

# Two Words That Will Get You Out of Any Jam and into Your Best Life

JANUARY 3, 2022

Dear Lala,

For decades, it has been my mission and my joy to help home canners fix runny jams that refuse to set and insist that, yes, they really do need to use all the sugar. But this pandemic has changed everything. I cannot answer even one more customer call on the FabJam JamLine. Customers aren't looking for home-canning confidence anymore when they contact us with questions about our award-winning pectin. Instead, they're expecting on-demand, free therapy sessions, life-skills training, and unconditional validation to questions like: Why can't I sleep? Why doesn't anyone (other than you) listen to me? How can I convince my pet boa constrictor to crawl out from between the springs of my neighbor's sofa?

Quitting in writing is definitely too formal, considering I'm your great-aunt and there are only five of us here at FabJam. But whenever I try to speak to you about moving on, you talk me out of it, and I don't want to leave you in a jam — or even a pickle — until you find someone to replace me. But enough already. No one's even asking about fruit spreads of any kind anymore. They're asking about everything else: "How do I reassemble the Ikea Janinge bar stool I took apart to fit on the back of my scooter?" and "I've been frowning my whole life — can I erase these '11 lines' on my forehead by using a small, flat rock I found (for free!) in my garden?" and "I want to get a dog, but what kind of dog doesn't shed, bark, or need regular walks?" (That answer is actually as easy as it is unpopular: a dogfish.) No other companies have a customer service line like ours anymore (other than that ChickenChat line, and you know what I think of those yahoos), and I'm burned out.

In the past year, the JamLine has become too much. All these calls are literally jamming my body by making me shorter, rounding my shoulders, and stooping my back. I know you think they're "just phone calls," I'm getting older, and I simply need a better chair. But at this point, even if you bought me a genuine Aeron chair (not that knockoff you've been emailing me about), I still wouldn't stay. What you don't seem to get is that while the pandemic has "inspired" more people to do and learn things on their own, they still don't take responsibility for their own education, especially on more personal matters (such as getting dried snot rockets out of jacket sleeves). They just want someone — me — to tell them the answer, or hold their hand over the phone, or both. The JamLine has been ringing constantly, and while callers sometimes start with cover stories involving jam, or a joke about being with "Citizens for Boysenberry Jam" (like I haven't heard that one before), that's not why they're really calling. They're really calling about all kinds of other "jams."

I mean, listen: by lunchtime last Thursday, I had empathized with and encouraged — without trying to convince — three people to go get a COVID-19 vaccine, emailed another desperate parent a personalized version of my "FabJam Science!" homeschool curriculum, Googled vaginal rejuvenation therapy so I could tell a vagina owner that they really should contact their physician rather than trying to self-medicate with our pectin, and provided a firm "No," plus a reading list, to someone who tried to tell me that critical race theory is "liberal malarky." What put me over the edge, though, was talking someone

through the best way to fold a fitted sheet. I mean, can you imagine? And then, sheet folded, they had the nerve to hang up without saying even the tiniest thank you or goodbye.

These are not my problems to lean into, no matter what Cheryl what's-her-name says. Every other company has closed their customer service line and can be reached only by email (except for those poseurs at ChickenChat). JamLine is what's left, and everyone's calling. I am deeply into middle age and my back is killing me. I think I've more than earned the "boundaries" and "self-care" I've been hearing about lately. I cannot wait to savor them and to never ever eat another bite of jam ever again.

In other words, I quit.

Love,  
Your Great-Aunt Berrie 🍷



FIGURE 1: *Sometimes, there's only one way out of a sticky situation.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLY WHITE © 2022