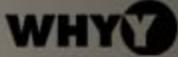


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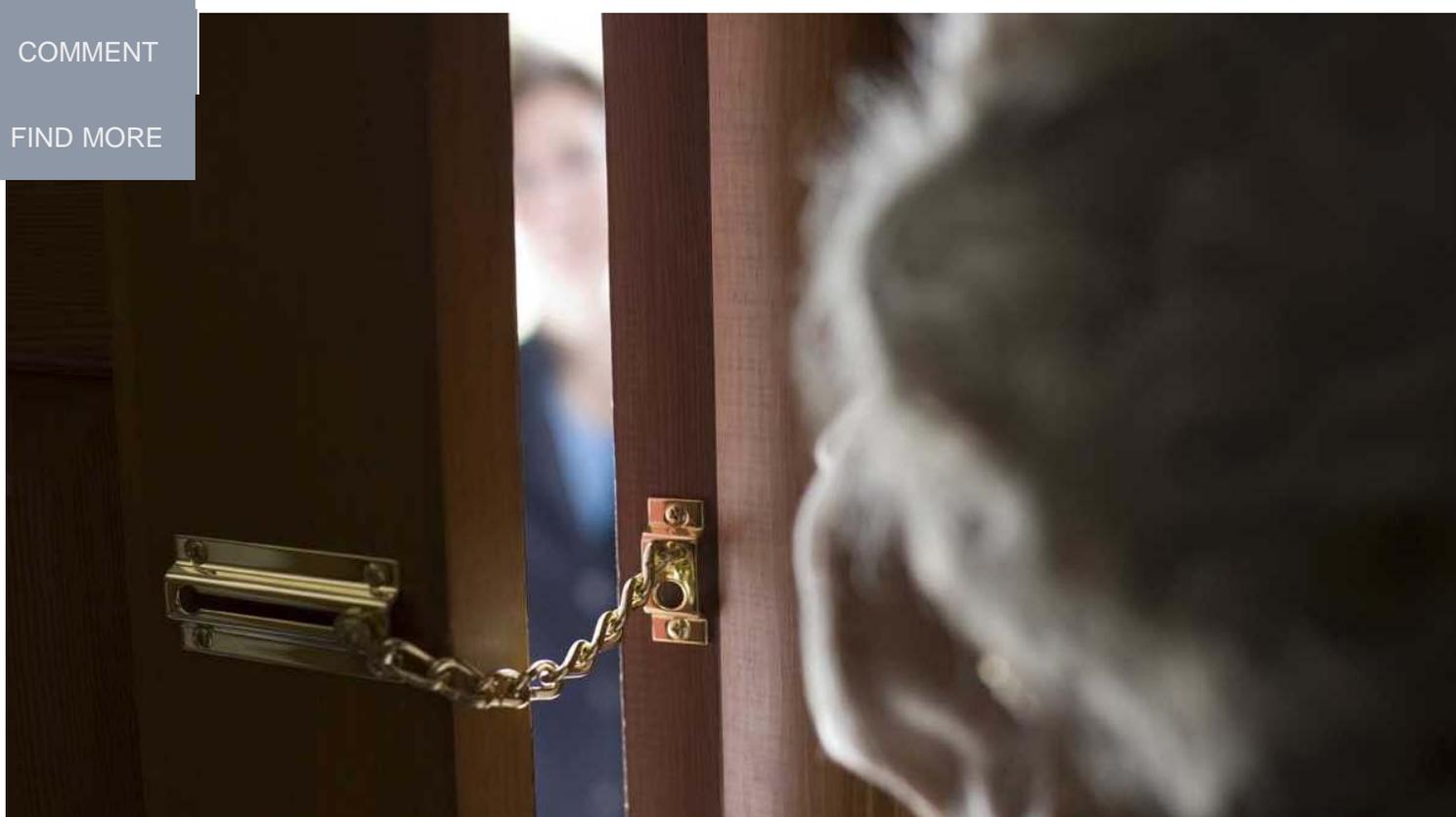
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Knock off the door-to-door intrusions, please. I'm not buying



(Door-to-door sales call image courtesy of Shutterstock.com)



COMMENTARY
BY SAMANTHA DRAKE

A warning appeared on my Facebook feed not long ago. A friend who lives a few towns away advised against opening our doors to anyone we weren't expecting and suggested telling unsuspecting elderly neighbors to do the same. Apparently, a lone stranger with unknown intentions was in the area knocking on front doors. It sounded to me like an escaped criminal was on the loose in Philadelphia's suburbs.

