

My little paper says, "Welcome to Social Security, HANOVER MA. Your ticket number is 114.

As I watched the television screen displaying the current number, it was much like waiting for your number at the deli. This was far more personal, though! I did wonder, and was even a little worried, there might be too much bologna. I was sixth in line waiting for the office to open at 9:00 a.m. and as soon as we entered, the place began to quickly fill to capacity.

We were there for so many different reasons: disabilities, social security, Medicare. And for many people arriving that morning, they already had a history with this or that social security office and many were not happy. One woman arrived with her mother. Her mother seemed a bit confused and the daughter was shaking her head and rolling her eyes. I thought she was perhaps impatient and worn down from dealing with a parent with dementia. It wasn't that, though. Soon, other family members arrived and they began to recount and commiserate over their experiences. "And don't bother to call because no one is going to answer!" Another one says, "And when we went there and waited all that time, she didn't have to be so mean and nasty! We didn't do anything wrong!"

That was a private family conversation, except there wasn't any privacy. Close quarters and no privacy did not stop people from talking. Others looked around and were eager to find a listener. One woman, in her forties, was there with her mother. Her mother was recently discharged from the hospital where she had pneumonia and, the poor thing, recently became a widow. Why were they there? Guess whose name was on the death certificate? Hers! She was trying to prove that she was alive and that her husband was dead.

So, it was with some trepidation that I waited for my turn. I was there to apply for Medicare because I will soon turn sixty five and you have to apply for Part A (hospitalizations) within three months of turning sixty five or there is some sort of penalty. As I waited, people were even saying, "This one was nicer than that one. I hope I don't get that one." (Yikes!)

As I waited, though, what overshadowed all these sad and complaining stories, were numerous acts of kindness. People getting up to offer someone else his or her chair. Holding the door for someone trying to manage getting her mother in who was in a wheel chair and the double doors were not automatic and fairly close together. The woman in the wheel chair was in good spirits, saying, "I get to ride around. I didn't even have to wear boots!"

My number was up and I approached the window. I answered a couple questions and was told she would send an email to her boss, asking if someone was able to interview me. Then she said, "I hope she's there. I hope she sees the message." (Oh, great; was this trip for nothing?)

I didn't wait long before being told that someone would call me, call me by name. (I was now a person, not just a number!) So, back I went to sit and wait. My return was met with a few chuckles. "Back again so soon?" I replied, "Apparently it is a two part process for some of us. Everything does not happen at the window,"

I didn't wait long before I was called to the back area to be interviewed by a very nice woman. It wasn't really an interview; it was more a confirmation that I was genuinely who I claimed to be. Parents' names, place of birth. "Yes, perfect, perfect." She kept saying with a smile. Then I swore that I was telling the truth and I was done. I noticed there was a back door and asked if I could exit by that one. I explained that not only was my car closer to that one but there were a lot of people crammed into that waiting and a lot goes on out there! She smiled, indicating she knew what I meant.

Before leaving though, I told her how I had witnessed many acts of kindness and that they made my day.

It isn't easy running a government agency. It isn't easy visiting one. Having been on both sides, I can tell you that patience and kindness go a long way toward helping them to succeed in their mission of helping people and doing it correctly, with as much security as needed.

Even the woman who was alive but had her name on a death certificate knew that somebody had made an error, clearly, but there are scams and now people had to make sure she was who she claimed to be.

All in all, I left with gratitude.

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