

## THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

Thomas Manning

Carrefour Express has just concluded a much-publicized competition in which a Christmas Hamper was won by a lucky shopper in every Express store throughout Argentina.

All shoppers had to do was fill out a voucher and lodge it in a box from which each shop's manager would draw the winning voucher at 1pm on December 23.

Although I am a habitual loser in prize draws, following Alexander Pope's observation that hope springs eternal in the human breast, I went at the appointed hour to Carrefour Express, Viamonte 352 in Buenos Aires where I'd entered the competition.

The manager announced he would draw three vouchers out of the box, one winner and two "suplentes" (substitutes) in case the winner did not claim their prize.

To my absolute astonishment the first voucher drawn was mine.

I was beside myself with wonder at how a lifelong run of bad luck had ended and while two further vouchers were duly drawn, I mentally began to decide which friends I would invite to drink the champagne and eat the chocolates and in my delirium, I even considered buying a Lotto ticket as obviously as my luck had changed — perhaps I would win the 360-million-peso jackpot that has lately so alluringly accumulated.

My delightful reverie was shattered with the manager's announcement the winner was a Señora López (name changed).

"What?????" I said incredulously.

"Yes, the third voucher drawn is the winner," the manager informed me.

I asked what planet the manager had just arrived from as it is an immutable norm on Planet Earth that the first number/voucher/ticket drawn in a competition is the winner.

"Is not the first runner to reach the finish line in a marathon the winner?" I asked, "How can you say the third runner to cross the line is the winner?"

"No," the manager said, "I always draw the suplentes first and the winner last."

I was gobsmacked but as the manager was immovable and as Señora López, a woman of humble mien, was looking distressed and near tears at the prospect of losing the hamper, I desisted from arguing the point and went home in disgust.

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GRATUITA, EN TODO  
EL PAÍS, LAS 24 HS.

Once home, I chaffed at the injustice of having had the hamper snatched from my deserving hands and ultimately telephoned the Carrefour customer service line to seek redress for what was clearly an egregious affront to fair play and honest dealing.

I explained the upside-down nature of the hamper draw to the operator and after he consulted his superiors, I was informed that each store manager is allowed to set the rules of the prize draw in their shop and that nothing could be done and he hung up on me.

No doubt Señora López enjoyed the hamper and I wish her no ill will notwithstanding my still-lingering persistent suspicion that she is somehow related to the store manager, but it's clear to me that Carrefour needs to set rules and conditions for their prize draws that apply nationwide and which are printed on the entry vouchers to avoid deranged store managers upsetting natural laws of justice on perverse whims.

Unless of course the answer is that Carrefour's owners/store managers are deeply committed Christians who literally follow the Bible's admonition: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few are chosen."



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The writer Thomas Manning is a New Zealand businessman active in Argentina for over 25 years, a founding member, former Vice President and long-standing director of the Latin America New Zealand Business Council and a regular Buenos Aires Herald correspondent on South Pacific trade, aviation and political matters.