

The water faucet handle broke off the shower in my hotel room at the Crockett and, having too gentle a disposition to take issue with it at the front desk, I decided to go for a swim in the pool instead. Checkout was at noon, so I had timed my morning to be back in the room at 11:30 to shower and pack. I got my things organized and then went into the bathroom to turn on the shower. I tried the hot faucet first and it spun around loosely with no result. I decided to spin it around harder and maybe it would catch. Then the “H” button in the middle of the knob fell off and went down the drain and the handle fell off in my hand. Too bad I’d been out in 105 degree temperatures all morning.

I went to the front desk to check out, and explained my trick with the faucet. The receptionist apologized and asked if I wanted the \$20 parking fee put on my credit card on file. That struck me as an odd segue. I said, “Yes.”

Hotel guests were allowed to share the pool across the street at the Menger Hotel. I asked the receptionist if there was a locker there with showers, and she said that she didn’t know, which I took as a safe way of saying “no.” I said I’d give it a shot and left.

I had already filled my morning with strolling and taking pictures at the River Walk, picking up a few souvenirs for the kids, and having a big breakfast. I didn’t intend to have a big breakfast, but they had a waffle maker shaped like the state of Texas and it was irresistible. I first had what I wanted for breakfast, which was similar to huevos rancheros but with scrambled eggs instead of fried. Then I went back to make a Texas waffle so that I could take a picture of it and post it on Facebook. Normally I’m not one to post anything on FB, but a Texas-shaped waffle was enough to push me to share something meaningless from life with everyone who had for some reason friended me.

I waited in the waffle line with my cup of batter. The waffle maker takes two minutes per waffle, so it’s one of those things that, when you’re waiting in line for it, can make two minutes seem like an hour and a half. One guy was making waffles for all his kids. Watching the time count down the

two minutes reminded me of when you get to something you're looking for online and you have to watch the first 8 seconds of a video ad first. Decades of your life can fly by faster than watching an 8-second ad. I finally got to the waffle maker - there were two of them side-by-side, and the kid next to me was spraying his down with cooking spray. A little cooking spray is a good idea, so you don't "Mess with Texas" trying to get your waffle out of the machine. But a young boy takes great pleasure in being given the opportunity to use an aerosol can and spray away at will.

When my waffle was done, I found a grape on the fruit bar to plop into a crevice to represent Austin. Then I used syrup to artfully designate the oily Gulf and Caribbean. Satisfied with my creation, I took my photo and uploaded it, which took me about 20 minutes on one of the most user-unfriendly websites on the planet. Back at my table, I didn't want to waste the waffle, so I tried it and found it to be surprisingly good. I finished practically the whole thing.

Walking toward the Menger now, I thought that I should've asked for the hotel manager at check-out, explained what happened with the shower-less room, and asked her to comp me the parking fee in exchange. I'm not too adept at thinking quickly or confronting people.

The Menger is a beautiful hotel, the oldest in the state I overheard one pool guest (Mr. San Diego, to be introduced shortly) telling another. I walked through the lobby and halls and admired the old phone booths and display cases. I found the fitness center and got on a stationary bike just long enough to decide that I didn't feel like riding it and notice a fruit bowl and an ice cold water dispenser. I filled my water bottle with cold water after dumping my warm water outside in some plants.

There was a man in a lounge chair at the pool with pure white hair that was very straight and too long. I really wanted to ask him if I could give him a haircut. Not that I care how long he wears his hair, but it was very straight with long front bangs that he pressed down over his face, and I could have given him a marvelous haircut. At one time in my life, I watched enough YouTube videos to get a basic

understanding of men's haircuts. This was after using an electric shaver on my husband after forgetting to put on the comb attachment, and giving him quite a do. He had shouted, "You're not shearing a goddam sheep!" It wasn't pretty – a co-worker of his actually stopped in his office the next day and asked, "What happened to you?"

He said, "My wife gave me a haircut."

And his co-worker said, "I think you get paid enough that you can start going to a barber."

I practiced the YouTube haircuts on my son many times and became quite expert at them. My neighbor Wade, a professional beautician himself, supervised my haircutting a couple times and said I had it down as well he did.

