

Target Parking Lot, June-Near Future

Julie thanked the cashier and proceeded to load her three children into the cart. She checked her “four important things.”

Stroller, diaper bag, toy bag, purse.

“Thanks again.”

“Sure, Ms. Walker. Have a good day.”

The complete enormity of Motherhood. Three bags, a shopping cart, a five year old, a two year old, and a baby; and doing fine. She had enough composure to greet the security guard on the way out.

No traffic either way. A short walk to the car and then The Great Ordeal of getting three kids situated. First, the baby, the beautiful girl Alexia - but six weeks old. Child seat placement, no effort for the three-time veteran. Now, the hard part, a two-year-old grumpy butt.

“Max! Maximillion! Get over here!” *Ah, the thrill of the chase.*

“Get in the car! James, you too.”

“I don’t wanna watch Learn to Read,” whined James.

“You know you’re going to have to for two more hours. Now set it up.”

Reluctantly, “Ok.” James began walking as if wearing a 50-pound pack.

At least he’s moving.

She spun, hawkish eyes scanning for her young. Max, in a show of disobedience, had sat down exactly where she wanted.

“Score,” she said.

Stroller, diaper bag, toy bag, purse.

She rolled around to the cart and quickly stowed the groceries in the Cargo Convenience storage bin. Her cell phone rang.

“Yes?”

“Hello, may I speak with Julie Walker?”

“Yeah, that’s me,” she said with the dread of an impending telemarketing call.

“Do you have five minutes to take a short survey from The Satisfaction Group?”

“Well, no, not really. What are you offering?”

“For less than five minutes of your time, we’re prepared to offer you two tickets to the new vid, The Crossing Over, shot on location from the continuing struggle in Iraq.”

“Oh, I think I heard about that. A Sunni and a Shia learn to get along after years of bloodshed?”

“Yes, that’s the one.”

She’d been wanting to see it. “Do I get \$150 too?”

“I’m sorry ma’am, the Satisfaction Group is unable, by law, to provide cash payment. I can throw in a dinner for two at Fredrick’s. Dinner with the husband?”

“Done. What’s this concerning?”

“Thank you for asking. We have been contracted by a local business to conduct a short market research survey, in order for that business to improve its services. We have been contracted by Dr. Joseph Isaacson, who we understand recently performed a service for you. Is that correct?”

Her obstetrician. “Yes.” She got in the car and flicked on Learn to Read. An

audible groan emanated from the back seat. Tom and Jerry for Max.

"My first set of questions involves his workplace. Can I ask you a few questions about his workplace?"

"Sure."

"The questions I'm going to be asking should be rated on a scale from one to ten, one being Very Unsatisfactory and ten being Excellent. If you need any help, feel free to ask."

"Could I get help speeding this up?"

"I'm sorry ma'am. We are required to disclose various items. We are monitored by the Federal Government, under the new HIPPA 2 regulations. If you want me to explain..."

"No" *Ich!*

"I won't be taking much more of your time. Should we start?"

"This is about Dr Isaacson?"

"Yes. Ok, first, how would you rate his office décor, on a scale of one being the lowest and ten being the highest."

"Ten. He has a..."

"Next, how would you rate the comfort of his office space?"

"Oh, definitely a ten. He's so..."

"Finally, on the office space itself, how would you rate the art displayed at Dr. Isaacson's office?"

"Oh...well, I didn't really look at it. I'm sure it was great."

"On a scale from one to ten please ma'am."

"How about a nine."

"Thank you ma'am, we're almost done here. The next three questions are concerned with Dr. Isaacson's staff. Are you comfortable answering questions about the personnel of Isaacson and Brendal, Obstetricians?"

"Yes." *Will it ever end!*

"First, how would you rate, on a scale from one to ten, the professionalism of his staff?"

"Nine."

"How would you rate the professionalism of Dr. Isaacson himself?"

"Ten."

"How would you rate your experience interacting with Dr. Isaacson and his staff?"

"Ten. Maxamillion, watch your vid!" He had struggled free of his Safety Sheath in order to grab a juicepacket.

"Mom, my lesson's done." James was lying.

Into the phone: "I'm sorry." Screaming: "Settle down both of you! James, next lesson, buster. In the seat. Max, here, Max...Don't..." Orange juice squirted in her eye. "Max," she said, with frustration.

The two year old nearly in tears, "I didn't mean to mommy."

"It's ok Max. Just try to be careful. How about I put on some He Man?"

A voice from a phone: "Do you need to put me down for a moment?"

"No...fine. How many more questions?"

"I apologize for taking up so much of your time. Thank you for your patience.

Only three more questions. I'll start. Are you comfortable answering questions..."

"Yeah yeah yeah."

"I'm sorry ma'am, I am required to say all of the following by law."

A sudden realization. "Are you going to ask about the procedure?"

"Yes ma'am. Please allow me to get through this in its entirety. Are you comfortable answering questions related to the finished product, to be specific, a infant child named Alexia? I understand if this is a difficult subject."

That's my girl.

"May I continue?"

Not this!

But she heard herself say ok.

"Thank you Ms. Walker. On a scale from one to ten, how would you rate your child as a whole?"

It was a reflex that caused Julie to touch the disconnect button on her phone. She felt like a bird fluttering away from the nest to draw the cat away from her defenseless chicks. She sat for a moment, stunned, then began to cry.