

## **I hate cookies, anymore**

I used to love cookies. If I wanted to take a break from what I was doing, I would retire to the kitchen, pour myself a cup of tea and indulge in some cookies, especially the chocolate chip kind. I did that while in ministry and still did it in retirement. When I was in parish life, people would get to know my special break times and would either bake me their special cookies or drop by and join me. I miss those special times when I became the taste tester for baker's favorite cookie batches. Now, I have to rely on store bought ones or else bake my own.

Now, I have begun to resent cookies, not the edible kind, but the ones that fly onto my laptop screen uninvited. It seems that everyone wants to send me a cookie as a free gift. They want me to know that these cookies are their token of appreciation for my interest in visiting their website. My host want to show appreciation for my visit and drops some hints in case I wish to return again at a later time so I can continue to evolve a friendship with them that I didn't request initially. Their cookies are an effort to tailor my search, my interest, my experience with a given product so that my searching or shopping experience can be as pain-free as possible.

I used to hate it when I would walk into a store and be accosted immediately by an attendant who asks – "Can I help you?" Obviously, I may just be browsing, checking out possible sale items or just being curious without a plan to buy.

I would love to be able to browse on line without having some anonymous attendant planning to make my shopping or searching experience more pleasant and profitable. In planning to make my browsing or shopping experience more palatable, they offer me a choice most times. I can either accept their cookies or I can go to the unyielding process of managing them. In some cases, they assure me that they will not be offended if I totally reject their offer of a free cookie. In some cases, they make it a little more difficult by making me choose which cookies I am willing to accept and which ones I totally reject. In fact, some companies think that using the option of "rejecting" a cookie is too harsh so they soften the blow by substituting "withdraw consent" instead of "reject it." But I found out that, even though you decide to "reject" cookies, they can still be dropped cleverly onto your browser. Later on, my browser reveals the so-called rejected cookies. That I have to crumble the cookies again.

I usually visit the "SunHerald" website every morning to check the "Obituary" section. I just want to know if I recognize any of the names of persons who have died. Of late, with the inclusion of cookies that – whether accepted or rejected – it keeps asking me to accept cookies even though I have declined. It doesn't want to accept "no" as a legitimate answer.

I used to try and check the Bay St. Louis paper – my last port of call, to do the same. The paper is "unavailable due to legal reasons" I am reminded. Because I am living in the European Union, the publisher has not signed up to the "General Data Protection Regulation." So, with or without cookies, the dying still die without my knowledge.

So, it seems, we have no choice but to live with cookies. Everyone wants us to have a wonderful and theme-tailored shopping experience and make it as pain-free as possible. We, on our part, can tick all the boxes if we don't want to be bothered or we can tunnel through the maze of choices to safeguard our anonymity. Even when we close our browser, we often forget that our cookies still lay in its refrigerator until the next time we open its door to be confronted with them again. We often forget to clean out our refrigerator browser.

Thanks to a persistent and encouraging niece, I purchased an iPhone and watch. The watch especially, keeps reminding me of my exercise accomplishments, my car journeys, stores I may have visited. As well as my predictable routine. I am being followed and tracked by an unwelcome guest.

One of my favorite stores to visit is a DIY store as I am always in a middle of some project or planning one. As I leave that store and am about to head home, I get a reminder that I will be home in "fourteen minutes." Provided I don't stop anywhere else or try and trick my timekeeper by doing some diversion.

Now that I am home finally, I am going to relax with a cup of tea and one or two of my own freshly baked strawberry muffins, baked from my own fresh strawberries. No more cookies for me. I have been converted. I am now a Muffin Man.