

# I Love Junk Mail

By Vengrai Parthsarthy

Should that be in the past tense? I don't know. When I first came here from India I was fascinated by the quantity of glossy and not so glossy mail and flyers that my son got. He had this habit of separating what he called the junk and throwing them into the WPB first thing. I couldn't understand how he could throw away the stuff without even seeing it. I told him: "Listen, you may not be interested but I am. Don't throw them away. I will. After all

I have the whole day before me with nothing to do and I would like to go through them. "Well," he said, "you asked for it", and smiled a roguish smile.

From that day onwards he would faithfully hand over what he called the 'trash' to me. My, what a pleasure it was to go through them one after another and savor them. Each one of those glossies would cost a packet to print in India and here they are throwing them away, just like that.

I would sort out the papers into, er, trash and those which called for a second look, and a third look. Everything advertised was, I found, exciting. What colors! There were the discount coupons on which one can save a packet. So I cut them out religiously and kept them separate.

And, then there were a sheaf of cuttings for my grandson's scrap book which I was encouraging him to maintain. There were these bargains adver-

tised for by the grocery, electronic and apparel stores. They were all so inviting. I kept all these cuttings. My file folders increased in thickness and when I gave the discount coupons (such a big collection) my son said "No, I don't have the time to use them. Please trash them". I was a bit peeved but then I still could not resist the temptation to cut and keep them. Their numbers grew and without any takers, they grew and grew.

So did my grandson's scrap book in which after an initial period of excitement he lost interest. The result was that like a seven year old I was collecting cuttings for a scrap book in which no one was interested.

And then I made the fatal faux pas. At one of the Residents Association meetings I told a group of friends how I was making use of all the free mail and flyers. That was the signal for all sorts of people dumping their junk mail on me, as if they were doing me a great favor. I had to grin and bear it. But not for long because it caused problems of living space or lebensraum which, some people say, started World War II. A similar war like situation was developing in my son's home, with flyers here there and everywhere.

The only thing I could do was to make a strategic retreat from the battle scene. It was a three-pronged assault. First I made a reservation by the earliest flight to Austin where my daughter was. Next I told my son in plain English "Do what you will with the junk mail". Thirdly, I asked my son to tell all the generous minded friends that I wouldn't need the gratuitous mail any more. No thank-you.

Now, what do I do when I return? Somebody said just climb to the top of your building and shout 'Help!' or better still ring up 911. By the way, when are you going back to India? That's a question I ask myself.

