since once Halloween has come and gone, the sugar high from eating all the leftover candy [...and you *will* eat the leftover candy...] will wipe *all* memory of the night's events from your brain. So we might as well focus on the rest of the season. First up, Thanksgiving.

There's little point in *me* trying to tell *you* how to celebrate Turkey Day. We all have our traditions, which we are loath to change. Just ask the so-far-unsuccessful promoters of “tofurky.” [Or maybe it's better if you *didn't*. The attention would only give them false hope.]

No matter what I say, you're going to call “stuffing” or “dressing” what *you* want to call it, then argue about what ingredients should be in it and whether to cook it *inside* the bird or out, and *then* slip blissfully into your annual state of ate-*so-much* semiconsciousness in the chair or couch of your choosing.

So what new and possibly inspiring insight *do* I have to offer that might add a fresh, positive spin to your Thanksgiving celebration? Just one small one — and I do mean *very* small.

Have you ever noticed how much a *Bugles* brand corn chip looks like a tiny *cornucopia*? Just add an itty-bitty pumpkin and a few micro-gourds and you've got yourself a perfect centerpiece for today's trend toward a “downsized Thanksgiving.” [I'm not sure it's going to catch on, but no harm trying to keep up with the times, is there?]

As for the gifting part of the season? Well, it can be one of the most intimate experiences two people share, inspired by emotions as personal as they are powerful. Which is why the only observation I have that feels worth *making* is a quite simple one.

And it's that — at the moment

that the giving and receiving take place — you should always try to see the gift not in terms of whether it satisfies a *want* but how it meets a *need*.

Because from my experience, it's the best way — in fact quite possibly the *only* way — to know for sure that even if you *don't* have *everything*, you still have everything that *matters*.

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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.]

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