

Excerpts from "Life at the Station"

by Samantha Cummins

I've been keeping this gold mine of fascinating stories to myself for far too long. If you've ever wondered what you get when you cross a gas station with a gourmet food store, well, you've come to the right place. Who knew offering products as varied as diesel to Italian gelato would attract so many different kinds of people? Welcome to America. Welcome to the melting pot. And welcome to the stories that make this minimum wage job worthwhile. So throw on your Nike Airs and dress pants to join me as I take you behind the scenes of seemingly well organized shelves stocked with specialty olive oils and rum cakes. Trust me, appearances can be deceiving.

Diesel and Daiquiris?

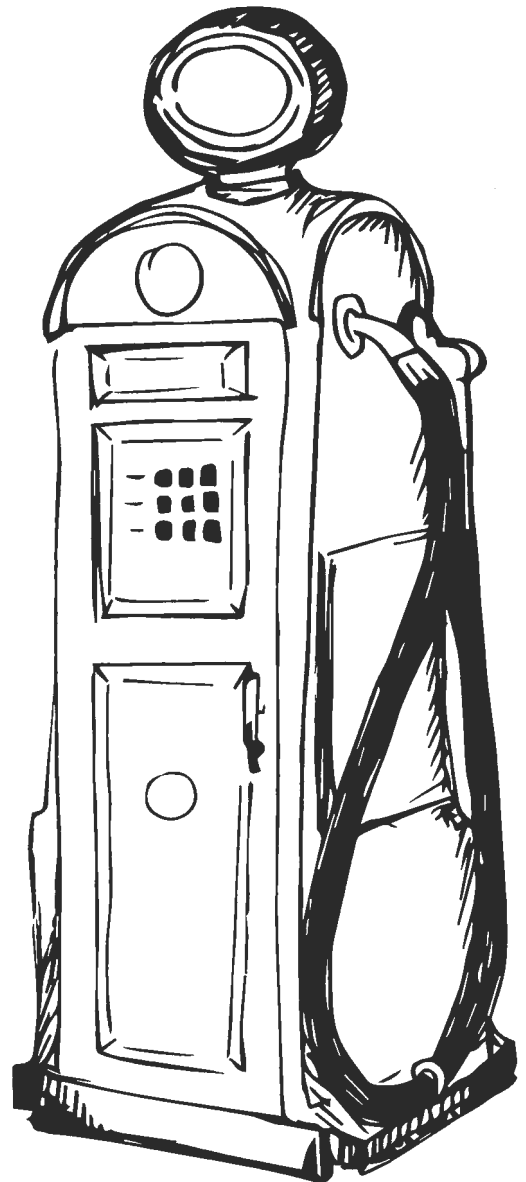
Station Update! In just a few days, not only will we be a gourmet food store/gas station, we will also have a bar. Why settle for limited options when you can have it all in one place? I wonder, does the DD end up having to pay for gas every time? Food for thought.

Runaway Patients

The station is conveniently located near a local hospital. Not only do we serve the general public with our unique varieties of goods, but once in a while we turn into a refuge for the sick...Or maybe just a place to escape.

Today a lady came in and asked where the bathroom was. She wore a hospital gown with another tied around her waist, providing the modesty so lacking in a usual gown. Her medical bracelet was still on her wrist. It even looked as though she was hiding the liquids she was hooked up to underneath her gown.

Surprisingly, this isn't our most exciting runaway story. One fellow got the cops involved. It was around midnight. I was sitting with two coworkers in the back parking lot after work when we suddenly heard a man scream, "I'm running away from you!" We hurriedly piled into my



friends' car. Luckily, I had my pepper spray handy (just in case).

We sat in the car and watched a man run into the woods behind our station. Moments later, we watched a police car drive back and forth several times on the road to the hospital. Believing it was our civic duty to assist this faithful community servant in the off chance we were the sole witnesses; we decided to follow the cop to report our findings. As we pulled our car around, we narrowly avoided running over the man as he sprinted out of the woods towards a neighboring Walgreen's. More determined than ever, we sped up our attempt to assist the officer. We quickly realized that the task of pulling over a police vehicle is much more complicated than being pulled over. We finally caught the police officer when she conveniently stopped at our gas station to refuel. I hopped out of the car to provide a description of the man. She affirmed my description, asked what direction he was heading, murmured something into her radio, and pulled out of the parking lot.

I had convinced myself he was some outlaw, wanted in several counties. We took in pride in assisting with the capture of a convict. However, the next day we were informed that he was just another hospital runaway.

Aslan is on the move

Some days I'm convinced my job is purely a giant scavenger hunt designed to amuse my employers. Monday I got my newest assignment. It was taped near the cash register, hidden among lost credit cards and lottery receipts, with my name in big bold letters. I unfurled my treasure map to see what adventure the day had in store. My task was this: venture to the back, amidst towers of boxes and shelves, to stock as many overflow products I possibly could. Game on.

I must admit it was a little mundane from the get-go. Though little, the station contained so much variety in products it was easy to grow disoriented. I went through the process of finding locations for many different cans and jars. Occasionally, I was successful, finding extra spots in the store to squeeze in a product. These moments of achievement punctuated the unsuccessful streaks of never finding where the product belonged. "Now does the Tahiti powder go near the anchovies or by the curry?" I was getting frustrated.

But then inspiration came in the form of a long, rectangular box labeled "Turkish Delight." It was sitting alone in the back room. After a series of four failures, I was in desperate need of encouragement. So I set the box in a grocery cart, meandering through the aisles to find its home. As I searched, I couldn't stop my mind from drifting to thoughts of Narnia. Images of Edmund and the White Witch formed in my head, the snowy land with no Christmas, the sleigh, talking beavers, kings, queens, and finally...Aslan.

Sad to say, I still to this day have no earthly idea where in our store Turkish delight is stocked. But maybe that's the point. Maybe after I unload all the boxes in the back room I'll find a hidden door that will lead me to Narnia. At the very least, the Turkish Delight brought inspiration when I needed it the most.

I'll let you know if I ever do get into Narnia. Until next time...

