

The Happy Medium

Leon Scott Baxter

(The Santa Barbara Independent – October 5, 2006)

I miss small, medium and large. Life was so much easier when we had only three sizes. You wanted to buy a T-shirt. If you were smaller than the general public, you got a small. If you were bigger than most of us, you bought the large. The rest of us ended up with the medium. Today, we've got extra small, petite, extra large, plus size, slim fit, full-figured, big and tall... The list goes on.

And the insanity doesn't stop at clothing. On Halloween the candy companies make those really, teeny, individual wrapped pieces (which would be a crime to call bars) of chocolate. Instead of naming them what they are, "small", they print on the bags "Fun Size". Fun size?! Since when does "fun size" mean "so-small-you-can-barely-taste-it"?

Plop down two candy bars in front of any kid: a regular Wonka Bar sized hunk of chocolate and one of these alleged "fun sized" morsels that would get lost in a plastic film canister. Let him look at the two and then ask, "Which one do you think would be more fun to eat?" You do the math.

All I'm asking for here is just three sizes. Last month I had to rent a car for business. I just needed a simple, medium size vehicle. Nothing fancy: four wheels, windshield, and space for my laptop. The choices were overwhelming: economy size, compact, intermediate, standard, full-size, premium, luxury, amphibious, smoking, and nonsmoking.

I went with the full size. Sounded good at the reservation counter. I'm no Hulk Hogan, but I'm a full size man. Figured I'd take a full size car. Turns out, this beast was bigger than the dorm room I shared in college. It had enough space to tote five full size men, a chest of drawers, a forty-gallon fish tank, two fax machines and a Scottish Terrier.

My biggest problem is with the fast food industry. Take for instance the carbonated beverage. Last week I entered a local burger place and asked for a small Coke.

“We don’t have smalls,” the fellow behind the counter informed me.

“What, did you run out of the cups?”

“No,” he answered, “we just don’t sell smalls.”

So I ask, “What’s the smallest you’ve got?”

“Medium.”

“Medium?”

“Yes, medium.”

A crowd began to form. “How can medium be your smallest?” I asked. “To be a medium there must be something smaller than it. That’s the definition of ‘medium’. Medium is between a small and a large... Do you have a large?”

“No,” the fellow tells me, “we have extra large.”

“How can you have extra large if you don’t have a large?” Before he could answer I continued, “If I asked for extra ice wouldn’t there first have to be ice in the cup before you gave me extra?”

“We dropped the large, sir, because more people were ordering the extra large.” The crowd of burger-toting onlookers was growing.

“So, you no longer sell the large?”

“Right.”

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight. Your medium is your small, and your extra large is your large. So, you just have two drink sizes?”

“No sir, “ he explained brandishing what looked like a horse feeding bucket, “we also have king size.”

“No small. No medium. No large.”

“Correct. Medium. Extra large. King size.”

“I’m just about ready to order,” I said, yet I felt the crowd wanted me to continue, “but let me just explain why I’m having difficulty with all this. Take for instance, the extra large. You can’t really call it ‘extra large’, because you don’t have a large to add extra to. You could conceivably call it an ‘extra medium’, because you do actually carry medium size Cokes. Yet, come to think of it, your medium is really nothing more than a misnamed small. So, actually you’d be best off calling it an ‘extra small’, rather than an ‘extra large’.”

The crowd erupted in what seemed like spontaneous applause. Come to find out they'd just announced the winner of Big Brother. But, no matter. I was on a role. When the noise subsided, the fellow behind the counter asked, "So, what size Coke have you decided on, sir?"

"Forget the drink," I told him. "Just get me a large fry."
"Would you like that Super Sized?"