

BitChin' & Moaning

Please Pass The Oke

By Judith A. Habert

There exists a seemingly innocent little word strategically placed on the bottom of every physician's prescription pad. Although it may appear a logical option to most, to me, the mere mention of the word sends chills up and down my spine. The word is "generic."

With a medically disabled dad and a hardworking, though severely underpaid mom, generic was a way of life in our home.

As a young girl the simple act of watching TV brought with it a plethora of questions. I couldn't quite understand why none of the products upon which we indulged ever felt the need to advertise. It wasn't until I got a bit older that I began to understand.

A survey of our pantry did show one common element: On every single item could be found the same 3 little words "Compare ours to..."

Probably the funniest part of the entire generic experience was the comical manner in which manufacturers attempted to trick us. If this was not their intent, then perhaps these manufacturers possessed a belief that Americans just don't pay close enough attention. Why else would we pick up a bottle of soda called Dr. Thunder instead of Dr. Pepper or Twist Up in place of 7 up?

A quick examination of our pantry at home would provide an abundance of seemingly misspelled name brands. Such items as "Spiffy" Peanut Butter, "Wander" Bread, "Moonlight" dish washing detergent and sitting there, center stage, as large as life my favorite beverage of choice as a youngster "Oke."

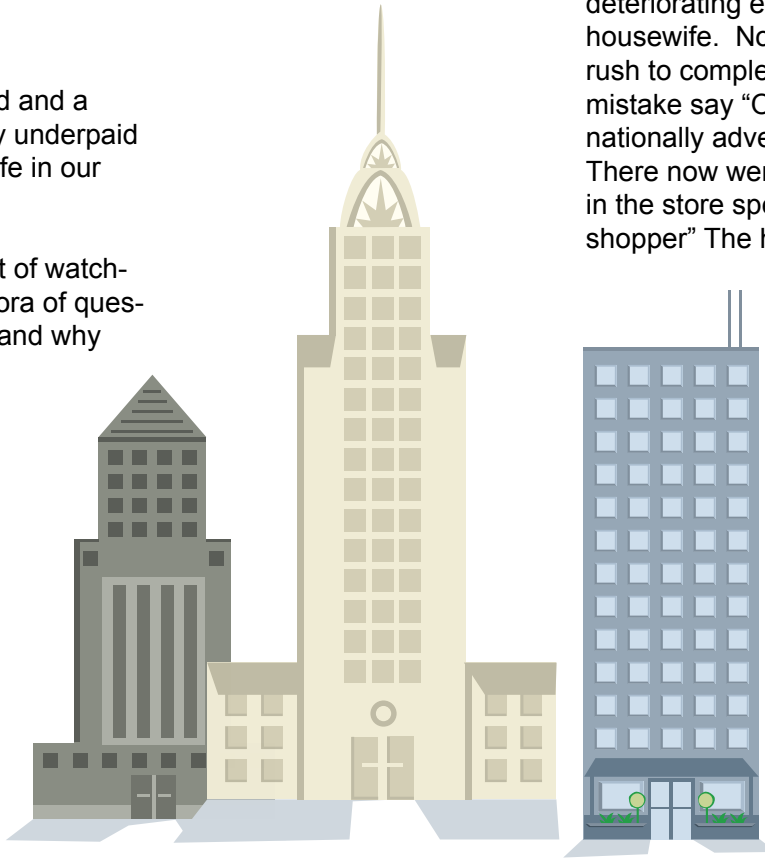
Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse a local supermarket chain proved me wrong. They came up with a brand new concept appropriately named "No Frills"