There was one chair open next to the white-haired guy, but I didn't take it because I heard him talking to himself and I didn't really want to lay next to him listening to his ramblings and being creeped out. I took a lone chair a ways away and the white-haired guy fell asleep for a very long time. I thought he may have died but luckily he didn't. Afterward a very talkative, touristy, middle-aged man took the chair next to the white-haired guy and very loudly asked him where he was from. The white-haired guy said, "San Diego." Maybe a lot of people leave San Diego to head to San Antonio? This was the third one I'd met in 24 hours.

They continued to have a very loud conversation about women's nail polish. Tourist guy said, "Women used to wear red or pink nail polish; that was it. Now they're wearing blue, black, white, even nail polish with stars on it."

Mr. San Diego replied, "HAW, HAW, HAW," in his very hearty and loud laugh. I've never heard literally a HAW HAW laugh before, but he was doing it most naturally and full of gusto. I wished I had

taken the chair next to him. He'd probably just had too many mimosas at breakfast and needed to sleep them off.

Tourist guy said, "My waitress last night had black hair, but she dyed it – what's that color that's a cross between blue and green?" A younger couple had taken the two lounge chairs between me and Mr. San Diego and the woman chimed in, "Aqua."

I thought aqua was a fair answer, but Mr. San Diego said, "Turquoise!" (And men say they don't know all the crazy color names.)

Tourist guy said, "Yeah, turquoise! The waitress asked me what I thought of her hair and I said it looked good, but it really looked terrible."

"HAW, HAW, HAW." Mr. San Diego had one Hell of a laugh.

I found it odd that the married couple that took the two seats in the middle sat with the man on my side and the wife opposite. I like a nice, secure wife that doesn't mind letting her husband sit next to another woman. It's actually quite rare. I'm sure he appreciated getting to sit in the middle too. I hope he realizes he has a great wife, because most woman are not that nice. Eventually her husband got in the pool and I asked her, "Do you know a good discount designer shoe store around here?" Nice to talk shoes with another woman to clear the deck. Plus, I really wanted to wear different shoes to dinner with Auntie than what I wore all over to Hell and back the night before ending up with blisters.

She told me she went shopping earlier for a purse to match her evening and proceeded to tell me what her evening plans were. This didn't surprise me because I found when I previously lived in Texas that women often matched purse to shoes or events.

She said, "Today is my husband's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and the in-laws have our kids. He thinks we're going to dinner and he knows I have a plan, but he doesn't know that 35 of our friends are checking in

right now. We're going to dinner at 5:30 while they all set-up here in the hotel and when we come back, they're going to surprise him." Is this a heck of a spouse or what? If I were a single guy and she got divorced, I'd ask her out in a heartbeat. She said she brought him to the pool so that their friends could all check in and get settled without him happening upon any of them. Brilliant.

Tourist guy left and two older ladies came in looking for lounge chairs together. There was one next to me and I said, "That one on the end is open, I'll get it for you." I don't know what business it was of mine to get the chair for her, I think it's a personal problem. Plus it was heavy and bulky as hell, and when I brought the chair over she laughed and said, "We could have gotten that."

They settled in with their books, one in the shade and one pulled her chair out into the sun. A waitress came out and the women ordered Fuzzy Navels and one of them asked me if I wanted a drink. I was trying not to spend any more money, and I can't stand fuzzy navels, but I like the camaraderie of having a cocktail with the other old ladies at the pool, so I told the waitress I'd have the same thing and we all laughed for some reason. Normally I wouldn't even drink a fuzzy navel. Maybe a rum punch or even a gin & tonic with lime. A frozen strawberry daiquiri would be nice at the pool, but then there's the calories. More than in orange juice, though? I don't really know. Then the waitress asked the married couple if they wanted a drink. The husband asked the wife what she wanted and she said, "Get me whatever you're having."

He said, "Well what would you like?"

She said, "Get two of whatever you like, maybe a beer or a vodka tonic." Note to men: in this situation where you were just given two specific choices, pick one of them.

Husband ordered something from the waitress and she walked away. The wife asked him, "What did you order?"

He said, "I got two margaritas."

She asked in disbelief, "FROZEN margaritas?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever in your life seen me drink a frozen margarita?"

"I thought you'd like it, so deal with it."

"I just think it's funny that you would order that because you've never known to me have a frozen margarita in my life." She really did think it was funny, she wasn't saying that sarcastically, she was laughing.

He said, "I wasn't thinking straight."

I wanted to tell her that all husbands do that. The only way he would know that she didn't like frozen margaritas was if they were dating. Marriage is their ticket to stop paying attention.

