

Puerto Rico has been ROCKED!



Jeana Babcock

Have you heard about the recent earthquakes in Puerto Rico? Not only did I hear about them, but I also experienced them first-hand! While we were "getting rich in memories" on

our first real family vacation in Puerto Rico last month (mentioned in my last article), our memories will be even more firmly planted in our minds with the inclusion of many earthquakes - most notably the 6.4 magnitude shaker that rocked us right out of sleep in the middle of the night. It was truly wild to experience!

Not only did our vacation include earthquakes, but it also included power outages, complaining, stuck elevators, endless stair climbing, rain, sea-sickness, terrible food, and sibling rivalry. That's the real truth and, let me tell you, it is not what I envisioned at all. In my mind, I was prepared for, you know, a fairy tale vacation where everyone got along, were happy 99% of the time, relaxed, laughed a lot, bonded over amazing experiences, ate exceptional gluten-free meals, and had warm fuzzies for seven days straight.

But life is not a fairy tale, is it? Perhaps if you scroll through your social media newsfeed, other people's lives look to be chock-full of the good. But what about the bad and the ugly? Maybe there are posts about some sad moments in life, but mostly, it's the exaggerated good, void of the realness of underlying emotions and the "real" bad and ugly parts.

If I were to ask you to write a few sentences about your life right now, what would they say? Go ahead, grab a pen so you can write in the margin. But before you do, consider this: What if I had only told you that my vacation to Puerto Rico consisted of the first ocean visit for our teens, iguanas, an amazing castle, Three Kings Day (PR's biggest celebration of the year), kayaking, paddle boarding with manatees, deep-sea fishing, rainforests, waterfalls, hiking, ziplining on the longest line in the world, my son's twentieth birthday and amazing food? Would all of this goodness -- true as it is -- alter what you might tell me about your life?

But now that I've told you the good with the bad and ugly, does that let down your defenses and allow you to be real? Please do! Take a moment and write a few "real life" sentences in the margin. Or send me an email -- I love to hear about the realness in other people's lives!

As I am always circling life moments back to the automotive world, might you be interested in hearing some of the "ugly" many mechanics have endured? And might you be open to a new perspective?

Over the years of my time in this industry, I have heard some ugly things, from "My car didn't _____ (fill in the blank) before I brought it to you, you must have done something to it" to "Since your shop is nicer than others, you must charge more" or "I could have done it for cheaper myself." And one of the ugliest I have heard: "You took advantage of me because I'm a woman" or "You took advantage of my wife because she is a woman."

I am grieved by some of the perceptions in this industry. I know there are mechanics who are untruthful. I know there are mechanics that do not have integrity. I've seen TV programs that have uncovered mechanics that have done terrible things. Unfortunately, I've even witnessed a shop owner in our community that has been dishonest, led customers astray, and cut down other shops for his own benefit. And because of a few bad people, the rest of the automotive industry, even those mechanics with the utmost integrity, have been stereotyped by some as being dishonest. That, my friends, is the ugly.

Now let's talk about more of what is true. Most independent automotive repair shops are honest and have the best intentions. They want to do the best thing for you and your vehicle. They desire to keep your vehicle healthy so that you can count on a reliable ride for a long time. If something goes wrong, many times it is due to miscommunication or human error -- not intentional crookedness. And in situations where something does go wrong, the mechanic wants to make it right.

In an effort to take the stereotypes away and help you see most mechanics in a new light, let me address the "ugly" statements:

"My car didn't _____ (fill in the blank) until I brought it to you, you must have done something to it." The blank in this statement could be a noise, a leak, or other problems. Something you may not have thought of is that a vehicle is not used to being lifted up on a hoist. It's used to having pressure on all four tires. When it is lifted, and the pressure is removed, parts that were strained and may be held in place because of the pressure could naturally adjust to reveal problems. Also, like it or not, we live in a rusty region -- meaning, because of our winters with snow, sand, and salt on the roads -- our vehicle's internal components rust quickly. Rust wins on so many parts of your vehicle. When a repair is done, a rusted portion or nearby area can move just enough to cause another problem. This is not intentional and should be blamed on the rust, not the mechanic. There are also times when we fix a loud noise and then another

noise is heard that was being covered up by the louder noise. The same can be said for leaks -- the big leak is fixed or something within a system is fixed and with the system now at full pressure, other leaks are found or problems are discovered. I could say much more about things that can happen or problems that can be masked and how this "ugly" statement is just not true in the case of most mechanics. But there are so many things that can happen and so many different scenarios, I fear I could not address every situation. The fact of the matter is, the only way to combat this thought from entering your mind is to find a mechanic with integrity and build a trusting relationship with them, communicate well and offer grace in the unknown.

