

Poignant Story and Typical Excuses

When Marcy Gerhart went about the business of writing a book about her experiences with customers (and critters) at her self storage facility, an overriding theme was that of late payments and the colorful personalities that often accompanied them. But the book also evolved into poignant stories about people dealing with hard times. And there were, of course, the funny stories. Here are two excerpts from *Our American Stuff: The Heart and Soul of Self Storage*, one poignant, one funny.

DAVE

This story epitomizes “One man’s junk is another man’s treasure.” Dave’s wife, Roberta, came in one day. She was enthusiastic. They were moving, so she was going to put things in storage, and take her time sorting through everything. She was determined to have an organized house.

So, moving day came, or should I say moving week? Her pickup came to the unit multiple times. She would always stick her head in the door to say “Hi,” and give an excited progress report.

Their storage unit was directly across from the office so I couldn’t help but snoop. The 10x10 filled up, leaving me wondering just how much was actually going to the house.

We did not see her for several weeks. Like many renters, we were instructed to charge her card for the month’s rent, so we didn’t connect the dots when she no longer came to the unit; not until Dave came in. He sat heavily in the chair.

Roberta had a heart attack and was in intensive care. Knowing she was in her mid forties, we encouraged him, and went on about technology...blah, blah. We did not hear anything until the first of the month.

He called, spoke woodenly, saying Roberta had died. Her pleasant and friendly personality had endeared her to us. However, we did not ask for particulars, aware of the difficulty he had giving us the news.

The unit was untouched for months. We continued to charge Roberta’s card until Dave finally called and gave us his credit card for the account.

Shortly afterward, he pulled up but did not come to the office. He opened the door for the first time since Roberta closed it months and months ago. I could only see his back. He stood there unmoving, with his shoulders slumped, arms limp at his side, looking up at the things stacked to the 12-foot ceiling.

Even from behind, the posture was bewilderment. The unit was filled front-to-back with just enough room at the front to close the door. He did not move or touch anything. He stood for some time. Finally, he closed the door, replaced the lock and left.

That was two years ago. We continued to charge the card for the ongoing months. Finally, the card was declined and I reasoned that he had given up.

We would have to go through the foreclosure process to free up the unit for rental. To send the certified letters and file the legal notices seemed too cold for this circumstance, although it must eventually happen. I elected to call before that ritual, got a voice mail and left a gentle inquiry about payment. I also called a second number that we had for him and got Roberta’s voice mail. His daughter returned that call, saying Dave had given her Roberta’s phone and that she couldn’t bring herself to change the message.

A week later Dave called. Humbly, he apologized, saying he had a new credit card. I was in shock. He had not abandoned the unit.

I am ashamed that I could not even ask how he was doing, or say how I felt sorrow every time I looked across at Roberta’s unit. Roberta was outgoing and chatty, but Dave had a reserve that did not allow me to step into his emotions. Instead, I assumed a business-like posture, took the card number and thanked him.

Unit A60 is a metal room, with a metal door that is secured with a disc lock. It does not matter what junk or treasure Roberta secured in there. To Dave it is sacred and not to be violated, either in word or deed.

EXCUSES WE’VE HEARD

The Bank Made Me Do It

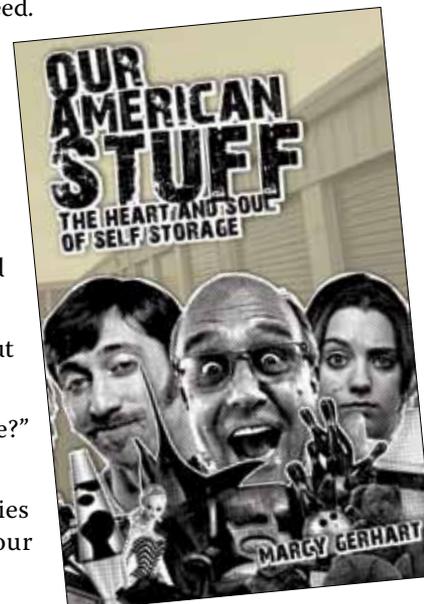
“The bank messed up my money.”

“What do you mean the card was declined?”

“I keep trying to pay online, but it won’t let me.”

“How could my check bounce?”
It’s rubber?

We have heard so many stories about the wrongs done to our



upstanding clients, we can only conclude that we have the worst banking system in the WORLD.

"My car won't go fast enough to get there before you close."

"My in-laws are keeping my mail because they don't like me."

"My cousin owes me money and is supposed to be paying the bill."

"I'm caring for an indigent family." (This customer bragged about winning a \$300,000 lottery. Two months later, he could not pay)

"I had to go to the funeral of a relative who died from a flesh-eating disease."

"I had to go to two funerals." *Shame on our relatives for always dying at the first of the month.*

"I'm waiting for my lawyer to apply again for my Social Security."

"I've been – uh – detained."

"I wuz gittin' in the car, and it wuz so hot I cudnt drive cuz the air didn't work and I cudnt git my winders down."

"I've been depressed."

So, how does that work for you in the Wal-mart checkout??

Our American Stuff: The Heart and Soul of Self Storage is available at Amazon.com.

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