Hi,

NHN&WR may squeeze out an extra "Farewell to Canada" edition next month

so here is April a few days early.

Tuesday, March 25, 2003.    c:/wklyltr3.3wc11

(2003 NHN&WR letter/story/poem #7)

Self-Scan Survivors.

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In the dim past, NHN&WR published a ‘White Paper’ describing the antics

of a frustrated Supermarket shopper, who fortunately was kept on a short

leash by his shopping companion..  Can’t research the date as we are in

our winter offices, but it was one of the more popular letters, …..

three comments were received.  We are revisiting this site due to

experiencing a wonderful new Supermarket facility, ….. The ‘Self-Scan’

Section.  To the original cast of: "Exact Changer", "Coupon Queen", "The

Forgetter", "Chatterbox" and "Speed Liner", we add the following.

First: The Self -Scan Department Manager who we encounter shortly,

looking like a prison guard, behind their self-scan snooper screens.  We

will shorten self-scan to "SS" and change Department Manager to

"Grupenführer".  (Isn’t that umlaut impressive?  Ctrl + Shift + (colon),

letter.  How’s that for a mouse person Nancy J?)  Second: The

computerized assistant we shall call "Monotone Mona".  Our shoppers will

be "Ms. & Mr. Recluse".  The frustrated shopper above had made an

impassioned plea for a ’C-less’ checkout lane, no: Cash, Chatter,

Checks, Children or Coupons.  His prayers are partly answered.

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On the Recluses inaugural winter season visit to BOBLOBLAW’S, and we

believe this Canadian shopping term has been previously defined, the

store was packed.  Each lit up lane was backed up.  Far to the left a

new sign was hanging from the ceiling, "SELF-SCAN".  Self-Scan?  The

Recluses exchange quizzical looks.  Ms. Recluse goes off to investigate

and returns.

"People are checking themselves out over there!"

"Really?"

"Yes, even old people like us."

"Really!  Hmmmmmn."

Now the Recluses do not go to the market to ‘buy a few things’.  Mr.

Recluse takes the ‘Produce, Bakery, Meat and Fish’ list, Ms. Recluse

takes the ‘Everything Else’ list. The end result is two full carts.

Should they hazard an SS adventure?  Mr. Recluse is reluctant believing

half his items won’t scan.

"Let’s come early next time, bring a shorter list and give it a try

then."

Agreed.

At last SS day arrives.  Economy of list has reduced volume, but there

are still two carts.  The Recluses position themselves before a …..

SELF-SCAN CHECKOUT STATION.  WOW!  There is a big monitor, scanner glass

with built-in scale, a credit card swiper with small screen, number pad,

signature pad and five plastic bag stands. SS Grupenführer gives them

the once-over from his battle station thinking, "Oh geez, more

first-time old-timers’." And very trying first timers they prove to be.

Mr. Recluse hits the red ‘Start’ icon. and takes the bag of apples out

of  his cart.  Since he has no idea what to do with them he looks over

at SS Grupenführer and holds one up. Grupenführer unseats himself and

strides over.

"That’s an apple."

"Thank you, ….. but what do I do?"  (At least he didn’t say, "Das ist

ein äpfel Dumkopf".)

Taking the apple, our leader points out a very small sticky with a

number on it.  The number is 4124.  This number should be keyed in via

the number pad after mashing the ‘Code’ icon.  Mashing is ‘Southern’

for turning on light switches and selecting elevator floors, as in "Mash

twelve please".  Mr. R stares at the little number.  (NHN&WR Censor’s

Warning: Adult comment coming up.)  What a marvel of modern

horticulture.  Comment: (When Dorothy Parker, "Men seldom make passes at

girls who wear glasses" was asked to use this word in a sentence she

responded immediately.  "You can lead a horticulture, but you can’t make

her think.")  End of comment.

Goodness, ….. how do they get a tree to number all its apples?  Oh well,

Mr. R clicks his heels and pads it in.  This wakes up Monotone Mona.

"E M P I R E  A P P L E.    H O W  M A N Y?"

Where is that voice coming from?

"E M P I R E  A P P L E.    H O W  M A N Y?"

Mr. R, looking heavenward, "Five".

"E M P I R E  A P P L E.    H O W  M A N Y?"

SS Grupenführer, "No no, the number pad! The number pad!"

Mr., R, "Oooops, sorry."

The number five is padded in.

"P L A C E  T H E  I T E M  O N  T H E  S C A L E  A N D  W A I T".

The Recluses obey.

"P L A C E  T H E  I T E M  I N  T H E  B A G."

