

Casual Celebrity

On Easter Tuesday, I decided to drive to a pretty popular and well-known garden center to purchase some vegetable and potato seeds for planting in my ready garden. The place was filled with families shopping for spring gardening seeds, fertilizers. Everyone seemed to be in a buoyant mood. Children were enjoying their Easter break from school. Spirits seemed to be uplifted by the cloudless sky and sun-drenched earth.

I headed past all the giftware, the side-store clothing boutique and the garden machinery to the huge display of various seeds. I had my mission to get at least seeds for carrots, parsnips, cauliflower, onions, Brussels sprouts, peas, beats and, of course, seed potatoes.

Just a few feet away, I noticed a man and his wife busily deciding on their spring, garden purchases. We made eye contact and acknowledged each other with a simple nod of the head. He was probably in his early sixties, a few inches short of six foot. He was wearing a long sleeved navy blue track suit. I sensed that his blond hair might have received some special treatment from a Grecian Formula type tonic. His wife was wearing a long black coat and was busy reading labels on bags of seed potatoes. She asked one of the attendants if they had seed potatoes for a certain well known brand. The particular potato company does not produce seed potatoes commercially in order to preserve part of their appeal and mystique.

The gentleman approached the array of vegetable seed packs and began to read some of the instructions. He collected a few packages of various kinds and put them into the trolley, along with some bags of seed potatoes and some fertilizer and headed for the checkout. I followed with my purchases. His wife paid for the purchases with her credit card. He hoisted the bag of fertilizer on his shoulders and headed out to a car in the parking lot. I paid for my purchases and headed to my car and, with a sense of achievement and anticipation, set out for home.

I found lots of interesting things about this man and my casual encounter with him. First of all, my niece told me that his children attend the same high school that she goes. She mentioned that they are good students; that they don't get any special treatment and they blend in with everyone else in their school.

Secondly, I knew that this man was a very fit man. He had run endurance races. He had climbed the tallest mountains in the world and he had even visited some of my neighbors.

The third thing I noticed about this man was that no one bugged him while he was in the store. Everyone went about their own business and they allowed he and his wife to do the same. Nobody went up to him to comment on the weather or the state of the economy, both local and national.

Fourthly, I didn't see any kids go up to him and shake his hand or even ask for an autograph. And I didn't see any of the workers at the center jockeying to attend to his anticipated questions. They went about their business and were available to answer any questions from anyone in the store.

Fifthly, I didn't see any secret service type characters with ear pieces lurking in the vicinity, keeping an evil eye on would be assassin type shoppers.

I thought about how reversed the situation would be if this man was living in America. He would have no private life. He would be groomed, watched, people handled and shielded from all but the most pressing contacts with fellow human beings. He would have little chance of he and his wife going out spring shopping without having an army style cordon of protective people watching his and everyone's glance and movement around them.

I felt a great sense of pride and satisfaction that this man and his wife could go out to a garden center, like every ordinary human being, and shop in contentment and peace, without fanfare or entourage. I was impressed that everyone in the store allowed an ordinary couple to be an ordinary couple and enjoy together the excitement and enthusiasm of becoming spring gardeners.

When I arrived home, I told my niece that I had met a famous person at the garden center and that he was the father of two young people who went to her high school as well. She had no trouble guessing who the man was. Oh! By the way, I forgot to mention his name or title. He is the Prime Minister of Ireland.