

We all say it. “I’m making a Costco run.”

It’s never a Safeway run or a Target run. But it’s always a “Costco run.”

There’s a reason: No other store tests our patience, endurance, willpower and perseverance the way Costco does. There’s something about Costco that transcends class and socioeconomic status. Rich or poor, young or old, we all shop at Costco, and no one judges us for it.

For me, planning and executing a Costco run resembles a chapter from the NFL playbook or a covert operation. The night before I go in to battle, my mind races with pre-shopping logistics: Should I go alone? Should I eat before I leave? What is the absolute most I can spend? Is my trunk empty? Where’s my checkbook? Should I wait in the gas line? Do I really have to go?

The next day, armed with an oversized shopping cart and Costco Connection coupon book, I’m at the starting line. I flash my membership card and nod to the greeter while doing my best to ignore the Samsung 55-inch diagonal LCD HDTV on my right and the Jenn Air gas grill on my left. No, I have a list, and I’m sticking to it. But maybe I should get a frozen yogurt first.

With resolve and determination, dodging cart after cart, I join in the Running of the Bulls and make my way to the back wall of paper towels, bottled water and toilet paper. God, I hate Costco – why is it so crowded and why did all these people have to come today?

Great prices may be in abundance at Costco, but manners certainly are not. It’s damned near impossible to maneuver around dozens of abandoned carts left in aisles by morons trying to grab free samples. People are practically plowing each other down trying to score four Cheerios in a paper cup. And their imaginary childhood friend must be back, because they push and shove a second time, get-

ting a cup for them, too.

Every cart tells a story. It’s like watching Saturday morning cartoons – one cart has a slab of meat straight out of the Flintstones and another sports giant solar panels right out of the Jetsons. I give the older couple with a cart full of booze the benefit of the doubt that they are actually

hosting a party and aren’t just alcoholics. And that stressed-out mother – her cart overflows with every convenience food imaginable, but I know the second she gets home her kids will complain that there’s nothing to eat. Then there’s the divorced weekend dad with his two kids in tow, trying to buy his way back into their life with a Kirkland kayak, three air mattresses and a deluxe quick-pitch tent.

I spot an office manager stocking up on coffee, plastic cutlery, Clorox wipes and Goldfish crackers, and pass a Power Shopper laden with a box of Fuji apples, four cooked chickens, a mound of denim, seven books, two memory foam contour pillows, designer sunglasses, a humidifier and three dog beds piled up higher than she is. Oh wait – that’s *my* cart.

And present in everyone’s cart, the ubiquitous five-pound tub of Red Vines.

With more than 55 million members, it’s safe to say Costco and its brainiacs have mastered the art of warehouse shopping. Even after we become accustomed to the maze of carts and confusion, they still play with our mind, enticing us to buy

something because it will probably be unavailable the next time we’re there. Why else would we put up with the teeming hordes, maze of carts, the sound of cellphones ringing while husbands on one side of the warehouse call their wives on the other, and the ever-changing selection of merchandise?

And God forbid Costco should have helpful signage telling us what’s in any given aisle. Just when I remember where they keep the 10-gallon jugs of mayo or the bottles

living in a costco culture

Rich or poor, young
or old, everyone
shops there.
Why is that?



By **Donna Lynn Rhodes**



Paul Sakuma/Associated Press

At Costco, if you walk around long enough, you'll buy something you absolutely don't need.

of allergy medicine with enough gel tabs inside to stop an entire nation from sneezing — they move them.

In the 1980s and early '90s Costco used to sell basic bulk products geared toward small businesses and families large enough to have their own sitcom or TLC reality show. Nowadays, Costco pretty much sells everything, including cars and coffins. One thing's for certain, from a gumball machine to a pinball machine, if you walk around long enough you'll buy something you absolutely don't need.

I check my list and realize I forgot the garbage bags, and make my way back to get them when I run into a friend and now wish I had taken the time to wash my hair. After 10 minutes of talking about how much we both hate Costco, I head to the checkout lines that stretch past the giant jars of Nivea and an endcap filled

with five-tier towers of Rocky Mountain Chocolate. While in line I check email and play three rounds of Words with Friends before it's finally my turn to say, "How much? Are you sure?" On the way out, receipt in hand, I pass a little village of overweight people huddled together under indoor umbrellas eating hot dogs, pepperoni pizza and churros, protecting their carts like nomadic hunters and yelling at their kids to sit down.

I show my receipt at the door, just in case I tried to hide that 55-inch TV in my cart. Finally outside, I make my way past the parade of minivans to my cute little sports car. I manage to just fit everything in, and dread finding a place to put it once I get home. Stuck in traffic, I realize that 48 Skinny Cows are slowly melting in my trunk.

Tough. I'll pick up another box on my next Costco run. 