

Have you ever been in a store to purchase a number of things and realize that you had forgotten your list and you couldn't remember for sure what you had written down? You thought and thought and tried to jog your own memory in every way you could. In the end, you probably bought what you recalled, but when you were home again, you realized that you had forgotten at least a couple of items that were crucial to your plans. It required waiting until another day to do what you had set out to accomplish or making another time and gas consuming trip to the store.

There is a way to avoid this situation, and it is also fun and probably good for the mind, as well. I have used the concept of the "memory palace" for years, and if I make that mental list properly, it never fails me.

If you haven't heard of this method, it goes like this: I establish a series of stops on a familiar route. Usually, this includes one's own residence. My memory palace begins at our mailbox. The next point is the old maple tree where my sister and I had our swing when we were kids. Then, I reach the gate by the garage. From there, heading toward our cabin, I come to the south end of the hay barn, and that is the next spot on my trail. Then, the north end of the hay barn, the horses' round pen, our yard gate, and the door to the cabin. If I have a longer list, I can continue inside the house.

To use the memory palace, one places items or words or ideas—it is not restricted to things one purchases—at these locations, in order, by associating them with something funny, bizarre, or otherwise unusual. The neurologist whose presentation on this method we watched several years ago says that we humans are better at remembering locations than words without a "picture context." And the more strange, outlandish, or unbelievable our associations are, the better we will recall them. It is helpful to use famous, infamous, or somehow "different" people or animals to assist our memories.

Here is an example, not something I have ever listed to remember, but typical. My list of what to buy at the grocery store could be like this: toothpaste, oranges, graham crackers, Dawn dish liquid, flour, ice cream, olives, and ginger.

And this is what I might put in my memory palace:

At the mailbox, my first stop, I mentally notice the veterinarian brushing Border Collie Blue's teeth. At the swing tree, Donald

Trump is trying to keep his head above a flood of orange juice. At the garage, a little boy with chocolate all over his face is making s'mores. At the south end of the hay barn, I look east and see the sun rising from a beautiful dawn. At the north end of the hay barn, Martha Stewart is making flour out of flowers. At the round pen, a polar bear is sitting on an ice floe, turning the crank on an old ice cream freezer. At the yard gate, Olive of Popeye fame is eating olives. And finally, at the door to the cabin, the gingerbread boy is running from the baker.

These won't be easy to forget, even though I have no plan to buy any of them and no reason to remember them. But, they will probably stick there in my memory palace until I put something else there to replace them.

Give this method of remembering a try. It is fun, entertaining, and actually works.