

Great Grandma opened the front door and walked down the ramp. She paused to admire her new gate, pleased that she'd had it painted bright yellow. Then she bent down and picked up the newspaper and took it back inside to get a cloth to wipe off the raindrops. It took a few minutes for her to unpick the end of the plastic wrap and peel it from the rolled newspaper and then to roll the paper in the opposite direction so that it would lay flat: "All to get 'Smart Meters'" she read.

When Granddad came in to get his breakfast Great Grandma slid the paper over to him.

"Looks like we get the Smart Meter weather we want one or not," she said. "The Government has changed the regulations."

Granddad read the article. "If you want to know how much power you are using at any one time you have to either open the meter box or get a special display unit installed (at your own expense) inside the house!" he said incredulously.

"Yes," said Great Grandma. "Then we can choose NOT to run the air conditioner or the fan when it is hottest because that's when the demand is high and so the price is highest. Nice dilemma."

When Grandma finally got up, had breakfast and read the paper she said, "Good to know we have a choice – pay a squillion squids for electricity or melt in the heat! And in the winter we can freeze, catch pneumonia and spend a week or so in hospital!"

"Yes, it's good to have a choice, isn't it?" agreed Great Grandma.

It took some months but eventually the installation team reached Great Grandma's house. The installer opened the meter box and stood flummoxed. He knocked on the door to ask, "Is there another power box?"

"No," said Great Grandma. "I know there is three phase power – my husband had it put on when we built. You can look in the garage but I don't think there is another metre." There was no other power box.

"Where's the switch to turn the power off to the house?" he asked. Great Grandma didn't know.

"We can usually disconnect it at the place were it comes in."

"The line comes down the pole and under the house," she said. "It might be there."

The installer looked horrified. "I can't do this so I will have to send another team. You 'll probably need a whole new meter box and have the house re-wired."

Great Grandma was confused – surely the wiring had been checked when they had the new fuse box installed about four years before Great Granddad got too sick to work in the shed? But now he was dead she couldn't ask him.

“Oh, well,” she thought, “I'll just have to leave it up to the power company.” Later that day she told Grandma about it and Grandma agreed with her – just wait and see.

Well they waited all of November, and December and January and had basically forgotten about the whole matter by February.

One Wednesday Great Grandma went off to her cryptic cross word class and Grandma began to work on the accounts. It was coming up to quarterly tax time and she was deep into the joys of balancing the cheque account when she heard beeping and loud male voices in the drive way. When she investigated there were three men in high visibility jackets walking up the drive and a cherry picker parked across the entrance.

“We've come to install the smart metre,” the foreman said. His name tag said “Josh”.

“Are you going to turn the power off? I am in the middle of the accounts and need to shut down the computers in an orderly fashion.” Grandma was a bit agitated. “There are three of them, so give me five minutes,” she said. Grandma rushed back inside and saved her files then shut down her computer and logged out and shut down Granddad's two computers as well.



Josh explained that the power would be off while.

“We had to bring the cherry picker to reach the top of the pole – it's the only way to disconnect the power to the house,” he said.

So one man used the cherry picker to disconnect the power while the other two opened the metre box. "Why have you got three phase power? This isn't a factory," Josh wanted to know.

"My father had it installed when we built the house in 1966. He did all kinds of things in his shed. The last one was to operate a gear cutting lathe – two actually. One cut conventional gears and the other helical ones. He also used it to make rolling pins. They weren't very good – apparently a metal lathe doesn't rotate fast enough to turn wood properly. I still use the rolling pin even so." Grandma laughed. The installation team all stopped and looked at her.

"Is the lathe still there?" They looked ready to down tools and adjourn to the garage to inspect the lathe.

"Sorry, no. They moved it to a factory and I think my brother sold it after Dad died."

They went back to work and tested the meter box only to decide that the MEN (the multi earth neutral) was missing. Now the MEN allows the electricity, in the event of a problem, to travel down either the earth or the neutral and thus to prevent the taps becoming live and causing injury or even death.

Josh called the task in, saying that it was urgent due to Great Grandma's age and health, and it needed to be fixed in the next couple of hours. He then told Grandma she needed to stay at Great Grandma's so that the paperwork could be signed.

Within ten minutes Leigh, from the power company, had phoned because she wanted the authorization of the property owner and needed the owner's signature. Grandma said that she had Great Grandma's financial power of attorney and could staple a photocopy to the paperwork if necessary.

Grandma filled in the request for and permission for work, found a copy of the rates notice to prove that Great Grandma owned the house and her copy of the power of attorney document then heated some water in a saucepan on the gas stove to make herself some coffee. Then she phoned U3A to let them know she would not be able to come to yoga and to ask that they let Great Grandma know that Grandma would not be there to bring her home.

Ten minutes later Rick arrived, checked the paperwork, sighted the power of attorney document and set to work. He had only just begun when Andy arrived.

There was much unscrewing and testing, testing, testing, taking of photos, phone calls, fetching of new batteries for the multi meter and then new leads for the multi meter.

“You Germans are so pedantic!” said Rick.

“I’m not German,” Andy replied quietly.

Rick stopped working and looked at Andy. Andy kept on rolling up the old multi meter leads.

“Where are you from then?” Rick asked.

“I live in Mentone – but I was born in Switzerland,” Andy replied.

They concluded that there was no problem, just an unconventional arrangement of the wires for the MEN. Rick took photos.

Andy affixed green and red stickers and used both a black and white pen to label all of the parts and switches of the meter box and they screwed everything back together. Rick phoned the power company and told Grandma to wait for the first group of men to return, install the new meter and turn the power back on.



When the first team returned (with the cherry picker) and looked at the meter box they weren’t happy – despite the stickers. They unscrewed all of the covers and all three took turns inspecting it and Josh made some phone calls.



Finally the new meter was installed, the power switched on the cherry picker and the rest of the men left and Grandma had lunch while she waited for Great Grandma to get home.