Our drinks came and the waitress asked me, "Are these three together?" Why did she ask me first? I said no, and paid for my own drink since I wasn't staying at that hotel and couldn't charge it to my room like everyone else.

I walked over to dip my toe in the water and a Spanish woman asked me, "Can you swim?" No one has ever asked me that before at a pool.

I said, "Yes." I thought just about everyone could swim. Especially if they were in the water. She and her daughter were clinging to the side of the pool.

She said, "My daughter lost her hair band to the bottom and she really wants it but we can't get it." They were in the deep end, just the place for non-swimmers, and I could see the hair band resting comfortably right there at the bottom. The girl tried to go under and reach the hair band with her foot

and didn't even come close. She must have very dexterous toes like me. She tried again and I could see she was getting nowhere, so I slid into the water. Here it is a goddamn heat wave and the water was cold. How the Hell can it happen? They must be running a hose right out of their well into the pool. I asked her to show me again where the hair band was, because I was wearing my contacts and once I went under I wanted to go straight for it and not have to open my eyes. She pointed to it, and I dove under and grabbed it no problem. I was pretty relieved it only took one try. Boy, they were happy. And this was a hair band, I mean the little elastics. I could've just given her mine for that matter. The Spanish mom read my mind and said, "It doesn't have any value but she really wanted it."

I asked the mom, "Are you visiting from Spain?"

She said, "No, I'm Mexican. Duh. I'm like three steps from the Mexican border asking a Latino person if she's from Spain. Well, she looked like it, that's all I can say."

She said, "We lived in Montana for my husband's job but he just died, so we're here to visit my mother. My mother and sister live here and now that I have no reason to live in Montana, I'm going to move back to El Paso to be near them."

I said, "I'm sorry about your husband."

She said, "That's OK."

I hoped he was a real asshole and that she's better off because she seemed like a really sweet person, and I didn't want her being all broken hearted over this guy. My friend Valerie said one time a woman told her that her husband died and when she said, "I'm sorry," the woman said, "I'm not, he was an asshole."

The widow asked me my name, and I said, "K."

She said, "Kay, like Kay Jewelers?"

I said, "Yes, I wish I was that Kay."

She replied, "You have the diamonds here and pointed to her neckline in the same place where my pendant sat on my neck. My pendant had a tiny diamond in it – really tiny – and I was surprised she could see it from where she was in the pool. I swam back and forth a couple times and then the widow said to me, "When you said you wish you were related to Kay Jewelers, I told you that you have the diamonds, here (and she pointed to her chest) in your heart. You don't need the jewelry store."

Man, some people are sure good at noticing how slow some other people are at figuring out things. It sure was nice of her to explain what she thought.

I swam to the side where one elderly couple was sitting as a younger couple approached them with kids. As the kids and the mom were getting chairs organized, the older man said to the younger, "I see you got a shirt at Mount Rushmore, how was it?"

The younger man said, "It was great. We spent most of the day there and went over to the Sitting Bull monument too. The damn Indians. You know, they refuse to pay a dime for their own damn monument, they want the government to pay for the whole thing for them." That caught me by surprise, I'm going to have to look it up. I assumed the monument was paid for by private fundraiser donations and the income from the visitor's center.

The older man said, "The Indians are just like the blacks. They don't want to do any work, and they want everything handed to them because they think they're entitled to get whatever they want for free." I went under water and swam around until I about thought my chest was going to burst and then got out and went to fetch a towel.

One of the Rushmore dad kids was getting a towel along with another girl and he told her, "Last summer, at the beach, I started eating this hot dog, and I don't know what happened, but all of a sudden



I swallowed it. I mean the whole entire hot dog went down my throat.” The girl and I were staring at him in a trance. I was pretty grossed out already to be honest. He continued, “I was afraid that swallowing a whole hot dog was deadly, so I forced it back up. I didn’t throw it up, I just pushed it all the way back up somehow, and the crazy thing was that when it came out it landed right back on the bun.” I’m not making this shit up – the kid purposefully regurgitated an entire hot dog and landed it smack dab on the bun. What are the odds?

I dried off and noticed I was starting to run out of afternoon, so I told the other old ladies, “Have a great evening,” and headed off to shoe shopping, where I did end up getting some raspberry pumps with the highest heels I’ve ever worn to date. I couldn’t get back into my hotel room so I had to change in my car which had heated up to 280 degrees, then proceeded to meet my Great Aunt and Uncle for dinner.