

Breaking Grey

Yeah, that was us on *A Current Affair*. We were the second story that night. We appeared after the dodgy dog walker and before the miracle diet pills. Our story was titled “The Out-of-Control Octogenarians”. They had thirty seconds of security footage that they padded out to a five-minute story to pretend it was newsworthy. We refused to talk to them. So, they stitched us up. They had some “expert” comment on our mental capacity. Then another one compared us to those luddites who destroyed machinery in the 19th century. We’re not that bloody old. But who were we really hurting? Sure, it was a mild inconvenience but in the long run it was for the greater good.

I mean, who really likes scanning their own groceries? It might be convenient when you’re just buying milk, but now they’re expecting us to scan all our weekly shopping. There’s never more than one cashier open. It takes me twice as long to do it myself. I move my bags and that red light goes off. Then I have to call the attendant over. It takes forever to get their attention. Then they don’t even look at my shopping. They just scan that bloody card they have and move to the next red light. Then mine goes off again and I have to call them over again and again and again.

When I ask why only one cashier is open, they don’t say anything. It’s not making the bloody groceries cheaper that’s for sure. That greedy board of directors just decided that instead of paying staff they’ll make us do it ourselves.

I was telling all this to James, Betty, and that double-crossing Clark. As I’m not one to complain they took notice. They’d all had enough too. James said we should just break the scanners. If none of them worked, they’d have to open more checkouts. Then people would be reminded that we didn’t need to give free labour just to get our own groceries. We could have someone lift the heavier stuff into our trolleys. I could have a nice chat to a cashier about their day, instead of just throwing my hands up and pointing to that stupid red light while I try my best not to swear.

After Betty and Clark left, James walked me to his car and showed me how we could break the scanners. He pulled out this tool about the size of a spanner. It had a red and black handle that led to the head. The head was bent like a hammer but the end of it was a small, sharp point. Kind of like the end of a drill. He said it was a window breaker. He’d gotten his son to buy it for him online so he could use it for emergencies. I’m not sure what type of emergencies, probably for when he locks his keys inside his house.

So his son wouldn't be suspicious of our plan, James pretended he lost his window breaker. His son bought another online, but then he booked James an appointment with his GP for a check-up. Luckily, it was easy for James to convince the Doc that he didn't have dementia and was just stupid.

The next time I caught up with James, Betty and that bastard Clark was at the seniors' dinner at the RSL. I ordered the schnitzel with garden salad, James got his with boiled veggies, Betty only fancied soup and Clark, trying to impress Betty, ordered the roast pumpkin salad. I've never seen him order a bloody salad until that day. I should've realised then that the man has no integrity.

I reminded them all about the chat we'd had. How we were getting tired of these businesses making us do the work. This was right after the RSL wouldn't give us a menu and we had to use our phones to scan the bloody QR code to order something. What are they going to do next? Make us cook our own dinner?

We all agreed that this rubbish started with the supermarkets. Betty said the last time she was there none of the checkouts were even open. It took her 30 bloody minutes to scan her items. She said that she almost pulled her back out when she lifted a bag of oranges. I mean what is she supposed to do? Go in every day and buy one orange at a time?

That was when James got out the window breakers and we put our plan into action. We needed to wear face masks as those bloody machines now take a picture of your face. Luckily, we're used to wearing them now. It was Betty's job to distract the security guard. She did this by asking him where she could find the Epsom salts. Of course he didn't know and had to call the attendant over. Then Betty faked a dizzy spell.

According to Betty she was quite the actress back in her day, and she's still a bit of a looker at 76. But when she pretended to collapse and stepped left and swung her arm into the chewing gum stand, it did look a bit staged. It served its purpose though. The security guard and attendant began picking everything up which gave us the distraction we needed. I aimed the window breaker at the scanner and tapped it with a quick flick of the wrist. It caused a small crack, but the scanner still worked, so I hit it again harder and then a third time even harder. I moved on to two more, hitting each once but with a big swing. I coughed a fit to hide the sound of the glass shattering.

Then I heard the security guard shout and I looked up to see that Clark, the bloody idiot, was hitting the display screens with the window breaker and pulling the sharp point across them causing a tear down the middle. We were supposed to be bloody subtle. I was only able to break one more of the scanners before leaving.

I tootled past Betty and muttered for her to just leave. James was waiting in the disabled parking spot out front in the getaway car. Betty looked back at Clark, then at me. I shrugged. It was too late for him. The security guard had already taken his window breaker. He was going to have to think quick to get out of this one.

Betty didn't start walking out until I was almost at the automatic doors. I turned back just before I went through and saw that she had picked up her pace, her short legs scurried like a toy poodle's.

I was almost through the door when the sales assistant came after us. She grabbed Betty who shouted for the young lady to unhand her. It was loud enough to get the shoppers to turn around. She really must've been a good actress back in the day.

I continued on my way to the car. The door was locked, and James was dozing. I tapped on the window, and he almost leaped out of the drivers' seat. His mouth was open like a trout as he looked around trying to make sense of his surroundings. I said to open the bloody door. Betty was already out of the supermarket with the sales assistant in tow. James fumbled trying to find the button to unlock the doors.

I managed to open the door as the sales assistant passed Betty and came up to me. Betty kept doddering along and waved for us not to leave without her.

I pretended I couldn't see either of them. I yelled at James to start the car. He asked where Clark was, and I said it was too late for him. I tried to close the door, but the sales assistant held it open. I used both hands to pull it shut. The whole time I wouldn't look at her as I strained to pull the door. Eventually she let go and it slammed closed.

The car revved and James pulled out leaving Betty behind. She threw up her hands and her jaw dropped to the ground. James stopped the car and wound down my window to tell her we'd meet her at the café around the corner. She couldn't hear us and walked closer to the car. He repeated it again but by this stage she was next to the car, so we just let her in.

The sales assistant stood there talking on her phone and staring at us as James waited for the cars turning into the carpark.

It wasn't long before the cops turned up at our homes. Clark the gutless goose told them everything. I had to ask my daughter to pick me up from the copshop. My lawyer made me plead guilty. He wouldn't even consider my defence that we were taking action to improve society. James and Betty got a warning, but I got a suspended sentence and had to promise I had no intention of being a public nuisance again.

After the footage appeared on TV my grandson told me it was all over the internet. People were praising us and saying things like 'good on you for sticking it to the man', 'finally a boomer cause I can get behind', 'bring back the cashiers', 'that old lady is a GILF'. He printed them out for me to show James and Betty. He said he respected me for fighting what he called late-stage capitalism.

It wasn't until five weeks later that we were all back at the RSL. I showed James and Betty the comments, while Clark sat at a table by himself. We haven't spoken to him since. If he hadn't messed up who knows how many times we could've gotten away with it.

Betty said it that she'd heard about someone doing it at another supermarket and James joked that we'd started a movement. I smirked then passed out some black markers and pointed to the sticker on the table. We're not done yet. Those bloody QR codes are next.