

IMPATIENT

Fran has accused me of being impatient. My initial response was, “moi???” But after thinking about it for a moment (I didn’t give it more than a moment) I concluded she was right. I am now and have always been impatient. I hate to waste time. I guess it is part of my overall parsimoniousness. I was taught that time is money.

Even on vacation, I try not to waste time. I plan the day just as I do when I am not on vacation: get up at a certain (later) time, have breakfast, sightsee, lunch, nap, swim, afternoon drink, read etc. (No more biking, hiking, canoeing or tennis.) Other people may let the day pass, and just sit around. Not me. Just sitting around is a waste of time. I have to do something, and sitting around is doing nothing. I don’t have the patience for doing nothing.

An exception: What makes some people impatient, but doesn’t bother me a bit, is my slow computer. Let it take as long as it likes. I look at it as a miracle and feel blessed to be able to type, look up information, send and receive e-mail, store photographs and music, all with the click of a mouse. Take your time; you are eight years old, which I am told is pretty old in computer years.

Further examples of all the ways I have manifested my impatience, my dislike for the inefficient use of time: I dislike waiting on line (in line?) anywhere—at banks, in department stores, at check-out counters, at restaurants, at ballgames, at movies, at airports. I became adept at finding the shortest line, or so I thought. Of course, if you are with someone, you can make small talk. My small talk is usually about how annoyed I am at having to wait. Especially if I have to wait what I believe is an inordinately long time in a restaurant, to place an order, and to have it served.

When driving, I hate getting caught in traffic; cars slow down to a crawl. I try to maneuver to the faster lane. What could have happened? I, who avoid driving in rush hour, am still stuck. Driving to an unfamiliar destination, I find myself too impatient to process the directions. I have a general idea. I am certain I’ll get there. When I am lost, I do ask for directions, but find I am too impatient to retain what I was just told.

I hate waiting for public transportation: subways, trollies, buses, airplanes. If I just missed a subway or bus, I seethe, I get angry, I take it as a personal affront, I even suspect an anti-Semitic plot. Sometimes I may have to wait five or ten minutes for the next one. What a waste! Of course, it is not a total waste. I never come to a subway station or bus stop without something to read, so it is not a complete waste of time. And when I look around at my surroundings and at the people waiting with me, I check that off as learning from observation, and put it in the plus column.

A story I have told before about having something to read while waiting: During basic training at Fort Dix, the summer of 1954, myself and one other soldier in my barracks were “readers.” We always took paperback books with us every morning when we fell out. The Army is notorious for “hurry up and wait.” When we waited, my friend and I

would read; the other recruits would talk, smoke, or just sit around doing nothing. One morning, in the rush of falling out, I forgot to take a book, and mentioned it to my friend. He held up the book he was reading and asked me if I had read it. I said no, so he ripped it at the spine and handed me the first half that he had finished. I was shocked, something I would never have done, but I didn't have to waste time that day, and I mentally promised to scotch tape the book together that evening.

Stuyvesant High School was a two-session school and I worked part-time. To save time, I would eat my lunch as I walked between school on East 15th Street and work on West 25th Street. I also figured out the fastest way to go, and how to maneuver between crowds, and how to avoid red lights--by walking up the block rather than waiting on the corner.

When I have doctor's appointment, I try not to arrive late, but I certainly don't get there early. I hate to be kept waiting, but that is why their outer offices are called waiting rooms, and why they have all those magazines (I brought my own). And perhaps why patients are called patients. And as the time crawls on, I am one patient who gets more and more impatient, and I make my annoyance known to the receptionist, which of course doesn't get me into the doctor's office any quicker.

And TV commercials! They interrupt everything. I don't know if my reaction is one of impatience or annoyance, or both. These days, except for some sports programs, I watch non-commercial TV, but then they are constantly bombarding us with fundraisers. Thank God for the remote. I find myself impatiently switching channels, and then trying to figure out if it is time to switch back. Still, the commercials are useful for going to the bathroom or grabbing a nosh.

Going to the theatre was always a challenge: How to get there just minutes before the show starts without having to sit around doing nothing. Years ago, whenever we would meet friends at the theatre, I would be the one who arrived the latest. It became a game for me. I was oblivious to the fact that I could be spending "quality time" chatting with my friends before the curtain went up. And there was a time that I played the same game with the airlines and the railroads. I stopped playing that game when I missed a flight.

In fact, I have stopped playing that game altogether. I am now the one who comes earlier to the theatre, and to the airport, not wanting to miss the start of the show or the departure of the plane. And would you believe, I married a woman who has no concept of time, and is always late. (I have recently resorted to telling her that we have to be somewhere a half hour before we actually have to be there.) Apparently, she has always been "the late Fran Morrill," but I love her anyway. She has a good excuse these days. I wait, and am impatient, but I try to seethe less, and I am getting a lot more reading done.

