



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**The Cane Mutiny**

## The Cane Mutiny

Forget wheelchairs. Try placing your aching body into a wheelchair, assisted by the wheelchair's driver: "There you go, sir, I've raised the arm-rest so you have no rest on which to rest your arm. ...No! Don't rest your arm on the wheel! It's not an arm-rest.

"Sir, this is a wheelchair, not an arm chair. ...Okay, I'll lift you off the floor and put you back in the wheelchair. Don't worry. My wheelchair passengers often grab hold of the wheel for support. Then off they go! ...Down the down ramp. Before they know it, they're at the next gate.

"Most troublesome, sir. Affects my tips."

I use wheelchairs now. It's my admission of being cast-out of our virile and ambulatory society into a netherworld--one to which many of us are destined. But to assure any readers that I still possess my Marlboro Man Manhood, I only use them at airports--and those in which the phrase "one stop" is advertised--for fees exorbitant enough to pay for the airplane. You know them. The flights may be direct, but the connecting gates to them are not. They connect their passengers to the next hop through a gate located in a different part of the airport and in another time zone. Marathoners love the arrangement.

Have you ever attempted to fold-up a wheelchair? Even more challenging, have you ever tried to unfold a wheelchair? It's a futile attempt at executing a mechanical Kuma Sutra without any climax. Look at the advertisement below for a wheelchair. It may be exactly what the manufacturer says, but my experience has led me to view the fold-up as a package of an un-foldable morass of plastics and aluminum.



Which is another reason I am handicapped. I cannot interpret the directions of the many products I must buy for my daily needs. Opening a TV dinner, much less cooking it, has become a journey into mass-market, plastic wrap confusion.

Granted, TV dinners are not essential to a person's existence, and Holly usually avoids them. To each their own, but my bachelor days died hard. I sometimes surreptitiously sneak-in a TV dinner containing enough calories to hold me over for a while. My wife then asks me, "Something wrong? You're not eating much." I'm ashamed to answer that my stomach is still fully extended (make that bloated) from a "snack" I had the day before.

My complaint about this overly processed and overly packaged food is simple: If products are on the shelves in grocery stores, we should be able to actually get to that product. If I manage to decipher the "EASY TO OPEN" codes on a container label, I make the purchase. I take the package home to discover I need a jack hammer to penetrate the lid. The steel-like plastic container forms an impenetrable shield around the product.

Recently, I purchased an electric razor from Walgreen's. By the time I had managed to pry open the razor package, I needed scissors, not a razor, to cut the hair growth on my face. The saving grace is that many of the bar patrons up here have beads so long they dip into their beer glasses.

Okay, back to the central thesis of this report: Mobile aids for people who are not very mobile.

### **My Mainstay: The Cane**

Recently, I have begun to use a cane when I go out into the public. Mind you, this macho body can still get around just fine without the cane. Granted, I walk a bit like John Wayne with one of his boots missing. But the cane adds a little pizzaz to my sauntering. Plus, it prevents me from bouncing off walls and people as I make my way down the street...resembling a sailboat tacking back and forth...eventually docking at a store entrance or counter.

About those *people*. Upon our first foray into a crowd of them...*our* meaning my cane and me...I rapidly discovered I had entered a different world. My first observation was that people made it a point to give me more space by subtly sidestepping when they saw me approaching them. When they passed-by me, they moved farther away from my cane and me. Some speeded up their steps as they made their journey away from a handicapped person. Out of sight out of mind.

The exceptions to these deferential movements are teenagers. They are oblivious to my cane and me. But then teenagers are oblivious to most everything, except themselves.

The crème de la crème of being half-crippled: Almost without exception, I no longer wait in line. Anywhere! Name it: grocery stores, movie theatres, restaurants, it's usually, "After you, sir," or "Step ahead of me, I'm in no hurry."

Amazing. My cane has created a mutiny of sorts; a silent sedition---unbeknown to me---against a bane of urban life: Queues upon queues of fellow humans.

The only consistent exception to this "Go to the front of the queue" is at the pharmacy. But then, my cane and I are usually in competition with other cane-carrying people and---assuring me of non-preferential treatment, people on crutches and in wheelchairs. But what should one expect to find at a drug store? Certainly not someone poised in starting blocks waiting to be served.

The other exception is at the Department of Motor Vehicles. I went to the local DMV office to obtain a handicapped sticker for my license plates. If my cane can get a free pass in our queued culture, so can my car. More than that, I could use those handicapped spaces at stores and shopping centers...spaces I have seen occupied so seldom that when I come across an occupied handicap parking space, I actually check for one of those stickers that I am about to put on my car.

I have this headline to report to you: Of the filled handicapped spaces I observed, at least half of them had vehicles without a handicapped sticker on their license plates or a handicapped placard hanging from their rear-view mirror. How dare they handicap a soon-to-be-handicapped person!

In the future, when I come across this travesty (after I am an accredited handicapped person) I am letting the air out of the car's right tires of these handicapped interlopers---that's my handicapped side. If I am caught, I will yell, "You can't do anything to me! America exempts us handicapped people from being handicapped, and that car is handicapping my handicap. That's un-American."

I could go on about other sagas that my cane and I have encountered since we became handicapped. Well, since I became handicapped. My cane is not handicapped, but I like to think of it as my handicapped partner.

As a cane yielder, I now have more indulgences in this urban life. I could get a bit uppity about this cane business and the privileges it grants me, all courtesy of the kindness of people I encounter.

Due to some urgent matters, recently, my cane and I took our first airline flight. The airport lines snaked half-way across large terminal rooms. My TSA pass had expired. No matter, the ticket agents, the security guards, the passengers (every last one of them) had me go to the front of every queue my cane and I encountered.

What a difference a day makes. ...No, what a difference a cane makes.

But in this newly discovered world of human deference and kindness to the handicapped, I vow not to let my cane become a crutch.