



The Best Laid Plans...



By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

Thanks to "planning," a business garage is confusing, a medical garage ignores patient limitations - and guess where the supermarket stores soy milk.

I HAVE CONCLUDED there are expert planners and no-planners, and those in between who base their plans on hope, not fact. Several recent experiences have impressed and baffled me.

Take car garages, new garages attached to new buildings. Why isn't there better planning for saving energy? On my way to a business appointment, I drove into a garage with a dead end. The light was dim and the markings confusing. An attendant ran after me and tried to explain why I was in the wrong place.

I backed up and bumped into the street again and into another entrance. "Park on the first two floors." All the spaces on the first two floors were occupied so I moved on up. And up, and up. Every space had numbers and was marked "reserved." Finally, because my business appointment in the next door building was soon, I parked in a numbered spot, near the top.

No elevator entrance was visible and I decided it must be down a floor. I opened an EXIT door and stepped out. The door quickly sprung shut and locked behind me. Steel steps were the only way down, and every door on every floor was locked. I tried them all. Finally the steps ended and a door opened onto the street. Now it was raining and I had left my raincoat in the car, believing I would be inside. I walked a few steps to the garage entrance where I had started. The attendant was patient and pointed down an alley to an opening in the building for which I was aiming.

"How do I get back to my car?" "Just take the elevator in that building to the floor where the car sits and walk across the bridge." I thought I remembered the number on which I parked, probably illegally, 500-something. That must be the fifth floor, I decided, I'll surely know my way. I took a deep breath and was glad my shoes were comfortable.

When my appointment was over, I rode the elevator to the fifth floor and confidently found the door to the bridge and the garage. But those numbers were in the 300s, not 500s. I walked back to the elevator. I asked a passenger about the numbers and the floors. "Oh, the numbers don't mean anything. Try floor two."

I tried two, and three, and four and five again, and no car. A young man in a garage uniform looked approachable and I told him my problem. "I'll find your car, lady," he said. "Come along." We walked and rode the elevator and crossed bridges and still no car. Eventually I remembered a barrier that had stopped me from going to the roof and that rang a bell in the young man's head.

"Stay right here," he ordered, evidently feeling sympathy, and he found the car! I had recalled two letters on the license plate. I thanked and tipped him. "You're a sweetheart!"

he said and described exactly how I should drive out.

Still, I came to a dead end and had to ask another driver who apologized for the strange turns in that garage. I told my story to the man collecting the fee in the exit booth and he said, "Well, here you are, aren't you? Now turn left. And watch out for that fire engine!"

That garage was chiefly for a business building. But there was another garage I entered, not quite so large, for medical offices. Spaces were small, made to squeeze in every possible car.

Just as they need more time for office visits, sick patients and the elderly need more space for maneuvering, don't they? Remember cataracts and dimming vision, arthritis and partially movable limbs? And here again you may have to ride an elevator up in order to go down. Or is it vice-versa?

Moving business people and patients to their goals is vital, but my acquaintance with access has been unfortunate. I suppose it's all a matter of cost, and if I want to go somewhere, or take care of myself, why, it's up to me to do it. However, confidence in my ability to plan, or think, or just get out into the fresh air is lost, and I'm numb.

I had to visit a supermarket to try to find, not my way in and out, but a product - soy milk. No, it wasn't in the milk section. Soy milk doesn't need refrigeration. With baby foods? No. In the diet section? No. It was below the cereals!

It occurs to me there are other kinds of planners and medical care planners that fit right in with those who work on garages and superstore shelves.

Space-saving and time-saving and, above all, money-saving are what move our living. And I loathe it.

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