

Last weekend I made a side trip to my local Office Max, mostly because it was enroute to the other errands I had to run. I'd mentioned that I needed a ream of paper to print my manuscript out on so I could read through it. And, as I was clearing one intersection and headed towards the next I saw the glowing red sign and made a split second choice to run in.

The thing is, there's just no such thing as a quick trip to an office store. Somehow, despite knowing exactly what is on my list I end up utterly distracted. And that particular Saturday was no different.

First I decided to try out all the desk chairs. After all, I'm in need of one, so why not try them out, right? Then I spotted the 7', or was it 8, cardboard cutout of Shaq back by all the desks.

"Come on, you have to get your photo with him!" I told my husband, "Then send it to the kids."

It's just this weird thing my family does, and I'm not sure any of us know when it started. But, we see a cardboard cutout, we snap a photo, and send it to the family with, "Hey , just ran into my good buddy..."

This, of course, led to the distraction of all the desks. I opted to shake most of them, you know to see if they could cope with how fast I type. And then I was reminded that I came into the shop for paper.

"Right, paper," was my reply. I marched ahead and down an aisle that appeared to have a variety of papers. They turned out to be hanging file folders.

"Remember 822," my husband says, as I turn around to head for another aisle.

"Why 822?"

"It's the numbers for the ink we need."

"Gotcha," I say, and then because whenever I'm trying to remember things I burst into song, "I simply start singing 822."

My husband joins in, because it's just how we roll. And there we are, two crazy people strutting around a corner with wild abandon singing 822 as if we're in that Pink Panther scene where he's doing the jojoba dance.

And just like that dance ended awkwardly, so did ours because we ran smack into some lady debating between the three specialty papers in her hands. Our song came to an abrupt end.

My husband looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"Don't. You. Dare!" I hissed.

His shoulders started shaking.

"Do. Not. Laugh."

He coughed.

We resume the purpose of our errand, glance at the sign above the aisle. It reads SPECIALTY PAPERS, we vacate the aisle, and see the next sign loudly declaring: PAPER.

"We found it!" I say, and head down the aisle. But I am immediately distracted by notebooks and pens and pencils. "Distraction, big distraction right here!" I say.

My husband grabs me and pulls me at breakneck speed to the end of the aisle. I'm whizzed past rows of cleaning pens in an array of various nib tips and ink colors. Past all the beautiful yellow pencils, and even the less stellar mechanical pencils.

"What on earth did you do that for?" I whine.

"You said you were distracted."

"Yeah, but I actually WANTED to be distracted!"

"We came for paper."

"But pens... Hey, wait a minute, this isle didn't have any paper either! Just those random notebooks. Seriously, how can an office supply shop mislabel their isles? Where's the service desk? I'm going to go ask for their label maker and fix this whole ugly mess."

"Wait," my husband says, "I think I can see paper over there. Which would perfectly explain the paper sign over here." He points across the store. I look, because this could be a ruse, or it could be the mother load.

Six isles down on the far wall sits the paper. I gape, "Are you joking me?"

He shrugs, "Why not?" and I realize this has to be a horrible Dad joke that I'm likely never going to get. On the other hand, there truly is paper ahead. There's only two packets though.

This time I dragged him along, "Hurry, we NEED that paper!"

The problem is, about halfway there I got distracted... again. And this time it's not by a shiny new pen or pencil. It's not a notebook with *the* perfect paper inside either.

No, this time I'm completely distracted by a bucket. Yes, a bucket. A gray one, with a metal handle that moves easily, and has a bit of red plastic on it. I stare at it for a moment, tip my head to check it out from various directions before loudly saying, "What a peculiar item to find in the office shop."

And then I do something far more peculiar. I picked up the bucket, and ran to catch up with my husband. He was inspecting the paper and growling. Oh yes, truly Dear Reader, he was growling and saying things like, "Why do they fail to label the paper properly?"

There was no label on it to declare what the gsm of the paper is. I'm pretty picky about paper, not so much because I'm snobby about the quality of the paper but because I get the chills when I touch rough paper. The kinda chills that make you grind your teeth and shudder, and take forever to subside.

But, this time I'm not so fussed about it, because I'm going to print it out, slip it all in a

notebook, and then put little red marks all over it. Or, so I anticipate. Because even if there's nothing to edit, I tend to leave myself notes. Endearing things like, "What's with all the pronouns?" or "Look at that typo, are you laughing?" They are rather humorous to run across when you're deep in editing mode.

