

Along the Canal: Shared Driveways and Other Thoughts

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We have a dog. Believing that a tired dog is a good dog, I make sure that Stubby and I walk regularly, most often with a friend. (Stub is not much of a conversationalist.) When it is just the two of us things catch my eye that normally would be missed, most recently – shared driveways. We have lots of them because most of the homes in our canal village date from the mid-to-late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, when people had barns, not garages. In this era of one car per adult, and, often, one per teenager, parking at your own home is a challenge. With a shared driveway, it is a major challenge, one more factor that must be lived with every single day. Cooperation, collaboration and compromise are a must.

The shared driveways, one directly across the street from our home, got me thinking about the frequency with which we are faced with the occasion to consider someone else's needs, rights or requests. Everyday life is full of them – keeping your tv or radio at a reasonable level to not disturb neighbors; holding the door for someone to precede you; lowering your voice when on the phone on a bus or train; not using a hand held at the lunch or dinner table or in a play or meeting. The list could go in and on, and I suspect you could add innumerable examples. I remember, still with surprise, my startled reaction in a workshop I presented for adults some of whom obviously had been sent unwillingly by their employer. The clue? For almost 2 hours the unhappy attendees held an ongoing conversation signing to each other. Rude? Yes, more importantly, a distraction to their classmates.

Over this summer's canal season I have seen this cooperation played out among the boating community which has spent time in our marina. Boaters, as a whole, appear to reach out instinctively to offer help and then carry through. Also seen this summer was the generosity of the local folks who volunteered at the marina to greet the visiting boaters (also cyclist, hikers, and people in cars and off busses). Their welcome in some cases went far beyond a hello and directions to the local museums. Transportation to a local drugstore and, in another case, in search of minnows for bait, and in yet another to an adjacent community to Walmart top the list. What is particularly impressive is that these good people see nothing unusual in this. Their counterparts exist throughout our community and in yours as well. We are so lucky to have them.