

The Hospital Parking Grinch, or Legalized Theft

Editorial by Barbara Heath

I recently had the experience of a 3 day visit to the hospital. The first day was what I thought was just a regular appointment with the doctor in internal medicine. But that quickly turned into, "You are checking into emergency, now."

I had paid my parking the first day, for a 24 hour period. But then the next day came and I needed to add another 24 hours. Would *the machine* allow me to pay for 3 days? Well, the answer is "No". *The machine*, however, gave me a 7 day option. I am not staying 7 days, no way I thought. So, the 24 hours was up. Back to *the machine* I went, telling the nurse, of course, that I would be right back, just in case they came to get me for another test. And of course, when I got back to the emergency department, the nurse said someone would be coming to take me to my next test. At least I was back in time.

I had very limited cash as I was not expecting this decision. Of course, we have **no bank branch** in Stanstead. That was closed June 13, 2019. **No bank machine**. I had taken a credit card with me, so I thought ok, I am fine. I put the card in the machine. "Unable to read card" it tells me. I looked at the card, turned it in every direction possible and still, "Unable to read card". The paper currency I had was barely sufficient to pay the extra money owed. I placed it in *the machine* to get change. *The machine* did not give me back the full amount. By day 3, I was lacking 25 cents, and the parking meter does not like it when the full amount is not deposited. I have found that the meter reads it as if the duration is shorter, and you might just end up receiving a ticket.

There I was, standing in the entrance to emergency, dressed in the finest evening gown the hospital had to offer. Hair ruffled, socks and shoes in the latest style. What a wonderful look for my dignity! Out the door went dignity, and I did not even care. I just needed to get *the darn machine* to work for my needs.

I dug around in my purse and jacket pockets and voila, a wonderful, shining quarter. Yes, someone heard me. I put that quarter in *the machine* with the speed of lightning. So, after 3 trips to *the machine* I had just barely made it work to cover my cost of parking. But what if they asked me to stay longer? I had no way to pay *the machine*.

Here I was, no one with me because I had told everyone there was no need, as I was staying. I thought I had

it covered, credit and debit card in hand. No problem. Big surprise: I do not have an app on my phone. *The machine* does not take debit cards and it was unable to read my credit card. There I was in the hospital, at the mercy of the parking system, as well as hospital scheduling and so many other elements to deal with. And I had to worry about paying the parking. Really.

Parking is at a premium at best, driving around and around to find a place to park. I finally found a place and entered the hospital, with no idea where I was going or exactly why. Insufficient cash in my purse and a credit card *the machine* was not able to read. I did not mention that entering the first traffic circle on Route 143 heading into Lennoxville was a huge round cylinder on wheels approximately 300 feet long. It was stuck trying to manoeuvre that circle. The police were on scene and traffic was backed up. Oh no, I am going to be late! I took a detour and arrived on time. I was already frustrated on arrival, then *the dreaded machine*.

The hospital does not manage the parking and I am a little doubtful about that decision, as well as what the government has allowed these companies to put in place. There most certainly can be an argument made about not paying for parking when our taxes pay for the hospitals. Are they not one and the same? Their parking is most certainly not in a convenient location for shopping, so who else would be there, except the people who need care or work in the hospital?

That is another entire issue. My argument is the method of paying. You are in your room, waiting for tests which you have no control over scheduling, and you need to think about getting to *the dreaded machine*. Technology again. Does it work for us? Are *the dreaded machines* set up for our benefit, or is it an easy way to grab extra money? You really have no choice. Has society and the government legalized theft?