"Since your shop is nicer than others, you must charge more" or "I could have done it for cheaper." Along with me, some of my fellow shop owners have dealt with this misperception. There are a couple of points I would like to reveal that many wouldn't naturally consider.

#1. Just because a business invests in a facility to make it comfortable and aesthetically pleasing, does not mean they pass that cost onto the customer. First, the joy and comfort of customers will likely be part of the benefits that make them lifelong customers instead of one-time customers, making the "pretty" investment worth it on many levels and not requiring the passthrough of more expenses to the customer. Secondly, oftentimes, the cost of the buildout (or improvements) is negotiated in the lease or lease extension, meaning the landlord incurs most costs of the updates.

In our case, we were blessed with a generous landlord who could see our vision. But just like we were willing to invest in some of the updates to aid us in earning longterm relationships with our customers, he was willing to invest so that he might earn a longterm relationship with us. It's certainly a win-win.

#2. Every independent repair shop must fall within industry standards in their pricing, otherwise, they would price themselves right out of business. There are other factors that go into this that I will discuss in the future. But for the time being, I urge you to understand this: Quality is not cheap and every shop is not created equal. Some shops use parts of higher quality, some have longer warranties, some have other benefits that others do not. So your bill might reflect this if you are comparing apples to apples. Furthermore, as in any industry, there are different levels of expertise -- knowledgeable, certified, experienced mechanics are more expensive to employ -- but that gets weighed out when they also find problems faster and perform repairs more efficiently.

Here's something to consider: Say you want a hamburger. You can go to the grocery store and buy the items needed. The cost, ambiance, and perhaps quality will differ depending on which store you go to: Walmart, Target, HyVee. Three stores, different prices, different experiences. If you are a decent cook you can fry up or grill out a tasty burger, but it costs you time to make that happen. Now, say you don't have time and have a hankering for a burger. You could choose to have a fast-food restaurant prepare one for you. The cost, ambiance, and perhaps quality will differ depending on which joint you choose: McD's, Wendy's,

Culver's. Three franchises, different prices, different experiences. Finally, say you don't want to make the burger yourself but you want a great atmosphere, quality burger, great service, and relaxing experience. Though the cost and quality may be close, the experience and ambiance will differ depending on which restaurant you choose: Newt's, Chester's, Pittsburgh Blue. This option will cost you time and money, but because of the quality and extra benefits, it's worth it.

Do you see the correlation? Do you understand that all chefs (mechanics), facilities, and experiences are not equal? Are you aware that in the last burger scenario, the excellent restaurants mentioned are different experiences but they can't price their burgers out of the market because you'd never go there? The same is true for pretty shops.

"Women are taken advantage of." This statement really chaps my hide. I am a woman. Why would the female owner of a business take advantage of other women? In my experience, this is typically an accusation derived out of buyer's remorse, miscommunication between spouses, or even someone who didn't educate themselves. I have stood at our front counter and at counters at other shops, in the presence of both men and women customers. Our service advisors along with the service advisors (some women) at many other shops I have visited speak to both males and females virtually the same. I believe that the difference is, just like the stereotype that mechanics are crooked, it is assumed that men know more about the mechanical workings of a vehicle than women. Therefore, because of our lack of expertise, we were taken advantage of.

Men, empower the ladies! Ladies, I want to empower you! In this era -- where you and I are said to make the majority of buying decisions in our households, where we have Google at our fingertips, where we have voices and can ask questions to educate ourselves -- will you join me in being confident in this industry? You don't have to know everything - you can leave the details to the professionals. But if something doesn't sit right with you, if you are confused about something, if you don't know something that you want to know, ask questions. If you are unsure of whether or not you want a repair done for whatever reason, wait until you are sure. Listen to your gut, be inquisitive, and be confident!

Now, how about we circle back around to the beginning of this article? What did you write in the margin about your life? Or, if you didn't write anything, what were you thinking about? Are you a glass-half-full, half-empty, or bone-dry type of person? My glass is typically half-full and though I can find a lot of good in situations, I have also found that being real and talking about the bad and the ugly allows other people to be real, too.

There is a lot of bad and a lot of ugly in this world. But I think that if we try harder to focus on the good, are grateful and kind, ask questions and be teachable, our perspectives change, we can overcome being victims by turning into victors and our bad and ugly can find ways to be better. So let me just give it a shot with my vacation now that I've shared the good, the bad and the ugly with you:

I'd say, all-in-all, the Babcocks ROCKED Puerto Rico!



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