

Packages in Packages



by Andy Rooney

- 1 Friendly types strike up a conversation with the person next to them on an airplane. Others fall asleep or read a newspaper, ignoring the person with whom they are rubbing elbows. I don't want to be best friends with a stranger but it seems polite to exchange a few words.
- 2 Last week I sat with an attractive woman in her late forties (I'm guessing) and we started to talk. She said she frequently flew from New York to California and back in her job as "marketing director" for a company that makes potato chips.
- 3 She had something to do with their advertising and I've always been curious about the relationship of the advertising budget to the cost of the product itself so I asked her about that.
- 4 "Which costs the most?" I asked. "The potato chips or the advertising?"
- 5 "Oh, the advertising," she said without hesitating. "Far and away."
- 6 "And what about the packages the potato chips come in?" I wanted to know.
- 7 "The package costs more than the potato chips, too," she said. "It's an expensive process."
- 8 When you think about it, you can see how it would cost the potato chip makers a pretty penny to pump all that air in their bags and seal it tight enough to make it look as though it had more in it than it does.
- 9 This is the same idea that candy bar makers have when they put the candy on a piece of cardboard twice the size of the candy bar, and wrap that to make it look roughly three times bigger than it is.
- 10 We all know advertising is out of control but so is packaging. Manufacturers put their products in plastic, wax paper or foil, put that in a box, wrap the box in paper with advertising or nutritional information or warnings on it, cover the whole thing with another layer of thin plastic film and at the checkout counter, the store puts the whole thing in a bag for us to bring home.
- 11 I don't want to buy crackers, cereal, or toothpaste loose but we are consuming huge amounts of material wrapping things that are already in three or four other kinds of wrappings or containers.
- 12 It's what accounts for the mountains of junk we all put out by the street in front of the house on the day the garbage truck comes. We couldn't wait to buy all the stuff and now we can't wait to throw away all the debris attendant to its packaging. Wrapping paper and the boxes stuff comes in expands when it's removed from whatever was covering so our trash takes up more room than the products held.
- 13 There are laws now that make manufacturers inform consumers of things like the nutritional content of their product and potential dangers for people with special medical

problems. I'd like to have them add to those laws by making manufacturers tell us what percentage of the price we pay is for the product itself and what percentage of the total is for advertising and packaging.

14 Too many of the packages stuff comes in are more convenient for the manufacturer than they are for the consumer. While I was talking to the potato chip lady, the flight attendant came around with a basket containing foil bags of peanuts. These bags are also blown up like a balloon to give the impression of more peanuts than they contain. There is a mark on the top of the bag designating the spot where you are supposed to tear open the bag. If I had to depend on getting into the bag in the manner suggested by the words "TEAR OPEN HERE," I could starve to death trying to get at my peanuts.

15 Last week I bought a toothbrush, a comb and a pair of scissors. I made the mistake of trying to open the plastic packages the comb and toothbrush came in first. It took me about 10 minutes. When I went at the heat-sealed plastic container that enclosed the scissors, I realized I should have tried to open that first so I could have used the scissors to open the other two.

16 We're being packaged to death.