

Recycling Presents from Your City Government

One of my numerous ongoing irritations has been the way the City of Iowa City traditionally required me to handle my recycling duties, which I take very seriously. Pretty much everything in LuAnn's and my household that can be recycled, is.

Until recently, that meant stomping on each item until it became flat enough to join all the others in a seemingly shoebox-sized 18-gallon blue recycling bin. Similarly, our garden waste had to be manhandled to the curb in random 50-gallon trash cans that may or may not have functioning wheels.

Imagine my excitement when the City of Iowa City announced last June that both types of containers were being replaced by huge, modern wheeled versions. The first recipients would be by request only, so I registered online as soon as I heard about it.

Long weeks passed with no results, until the middle of August when I was notified that demand had outstripped supply and/or budgets, so carts would be delivered "when available." I found myself wondering who in city government would be the most likely to accept a bribe to remedy this situation.

Have you noticed that when people don't have significant problems, an insignificant one gets elevated to become the Most Important Thing in their lives? It happened to me, because recently I've had no noteworthy dramas occurring.

Time passes really slowly when you're waiting for just one thing to happen before you can get on with your life. Stop reading right now and count off twenty seconds – you'll see what I mean. Now stop reading and count off 15 million seconds – that's about equal to the six months of time I'd been waiting for my carts.

Suddenly, about a month ago I noticed the coveted household blue-lid recycling carts popping up in yards around town. I swear, in every other neighborhood but ours. For some reason the two different types of recycling carts were being delivered by different trucks on different days.

About the same time, I came home one day to find that our neighbor across the street had received his new yellow-lid yard waste cart and we hadn't. It was sitting in the middle of his lawn where it was dropped off and has remained there untouched ever since. It sears my retinas every time I leave the house or look out the window, mocking me.

It turns out that although we both live at the intersection of 7th Avenue and Morningside Drive, my neighbor technically has a Morningside address while ours is 7th. And he obviously doesn't recycle regularly – I was seriously thinking about becoming his container's new owner in the middle of the night.

Finally, one morning a couple of weeks ago LuAnn (who sadly shares my cart obsession) spots one of the household recycling cart drop-off vans working its way down Morningside Drive toward our house. She held her breath as she watched every house receive a container until the truck got to ours, at which point it pointedly skipped us and continued its drop-offs with our next-door neighbor!

She literally chased down the truck on foot, catching up to it at another Morningside address. The unusually happy young guy in the truck explained the drop-offs were occurring by street addresses - not garbage routes - and he didn't have the list yet for 7th Avenue. He said, "Don't worry, babe, I'll make sure you get yours when your address comes up!"

I asked her, "You didn't mind being called 'babe'?" "She replied, "Not at all."

Anyway, on Christmas Eve morning I arose late and happened to glance out the window. To my amazement, trumpets sounded, the clouds parted, and shafts of blinding light descended from the heavens, shining directly on our new household recycling cart sitting proudly on our front parking. I ran out of the house in my slippers and touched it gingerly at first to make sure it was real. I then carefully rolled it to its place of honor in our garage, where it won't accidentally get bumped or scratched.

As if that wasn't a glorious enough Christmas Miracle, the day after New Year's our garden refuse cart magically appeared! I walked around the yard in sub-freezing temperatures picking up twigs almost too small to see, just to be able to use it right away.

It may have taken 15 million seconds, but life is good.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is pretty sure you don't want to know which of his many first-world irritations has been promoted to become the new Most Important Thing in his life.