

## GIFT WRAP THE GARBAGE

BY JAMES J. COLLINS

I finished college; got married, moved to the suburbs, bought a house, but now it seems I have to join the Garbage men's union. It's not that I want to join to get a better paying job, but since I am now designated by my town as a special garbage sorter I feel I may at least find out about the medical benefits attached to the position.

Originally when I arrived in the suburbs there was a clean separation of duties between the home owner and the Sanitation department. The home owners generated the garbage, put it in cans, and moved it to the side of the road and the Sanitation department picked it up. For this service you paid a fee either indirectly by taxes or directly as a monthly charge.

Between then and now a series of events occurred a couple of years ago which changed this simple amiable relationship. They appeared harmless at the time, but now we recognize them as part of a well thought out plot.

First the trucks were changed. The old reliable, take anything, open maw, garbage truck which had been around forever, had to be replaced. We were told we would pay for this decision by a small increase in our taxes. Nobody told us about the additional payments.

The new high technology garbage truck arrived on the scene, driven by a young man and his two burly associates who apparently

were handicapped. The trio obviously lost their hearing either in combat or while listening to hard rock music for they had all the responses associated with the deaf. The driver would forget that he had the machine on grind while he leisurely toured the street and it seemed that he could not hear that the truck mechanism was running. However, everyone else could. All the dogs and cats would howl in unison with the Banshee screech of the machine while the pickup team, oblivious to the racket, would go from driveway to driveway with fiendish glee trying to destroy the garbage cans by crushing the sides or warping the rim. I think they were hired from 'psychopaths are us'. In addition to the noise, there was a change to the routine, for behind the truck was a trail of junk left at the curb; broom handles brush piles, floor lamps and other long thin things. It looked like a rejected basketball team from appliance land. Upon closer inspection a small preprinted note was seen attached to each pile;

"The new truck won't accept any refuse longer than four feet in length. Please make sure your refuse conforms to this length. If more than one piece is involved they must be tied together in such a way that the four foot length is not exceeded. No package can weigh more than forty pounds."

Right away I was given three new jobs. Measuring, cutting, and weighing odd shaped items.

Broom handles were designed by the devil himself. They all exceed the four foot limit; they all come five feet or longer, so you have to cut every one. But they are round and when you try to saw them, they either rotate in your hand or roll off the bench.

When you do finally get them cut and try to tie them with string you find out they are highly polished and fall out of the stack as you take them out to the curb. The best way to pack them is to use sticky tape wrapped round and round the bundle. Ten feet will usually suffice. This is another hidden cost but you can buy the tape by the gross and sell it to your neighbors or you can dip into your kid's college fund.

Don't forget "they" won't pick them up unless the piles conform to the new rules. They have to be tied or taped, under forty pounds and can't contain any hazardous materials. The detailed set of instructions was put together by somebody who must have worked in the Post Office. The fine hand of a bureaucrat is obviously at work. If I were trying to transport one of these packages to the Yukon I wouldn't have to go to more trouble. You effectively have to gift wrap the garbage. I'm adding up all the costs and when it is cheaper to package and mail it to another state, that's what I plan to do. But for now I put aside one hour per day to prep the garbage for the "Industrial Waste Engineers" - the garbage men's new self-assigned title.

Immediately after this event, a group of citizens concerned about the environment knocked on my door and handed me a highly colored handout which is titled 'Household hazardous waste wheel'. This is a round cardboard wheel the size of a dinner plate, and has a rotating cardboard window which can be moved around the wheel to inform you of the problem with each dangerous household product. The citizens proudly pointed out that they made this available to the town, and this wheel identifies a simple

alternative to each hazardous product. Did the people who put this together ever read what they generated?

Under pesticides- flea collars and sprays- they recommend 'brewer's yeast in pet's diet'. Does this mean I should feed beer to my dog? How does this work? Do the fleas get looped and fall off the dog, or do they get belligerent and kill each other off? Maybe the aim is to get the dog so drunk that the fleas don't bother him any more. Either way I'll give it a try and put out a bowl of beer for him. Fido is a happy drunk so I don't mind, but the pit bull down the road is mean enough without getting him soused. Sober, he will chase a Mack truck a hundred yards but if the neighbors start feeding him booze he will start catching trucks and bring them home to bury in his back yard. It would be a plus if we could only get him trained to chase the garbage trucks.

Under pesticides-Chlorinated Hydrocarbons- they recommend 'keep garden clean, import predators'. This is truly frightening what are they talking about? Do they know how this can be interpreted? I described the pit bull one neighbor got; he bought that dog to get rid of rabbits. We're not dealing with a rocket scientist here. With this kind of general instruction - import predators-I can expect my neighbor to try anything from trained bats to wolves or tigers. God save us from the well intentioned

Last year the inevitable happened. The union showed up at a town meeting waving the cardboard instruction wheel around like it was the bible. They started to quote it like it was scripture from on high. They intimidated their management by pointing out the hazardous substances they had to handle including household

batteries antifreeze and mothballs. Then they demanded more money. Rather than stand firm, management told them to present their case to the taxpayers directly, and the citizen generated waste wheel turned on them and ran the citizens down. The fact that the sanitation men had been handling the same compounds for several years at the same rate of pay cut no ice. They got their raise and we got more taxes.

Next we began to pay the rest of the bill associated with the new trucks. The union hid in wait till their contract ran out and demanded more money. Why? Because they had new duties associated with their pickup and delivery to the dump. Specifically they had to 'sort the trash by size, and identify those items which exceed the four foot limit'. Why am I paying for this? They recommended the trucks-but cleverly neglected to tell us about the size limit. If they didn't consider this key factor I think it is their problem. I don't understand why I have to pay for their mistake. It seems un-American.

Another interesting side effect is now the total list of items on the wheel must be segregated and stored by the home owner- the sanitation truck won't pick them up. Instead, twice a year, the home owner must make arrangements to take these compounds to the special handling area where a commercial waste treatment company takes possession of your chemicals. This is a scary event. Hundreds of people line up in their cars and inch along a half mile queue while two individuals in white contamination suits with breathing apparatus, looking like apparitions from a science fiction horror movie, take your

offering. You have to fill out a multi-page form which makes you feel like you are responsible for the Black Death that decimated Europe in the middle Ages. I gave them my ten quarts of oil, two empty cans of paint and a box of moth balls. They looked at me with steely eyes and gave me an additional list of things the garbage truck won't handle any more. Can you go to jail for the criminal possession of antifreeze?

Last week we got some more bad news - the land fill can't handle leaves packed in plastic bags. Apparently the leaves decompose but the plastic bags don't. Ominously the article indicated that specific instructions on how to handle leaves are being printed up and will be distributed to all home owners next week. I'm prepared for the worst. I expect that the powers that be in the sanitation Department, won't accept the leaves unless they are sewn together in the form of a crazy quilt. After all this is New England and quilting is an art form that many practice. Unfortunately I don't.

Paul Revere rode his horse to raise the militia to defend unjust intrusion on the liberty of men. I don't have a horse but I have an old Chevy which I will use to spread the word. After all I have to use the old Chevy because they won't accept it at the dump any more.

THE END