Boy, ….. Monotone Mona has absolutely no sex appeal in her voice.  Think

BOBLOBLAW’s is missing the boat here in Ontario.  Across the river in

Quebec I bet they have a "Suzanne Exotique" who is not sans voix sexy in

the almost French version.  (Boy, ….. hope you are all following how

erudite NHN&WR is.  We’re talking almost English, almost French, German

and Southern!)

  Mr. R hands the apples to Ms. R.  She places them in one of the five

available bags.  Item, quantity, price and cost are displayed on running

monitor tab.  Hey, ….. Piece of cake.  The next nine items are

scannable.  The R’s  cruise along like pros.  Next a pound of butter is

scanned.  Incidentally, Canadians seem adverse to buying butter in

wrapped quarter pound pieces which you all know from last month wouldn’t

be quarter pound pieces anyway.  However that’s another story.  Ms. R

puts the butter in partly full bag #2.  Ms. R then decides she should

put dairy items in a separate bag.  She takes the butter out of bag #2

and starts bag #3.  The roof caves in, the monitor flashes and Mona is

all upset.

"C A L L  T H E  C A S H I E R!  C A L L  T H E  C A S H I E R!"

The R’s are frozen in terror.  SS Grupenführer is en route.

"What did you do?"

"Last thing we did was to move a pound of butter from one bag to

another."

"Nein, nein, nein, das ist verbotten!"  Never put anything in a bag or

take anything out of a bag without being told to do so.  Each bag is on

a delicate scale and immediately senses un-authorized weight change."

"Jawohl."

Shaken and chastised, but still game, the R’s continue.  The scanning

and bagging is down pat.  Then  wooops, ….. croissants.  Mr. R has

inspected each of these pastries carefully while holding them on big

tongs.  He knows there are no identifying codes on them.  (All are

requested to use the tongs in the interest of sanitation.  All do, then

toss the handled and contaminated tongs back in with the pristine

pastry.)

"Oh Grupenführer."

"Yeee-sss."

(Shades of Jack Benny, anyone remember, "Train leaving on track 5 for

Anaheim, Asusa and Ku…….kamonga"?)

‘We’ve croissants."

"Yeee-sss."

"No little sticky number."

"Where did you get them?"

"Bakery Department."

"What does it say on the screen  right here."

"Bakery Products."

"Gooo-d!!!!  Push ‘Bakery Products’."

Mashed.  Icons of delicious looking desserts appear.

"There.  Now do you think you can find something that looks like a large

croissant?"

"Yes.  Thank you."

Mr. R mashes the large croissant picture.

H O W  M A N Y?"

"Six Mona, six, ……  and I know what to do!"

  Finally the last item is logged in.  ‘Done’ is pushed.  The payment

screen appears. Grupenführer must be monitoring the R’s progress because

he looks very relieved.  ‘Credit’ is selected.  VISA is swiped.  Amount

OK’d.  Wait, ….. don’t touch the bags yet!!!!!  Wow, that was a close

one.

        S  I G N  T H E  S I G N A T U R E  P A D.

Gladly Mona.  Done.  Mr. R looks over at Grupenführer.  Pointing to the

bags, he makes a lifting motion.  A benign smile crosses Grupenführer’s

lips and he nods.  Hooray, …..  we’re out of here!  Wasn’t bad at all.

Mona was not inclined to chat, we didn’t see a ‘Coupon’ icon, not that

we were all that good about noticing icons and for some reason no little

people were in evidence in the SELF-SCAN CHECKOUT area.  Probably next

time it won’t take us three times as long as the regular line.  Many

things came to mind on the way home.  This could change our whole

shopping mindset.  We would now go through the produce department

looking for items to challenge Monotone Mona.  Masquerading Scallions,

Green Onions and Shallots.  The, "Is that parsley or cilantro?"

question.  Is there a fresh ginger icon?  Smooth and rough avocados.

Fun produce with no little sticky.  Ratatouille ingredients.  Then

there’s the bakery stuff.  One of each cookie, muffin and bagel.  If

there is no scan code and no sticky, we’ll try it..  Hope the same SS

Grupenführer is there.  We would hate to break in a new one.  The

signature pad was also intriguing.  If ‘Mickey Mouse’ was signed, would

Mona know the difference?  Probably not, but then Grupenführer is always

watching.

Can’t wait!

Finally, closing in Swahili: Kwaheri kwa sasa. (Bye for now.)

Lucile & Ken.

219 Atlantis Ave

Ottawa, On  K2A 1X9

613-761-6519

[ken.jefferson@sympatico.ca](mailto:ken.jefferson@sympatico.ca)

Regular Distribution.