Mom was ecstatic, and so apparently were most of the moms in our lower middle class neighborhood. In some ways I suppose it was better, less pretentious, and you actually knew exactly what you were getting now. No gimmicks, no manufacturers hoping for the deteriorating eyesight of the middle aged housewife. No hope that a shopper in a rush to complete the weekly shopping might mistake say "Oke" for the more popular nationally advertised and marketed soft drink. There now were separate isles set aside in the store specifically for the "low income shopper" The header on the isle proudly

displayed it to be the "No Frills" isle. There were no mistakes to be made, since the labels on all items were very easily identifiable. Who could possibly make a mistake now with items labeled "Beer" "Cola" "Peanut Butter?" No creativity here. Of course these items were only for internal consumption. If company came around, depending on whether they were family or friends Mom would determine whether we could utilize the "no frills" brand or if we had to moved up to the generic brand. The

decision was based on two very pertinent questions. Who was the company coming to dinner, and would the items in question ever be visible to prying eyes? Items such as tomato sauce, gravy, cake mix etc., would never be seen by upper middle class prying eyes, so "no frills," was just fine. Butter or soft drinks, on the other hand, would require either generic or on very special occasions, and with special company, the coveted name brand items, since these would be visibly on display.

Secretly I longed for a household cupboard filled with name brand items. I swore when I had my own home things would be different. I would have a pantry full of advertised name brand items. I would drink Coke!



My very first venture into the grocery store as a young married woman was frightening. There is an unwritten rule when setting up your own home. You do exactly what Mom did. You buy the same products mom bought, because you grew up on them and if mom bought them they must be the right choices. There I stood in front of the frozen food display. What brand do I chose. Of course reflex impulses drove me directly to the generic brand. I was stronger than that! I would go with the name brand item and live my dream...a pantry full of name brand items. I did it! I was proud! There was not a single item in my shopping cart that was not name brand. Even the items that I could hide behind kitchen doors proudly displayed nationally advertised, recognized and respected brand names. As the total for my shopping selections was emblazoned on the cash register I fished into my pockets to gather up every last penny, barely making the total on the register. Nonetheless I was proud. But I could never remember my mom spending anywhere near the total for weekly groceries that I had just spent.

At dinner that evening I had as many packages as possible visible for viewing on our dinner table. It was a passage. I was mainstream. I was no longer generic! However, my husband didn't seem to be impressed. It didn't even seem to matter to him. Of course, that was until he asked me what I spent for the weekly shopping and I told him. He informed me that we would have to be "more careful" next week.

So careful I was the next week, and came home with less food. We ran out on Wednesday and I scrounged around for creative meals utilizing the few remaining ingredients in my pantry...but I might add, they were all name brand. The day before payday it became increasingly obvious that if I were to make dinner that night I would have to do so on four dollars. Okay, so if I bought generic one night, who

would know. So I meekly placed the "no frills" pasta and sauce on the counter and paid with my last \$3.97. We had dinner and no one was the wiser.

Slowly it happened. First it was one item, then two, and before very long most everything in my cart was generic. I vowed to get a better job. To make my husband get a better job. To cut corners in other ways. Anything to get back to name brands. For a while I did.

But then it happened. We had kids. Name brand diapers were sinfully priced. My logic could not escape me. Five dollars more a box for an item that got almost immediately soiled and thrown in the garbage. Okay so generic diapers were okay, unless of course it was a kiddie outing with other moms and then I was back to the expensive brands. I was sensible, but not stupid.

Years have passed, finances are better, but there are just some things that I cannot escape. Maybe it was the very day I sat down at dinner with the kids who had requested their favorite dinner, "Hamburger Helper". Who was I to tell them that this was not the name brand, but instead some generic product called "Hamburger Dinner." They ate it just as well, it was less expensive. How far had I fallen? I was buying an item, which stretched dinners by adding pasta to chop meat, a product for those suffering somewhat financially and I hadn't even purchased the name brand. I examined my motives, argued the rationale, and decided that if they liked it, who was I to impose my silly prejudices. If they wanted generic, well then I would give them generic.

Somewhat saddened by my realization that my ideals might have to be altered, I sat back and turned to my husband and said four little words that I knew might haunt me for the rest of my life, "Please pass the Oke"

San Diego.....

Skyline
from Coronado



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