attention!!

AMARILLO (AP) — There's a codicil to the modern wisdom of someone named Murphy. It's called "Ephron's Law," and states simply, "The other line always moves faster."

There are plenty of examples of this, but among the best is that marvel of contemporary convenience, the supermarket. As you quickly and efficiently fill your cart with the things you've come there for, there's no warning of what's ahead.

You finish and wheel toward the front of the store.

It looks like a piece of cake. There's a checkout booth that's empty. You head for it in high gear, but before you get halfway, from nowhere a Cub Scout pack, seven bag ladies and the purchasing agent for the 49th Army (with six full grocery carts) materialize ahead of you.

Trying not to hyperventilate, you move to the next line. The checker here chats a couple of minutes with each customer.

She's just in the warmup: right ahead of you in line is her ex-next-door neighbor, and the two of them have lot of catching up to do, starting with pictures of the grandkids each has been blessed with since last they met in 1963.

So you try yet another line, which looks more promising, with a smiling teen-ager who appears eager to please. Turns out she's a trainee: she rings up your purchase and gets a figure near the national debt, then tries again and the cash register crashes.

Just before she breaks down and cries, you shove your stuff back in the cart, mumbling "Excuse me, I forgot something," and bull your way back out, so you can try another line.

This one has only one sweet-looking little old lady with five items in her cart. After the checker rings it up, she begins to fish loose change from a purse the size of a duffel bag, a coin or two at a time.

She counts it all carefully, then, when the checker recounts it, is just a little short, and has to dive back in the purse and swim to the bottom to dredge up 13 cents more.

The second time she comes up for air, you move to yet another line. There's only a couple of shoppers ahead of you, and the first whisks through. All right?

Not all right: the other one is the dreaded Fresh Fruit and Veggie Freak. Concealed in his cart he has separate bags containing six apples, three oranges, 14 limes, nine kumquats, five kiwis, a brace of avocados, the season's last mushmelon, and enough bananas to feed King Kong his lunch, plus a few of every vegetable the store

offers, and even smaller amounts of evil-looking things from the Fresh Oriental Produce counter.

All of which, of course, must be weighed, and a third of which the checker has to find a price for by flipping through a list that looks like the Congressional Record.

There are a few other supermarket types to avoid if you can just spot them ahead of time.

For instance, there's the shopper who keeps looking around furtively as she nears the checkout, and puts you in mind of a distaff James Bond about to make contact with a KGB dropout.

Actually, she's sure she's forgot something, and just as she gets to the register, she'll remember what it was, leave her cart and go get that one last item . . . then that one last item . . .

And there's the gal with a scant two dozen items in her cart. Which she's buying for herself and four friends, so she has to direct the checker, item by item, on arranging the things in the right piles, which then must be rung up and paid for separately.

Followed, of course, by The World-Saver. He has a pack of sugarless gum to gain entry for his real purpose, and you feel youself growing older at an accelerated pace while he makes his pitch for the Save the Giant Pangolin Foundation.

But finally, you're in the spotlight, and an efficient-looking checker is doing the number. Until he picks up the garden-variety No. 2 pencil you almost didn't get in the first place. It has no marked price.

"We need a price on drugs," he announces over the PA system to someone in Brisbane. That's a pencil. If a pencil is a drug, how do you take one? On second thought, I don't want to know.

But the price is found, finally, and relayed by a surly-looking type. Then comes a sale item with no sale tag. "It said 69 cents on the shelf," you tell the checker, with a sinking feeling.

"I'll go verify that," he says politely, walks from the checkout booth and joins the Navy.

So the store manager herself, looking like she hasn't slept in years, shaking her head and mumbling, comes to extricate you.

Through blurry computer codes that won't beep, items with a half-inch stack of price changes, and yet other things that aren't on the price list at all, she forges doggedly ahead. You've got to admire that.

And finally, the register makes that beautiful emancipating jingle, and as you count out the money, you suddenly realize that even the Cub Scouts and bag ladies are long gone from the store.

This week's attention!! photo of the Langford Architecture Center was taken by Randy Marquardt, a junior environmental design major, using a pin-hole camera with a 4.5 hour exposure.

That's because whether you're at a supermarket, or at a bank, department store, post office, cleaner, airport ticket counter, ball game or tax office or wherever you have to stand in line, it's like the Law said:

The OTHER line always moves faster.

Tom Allston is a staff writer for the Amarillo Globe-News.

Editor's Note: This attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black-and-white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building. Be sure to specify that it is for At Ease.