

Are First-World Problems Ruining Your Life?

I'm guessing that you tend to lose your perspective occasionally. I do, too.

LuAnn retired as an RN from the University of Iowa last month, and we held a reception for her at an upscale restaurant - sorry if your invitation was lost in the mail. One of the hors d'oeuvres available was very tasty crab cakes, which were depleted rather quickly.

One of the guests noted that they weren't being replenished in a timely fashion and seemed rather put out about it. LuAnn's niece, Amanda, happened to be standing nearby and whispered, "Here's an example of a first-world problem."

Tardy crab cakes! My day is ruined!

Later that same evening, the remaining eight of us all realized at the same instant that a round of shots of Jameson's Irish Whiskey was actually Fireball Cinnamon Whiskey due to a bartender error. This also resulted in a fair amount of first-world angst. And a free extra round.

Speaking of Fireball, there has been a first-world problem regarding its availability recently in Finland, Sweden and Norway due to a recall. Evidently batches that meet North American standards were accidentally distributed in Scandinavia that had "excessive" (by European Union standards) levels of ethylene glycol. It's a different type than what goes in your car's radiator; a mild sweetener used in a variety of products. I've been told not to worry.

Google up First World Problems and you get almost 40 million hits. Not bad for a phrase that was added to most online dictionaries only a few years ago. Almost all of the definitions refer to frivolous frustrations experienced by privileged individuals in wealthy countries.

For example, a couple of weeks ago one of my primary concerns was that I was losing a garage space I had been renting. That meant LuAnn and I had five cars and two motorcycles (not all of them run, don't ask) to fit into a three-car garage. Definitely a first-world problem.

Since almost all of us in the U.S. live in a first-world environment (thank God), any problems we have tend not to be related to basic food/shelter/clothing issues. That makes them relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things but it's easy to lose sight of that.

The next time you find yourself getting worked up about something, use it as an opportunity to take a deep breath and say to yourself, "this is a first-world problem." You should be falling on your knees and thanking your lucky stars that you are able to worry about such things.

Informal polls about different types of first-world problems include things like losing the TV remote, poor cell phone reception, air-conditioning that is too cold, slow Internet connections and having to buy Pepsi because they're out of Coke. Or worse – forgetting about your massage appointment, buying Brie that turns out to be too hard or realizing your neighbor has the same Laura Ashley wallpaper you do.

According to an article in the Daily Mail, even the worst-off people in many developed countries are wealthy by global standards. For example, the poorest five per cent of Americans average about the same annual income as the richest five per cent of the citizens in India. You may not think you're well-off, but you are.

If you got up this morning and the lights came on, the toilet flushed and the refrigerator yielded breakfast, it's already a great day!

Writers Group member Dave Parsons co-owns a business on the Coralville Strip and has no real problems to speak of.