



# “Who Stole My SPOT?”

*By Mary Nearpass*

It is six o'clock Monday morning. You blew off the gym all weekend, and decide to hit it first thing today. You pull into the lot, and to your complete dismay, your parking spot is occupied! "Who stole my spot?" is your immediate thought process. After adjusting to this slight irritation, you settle for another spot, and plunge forward with your determination still intact.

With a sigh of relief at the absence of a crowd, you proceed to the locker room, get your water bottle and Walkman, and head upstairs to the elliptical. Your body can take you to it with your eyes closed. When you look up to place your water bottle in its usual caddy, someone is already sweating away on YOUR cardio-vascular machine! This cannot be happening! "Will you be much longer," you manage to verbalize as politely as you can; only to hear, "I just got on five minutes ago, but there are plenty of others open though!"

"That's not the point," you voraciously want to retort. But instead, a forced, fake, half smile is all you can muster, and, reluctantly, like a little girl who wanted to play with a particular Barbie, but had to settle for Midge, you walk down four or five machines, and step onto a stranger. Convinced your workout will not be the same, you shorten your original intention of performing a rigorous, aerobic conditioning program to a ten-minute warm up, which seems like an eternity.

With a newly, envisioned weight training session now in the forefront of your mind, you somehow muster up the determination and focus to still accomplish a super workout.

**Lat pull down:** CHECK  
**Shoulder press:** CHECK  
**Leg extension:** "TEMPORARILY OUT OF ORDER"

Shock number three! Another unexpected detour and I have been up for less than an hour! If this is any indication of how my day will be, I may as well just call in sick!!!

Whether it is your parking spot at the mall, desk in the classroom, seat in the cafeteria, lane in the pool, or your spot in a Yoga class, when someone or something gets in the way of our conditional, pre-planned mindset, we all react in the same manner with audacity, shock, disbelief, anger, denial, reluctant complacency and compliant acceptance. We actually go through the natural steps of a mini-grieving process! All of these scenarios share one common theme: our need, want and desire to have structure, predictability and ultimately, a perceived control over our domain in life. When things do not go according to plan, we immediately react like little children, saying to ourselves, "Hey, you can't take that, it's mine!" or "I don't have to share it with you if I don't want to!" Major, adult meltdown.

I also love the body language that goes along with any pre-coded violation to the gospel according to the orchestration of spots in the gym. Have you even been on the other side of the spectrum when you were the new kid on the block? You have to be "checked out", and "put to the test" in order to pass inspection. God forbid you are the new kid in the Pilates class. You walk in all excited yet nervous to try out the class. You have practiced at another gym for awhile, and have heard good things about this

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particular instructor, so you are feeling pretty good until all eyes are on you; not so much because you are new, but because you had the flagrant disregard to place your mat down in Jennifer's spot!

Whether the seasoned fixture or the anxious newcomer, feeling deflated is the end result. Do you find yourself wanting to re-inflate yourself by diminishing or degrading someone else? Since we automatically feel betrayed or victimized, these feelings tend to threaten our illusion that we can and should have it all. This sense of entitlement we have created in our narcissistic society feeds our preferred image of unlimited possibilities that nurture our sense of grandiosity and omnipotence. We could go on and on throughout our day to find numerous "spots" that have been confiscated from us. We are left with feelings of disrespect, disregard and indifference.

However, this may come as a shock, or maybe not, but guess what? It ain't about the spot or the person who took it! It is about control! Something or someone had the audacity to take it away from us! Although we try to "adjust" to the situation in the best way we know how, as a society, we are poor at adapting to change. We like predictable, reliable structure to guide us through our day-to-day routine. It makes us feel good by granting ourselves the illusion that we are in complete control of our lives. Amazingly, most of the time, things go relatively according to plan, so we come to expect it. Since we have little or no control over bigger events that are bound to occur in our lives, we tend to desperately cling to what we think we can control. There is definitely something to be said about establishing and sticking to a routine. It teaches us the art of self-discipline, self-reliance and self-assurance. However, if someone takes our parking place, it is almost as if we respond as we are being personally violated!

Instead, if we could simply take a deep breath, step back and ask ourselves the ultimate question of intent, "Did the person who parked in 'my' space intentionally do so just to piss me off?" Highly unlikely because; a) it's not always all about you, b) maybe the person cannot walk too far, and c) whatever happened to flexibility? If you don't like the scene, paint another picture! Whatever happened to "doing good" verses "feeling good"? When faced with daily obstacles (a.k.a. challenges), developing self-control can cultivate character, thereby becoming stronger for having done so. Look at these as opportunities to master feelings of frustration and anger with compassion toward the other person and the true power of intention. If we can learn to reverse roles in most of our daily interactions, the stress level decreases almost immediately and a sense of accomplishment resides were a sense of betrayal and entitlement used to live.

Therefore, tomorrow morning, I dare you to deliberately park in a different spot. You may just find that you not only survive the trauma, but also thrive in the spontaneity!

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