

## THE RACE IS ON

By now, most everyone has heard that smart-ass remark of some of my contemporaries: “I don’t even buy green bananas.” It is said by folks who think they are being clever. They are the same people who refer to south Florida as “God’s waiting room.”

I do buy green bananas, and I don’t refer to south Florida as God’s waiting room. But what I find myself doing more and more, is looking around my home for things I should use up before I shuffle off this mortal coil. I mentioned some time ago that, since I was a teen-ager, I have been saving blocks of commemorative postage stamps in anticipation of there dramatic increase in value. They have not increased in value so what I have been doing is using them on letters and packages. I had accumulated so many, I may not be able to use them all up. The race is on. Can I use up the stamps before I am used up?

A related item to stamps: note cards. I cannot go to a museum without stopping at the museum store and browsing through their collection of art reproduction note cards. They always have dozens of boxes featuring different artists, and I always end up buying one or two boxes, and some post cards. What really makes my day is when I find, in a corner of the store, note card boxes of an artist that had been featured in a show. The show has moved on, but the boxes have remained, and the museum wants to get rid of them. And they mark them down, usually half price! There is nothing the matter with them. If the artist deserved to be featured last month, his or her work is still worthy of being bought, admired and mailed.

A number of charities send potential contributors attractive note cards, for which they expect a contribution. Sometimes I send a contribution, sometimes I don’t. The charities keep sending them, and they keep accumulating, along with the museum note cards. I have therefore decided not to buy any more special occasion greeting cards. Instead, I take one of my pretty note cards and write “Happy Birthday,” “Happy Anniversary,” “Happy New Year,” “Get Well Soon,” “Congratulations on Your Graduation, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, Wedding, New Home etc. This way I can kill two birds with one stone. I get rid of both stamps and note cards. The race is on.

Over the years, whenever we stayed in a hotel, motel, or on a cruise ship, we would abscond with those fancy bars of soap that they provide. The fancier the accommodations, the fancier the soap. I don’t think we fooled the chambermaid. Nobody is that clean that they use two bars of soap a day. We come home with a healthy supply. You might say we cleaned up. We squirreled them away, under the sink or in a drawer. The time has come to use them. We will stop buying soap at CVS or Stop and Shop, and start using our stash. We can also give them as gifts, but I suspect the potential recipients have their own soap from their own trips. The ones who don’t, like my grandchildren, wouldn’t appreciate it. The race is on.

Tea bags have been proliferating in our kitchen and pantry. Fran can not resist the exotic tea bags that seem to be sold everywhere. Growing up, I was unaware of anything but Liptons, Tetley, Swee-touch-nee, or Red Rose. And loose tea. You buy a box of tea bags,

and when you are running low, you buy another. During the depression, many families “shared” a tea bag, making two cups from one bag, or even putting a bag, that was only used once, in a saucer to be used a second time. No more. Today’s homes, including mine, have dozens of boxes of a wide variety of teas: green tea, black tea, herbal tea, organic tea, caffeine-free tea, fruit tea, artichoke tea, chamomile tea. One package describes the tea as “a cheerful blend of aromatic fruits flavors and spices.” Another, Bigelow Blueberry Harvest Herb Tea, “rich and bursting with blueberry flavor.” Though we present several boxes whenever we have friends over, I don’t believe we will ever run through them all. The race is on.

Finally, there are a few more items that I feel I should use up, but doubt that I will. One is writing implements. From time to time, I bought packages of a dozen yellow number 2, wooden pencils. At other times, I helped myself at the offices in which I worked. Now, pencils in my home are everywhere. I put rubber bands around bunches of them, and stick them in desk drawers. Another bunch is in a container on my desk. I find I use them hardly at all.

Then, the transition was made from pencil to ball point pen. Wherever you went, you were given ball point pens. Most had advertising printed on them. The hotels and motels that supplied me with soap, also supplied me with ball point pens. Other institutions had fancier ball point pens with pocket clips and a button on the top, enabling you to extend (?) and retract the point. They also had advertising, but fancier. Now I have more ball point pens than pencils. One thing I learned about ball point pens: They dry out and die. I have had to throw out several old ones. So part of the race is to use up the old ones before they dry out. The other part of the race is to use up the rest before I dry out and die.

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