I attempt to stop the growling, "It doesn't matter what the GSM is this time, they are on sale! Two packs for \$14, that seems good. Let's just get it and run."

In reality I have no clue if that's a good price for paper. I'm still locked in that strange space that occurs when one moves across the world. Prices seem good compared to where you have come from, but as you adjust to the new prices you're only sure half the time if something is well priced or overpriced. This is one of those moments, and probably worse because I'm so picky about my paper.

He's uncertain, he knows I'm picky about paper. He's never complained about this pickiness, he's endured the insanity back on the Island of the tiny little office shop in our town, the one where when they see me coming they will actually race to the door and lock it. No, truly they do!

"There's only two packs left! We have to get it before O'Neil comes and takes the rest! I can totally see him peeping over the isles at us, he's kinda hard to miss," I giggle.

He snickers now, and grabs the paper. We move down to the ink, and we both say, "What was the number on the ink again?"

We can't look at each other because the hilarity of the speciality paper isle comes flooding back to us, "822," we whisper in unison. We begin singing our absurd song again, and my husband decides now is a great time to just throw his dance shoes on and is looking very Inspector Cluso.

We finally pull ourselves together lest we're asked to leave the store, and my husband points to the ink on the bottom shelf, "This is it."

I shake my head, "Don't get that one, it has all the colors in it. We don't need all those, we just need the blank ink. We have spares for all the rest at home."

"Good point," he says while searching the shelves. He frowns and glances up at me, "Bad news."

"What do you mean by bad news? This is not a day for bad news!"

"They don't have it."

"Of course they have it," I say pointing with my sandled foot to a black and white ink box two shelves up.

"How did you know?"

"It says 822 on it!" In reality, I'd forgotten the number for a minute and was just scanning boxes with similar pictures. Which was honestly not the smartest move considering they are all boasting the same picture for the most part.

At checkout I plop the mop bucket on the counter. It has my ink in it. My husband looks at the bucket and then at me, but he says nothing. His look is asking me why on earth I have the bucket, and why I'm willing to pay for it. I'm about to tell him when I become completely distracted by all the things on the counter.

The clerk starts ringing things up, completely oblivious to the half finished silent conversation we were having, "Ahh," he says, making me focus on what's going on, "this makes a lot more sense now."

I look at him, I feel like I'm about to learn the reason why they are selling mop buckets. It's bound to be a good story, or at least make us laugh.

"You've got ink in there. I couldn't figure out why the security alert was going off on a bucket to be honest."

I feel completely let down at this news, but I smile and enter in the details on the payment screen as asked. But I spot forever stamps, and I'm trying to remember how many we have left at home. Which leads me to wondering how many global stamps we have at home.

My husband entered my pin number, and the next three buttons on the machine.

"Oh, sorry. I'm so distracted."

Then he hands me the mop bucket, grabs the paper, and we head for the exit where I stop in front of a great large glass... wall. We stand there staring at it for a minute, before it hits us that it's not a door.

We realized we ventured off the path that was leading us to the exit. We manage to contain the laughter until we're in the parking lot.

"It's a shame," I say, swinging the mop bucket over my head to ward off a wasp that's flying by, "that the kids didn't come with us. They have no idea the fun they are missing out on."

And it's like they are there with us, because I swear I hear one of them saying, "Oh, we know, and it's why we didn't come!"



Yes, I really did purchase a mop bucket at the office store. And yes, I do know that offices need mopping buckets on occasion. Still, I always find it odd when I find things like mop pails, toilet paper, and coffee at the office shop. It's just one of those weird little things that make me laugh.

I'm also pretty sure I've officially reached the point where I'm just one of those "embarrassing parents" when I go out, which is why my children turned down an opportunity to join us at the office shop.

There's no amount of horror stories that seem to help them understand that they put on their own embarrassing shows once upon a time. My youngest does not believe that we had to literally carry him out of a store while he screamed the entire way out, "I want my moon back!" {his pet name for his pacifier.}

Our eldest once, very loudly, asked why a bald man was down the shampoo aisle since he had no hair. My husband told me we could never go to the personal care aisles again, lest we run into the poor fellow again.

Ahh, wait until they find out their father was dancing down the ink and paper aisle, which was only a hop skip and a jump away from the service desk. They will never let us out of the house again.

The Reluctant Author.