The threat turned out to be persistent door-to-door solicitors from one of the energy companies unleashed by the PECO deregulation.

But it was too late for me. The energy companies' foot soldiers — cheerful, long-winded and loath to take "no" for an answer — had already swarmed through my community the previous year. Before them came the seemingly endless war for the hearts and wallets of cable television subscribers. It was a desperate battle, too often waged after dusk and with misleading information. I'm looking at both of you, Comcast and Verizon.

These intrusions continue only because people keep answering their doors and engaging. I feel partly responsible for these home invasions, because I am one of those people. Even though I know better, I can't seem to help myself. My Pavlovian response to a doorbell or repeated knocking is clearly a throwback to a simpler time and place — though not a time or place I ever lived in.

Hiding out

I get it, making contact is getting tougher all the time. Phone solicitors are ignored or shuttled to voice mail by caller ID if not muzzled by [Pennsylvania's Do Not Call List](#). We no longer have to watch anything resembling a commercial on TV thanks to fast-forwarding or simply changing the channel. Spam filters ruthlessly weed out unwanted emails, and pop-up blockers quell online ads.

But ignoring someone I don't know on my own front porch requires an entirely different level of avoidance tactics. My strategy, when I remember it, is to quietly race upstairs and peer out a second-story window with a view of my front porch.

Often, you can tell people's intentions based on their appearance. Well-dressed people with books are from religious groups. The not-so-well-dressed carrying clipboards are environmentalists. Men in work clothes want to shovel my snowy driveway or clean my clogged gutters. (That used to be a welcomed visit until one enterprising gutter cleaner returned to ask me for money so he could take the bus home.) With kids, it's hard to tell what they want — but I want to scold their parents for letting them go up to strangers' houses. Crazy people can lurk on either side of the door.

Few exceptions

My advice to those trying to do business is to stuff whatever you want me to see in my mailbox, like the menus I get from every new pizza or Chinese takeout place in the area. It's not like I'm going to sign up for anything or write a check while standing in my doorway trying to keep my cats from slipping out. I don't understand how door-to-door solicitation can be part of a good business model, anyway. It just annoys people.

So please stop. My own family doesn't arrive at my door unexpectedly, and total strangers shouldn't be doing it either.

Mind you, a couple of narrowly defined exceptions apply. I do grant a very limited number of face-to-face doorway transactions involving sugar, i.e., Girl Scouts selling me cookies (in full uniform, please), or me giving away Halloween candy (only on Oct. 31, and only to individuals who are clearly children, in

costume, and preferably chaperoned).

Surprise flower deliveries are always welcome, too.

Oh wait — I just remembered that [a stranger tasered a Villanova man](#) a few years ago when he opened the door for a flower delivery. Never mind. I don't really like surprises.

It's a sad commentary on the state of safety and trust in our society, but if I have to start making Girl Scouts and trick-or-treaters show some form of ID under the door before I open it, so be it.

—
Samantha Drake is a freelance writer based in an undisclosed location.

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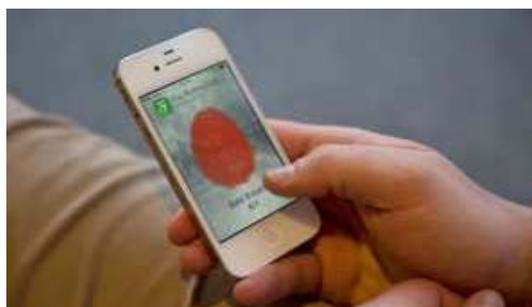
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