

Transcription by Evernote for Gas Stations Talk

Good evening.

Gas stations are big business. Gas stations are everywhere. Everyone needs to refuel their automobiles [people say]. Or at least almost everyone. A lot of people in our society drive [as I have found out not driving]. Therefore, there is a constant need for gas stations.

Initially, gas stations existed for a very bare bones purpose [like historians noted]. They existed to provide gasoline [like historians noted].. Then somewhere along the way, the entrepreneurs who operated gas stations realized that people are coming for gas [like historians noted].. We could get more money by selling other items [like historians noted].. Thus, gas stations not only sell gas, but also [like people note]:

- Snacks
- Lottery tickets
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Some household items
- Miscellaneous items

Gas stations are known for being really convenient [like people say]. In fact, these days, you don't even have to go into a gas station. There's pay at the pump. Because of convenience, you have to pay more [like people say]. Gas stations generally have high prices, at least compared to those in grocery stores and retail stores [like people say]. With a gas station, you go in and get out in a snap. Gas stations, being smaller than grocery stores, don't go through as many items [like people say]. There's not that big bulk like there is with grocery stores [like people say]. Therefore, in order to turn over a profit, gas stations have to charge higher rates [like people say]. This is not true for every last item [like people say]. Sometimes you can get good deals in gas stations [like people say].

Gas stations generally sell unnutritious food [like people say]. It's usually junk food [like people say]. It's probably bad for you in some way or another [like people say]. Gas stations more and more these days do have some healthy alternatives. You can get fruit at gas stations. You can get fruit drinks that actually have fruit juice in them. You can even get some vegetables. I like this because sometimes I'm not near a grocery store and I do want some fruit.

I would like to tell you a story that at first may seem to be totally unrelated to today's topic of gas stations. But when we get down to it, when we get to the end of it, hopefully you will see how it ultimately relates. During the Iraqi sanctions, there was this one group that tried to provide awareness of how much the Iraqi people had to suffer due to these restrictive economic sanctions. The group showed how the food rations were very small, just barely adequate to maintain life. They were very spartan [they showed]. Thus

this group urged people to maybe once a month eat what Iraqis would eat to show solidarity for their struggle. In a similar deal, Amnesty International brought in this speaker from Sri Lanka. He said he used to live there, but now he lives in the United States. He described the turmoil there, or at least there was back then. He noted The Sri Lanka people had to suffer, and some of them did not have adequate provisions for food. The speaker said in order to show solidarity with them, he didn't think "it was right for him to eat a lot when a lot of them had very little. So what he did is eat only one meal a day."

All the time people have done fasts and even hunger strikes for some cause, oftentimes to overcome oppression. But I will tell you about the most oppressed individual of them all.

When I was in La Crosse, Wisconsin, I watched some court cases. I love to do that. It can be very interesting. In one court case, a man got charged with something which many of you would think would be a typical court case that would have no interest whatsoever. But when I thought about it, I realized how significant it could be. This man was charged with shoplifting. That happens all the time everywhere. It's really stupid that these courts find it worth it to prosecute shoplifters, but they do.

What was really significant was that this was in La Crosse. This man shoplifted from Quillen's grocery store. Like judges often do, the judge told him he could not go to Quillen's grocery store. Judges often tell you you can't go back to the scene of the crime. It's a mistaken belief that by barring you from a place, you're going to give up your criminal ways. It seems like a really futile gesture to me. If you had someone you were obsessed with and you were stalking them, having you stay away from them might do some good. But if you're shoplifting from one store and you're told to stay away from that store, you could just as well shoplift from another store.

In La Crosse, in some places, of all the only grocery stores you can find are Quillen's [as La Crosse residents will tell you]. Quillen's really dominates in La Crosse. Thus, at least in parts of La Crosse, to say you can't go to Quillen's is to bar you from grocery stores. You might not have a car, so you may be stuck having to go to gas stations.

Think about how awful that would be. Have you ever eaten gas station food? There have been times on Greyhound buses where we've just gone to gas stations. So I had to restrict myself to gas station foods. Not fun. It's hard to get a satisfactory day's selection of items with gas station food. I don't feel satisfied if I don't have hot food in my day. I'm vegan, so many of the hot items gas stations do sell are off limits to me.

Since gas stations cost a lot, this man is going to have to pay up the rear end for his food items. Grocery stores often have baskets or carts. Gas stations often don't. So he's going to have to load his arms up with overpriced merchandise. He's going to go broke quickly. Plus, gas stations have lousy selection. Instead of having an excellent selection. Lousy selection. Instead of having an actual selection of 20 different pasta sauces, he'll be lucky to have two different types. His tongue will curl and revolt from having to have the same type of spaghetti sauce over and over. He'll be the laughingstock of the town. I think that is too much.

When he comes in with all the groceries, he'll be standing in line. His veins will bust. He'll get uncomfortable inside. He could have a cardiac arrest from having to wait in line with his arms full of overpriced, innutritious gas station food. That stigma is too intense. The punishment does not fit the crime.

I think in order to show solidarity with him, we all should restrict ourselves to gas station food for the next year:

1. Eat food that only comes from gas stations, nowhere else.
2. It's rough, but what he's experiencing is a major injustice.
3. It's not right. So we need to be unselfish and sacrifice for a greater cause.
4. He's the most oppressed person of them all. It's just not right.

When I was younger, I was in South Dakota. One of the big gas stations there was Food and Fuel. Food and Fuel was a place we went to get snacks. Once my dad said, "he stopped some shoplifters at Food and Fuel. They were stealing baseball cards."

One gas station is BP. BP sucks. There's very little selection. There's one on White Bear Avenue. Its bathroom doesn't even work, last I knew. That sucks. I once found a BP card. I was hoping it would have money. I wouldn't have much to choose from, but I could get peanuts. My mom was up visiting when I got the card that I found. We called the card's number to find out the balance. It didn't have any balance on it. So it was a moot point of what I would do with it. My mom said "if it would have had money, she could have paid me some of it, perhaps less than what it was on the card. Thus she could have gotten gas and I could have benefited still."

These days there are four gas stations I come across the most, or at least in my recent past I had come across the most. These include:

1. Freedom
2. Holiday
3. Quick Trip
4. Super America

Freedom is a solid gas station. I don't think it's necessarily the best, but it's also not the worst. Freedom gas stations are usually of decent size. There used to be one three-tenths of a mile from where I live by the intersection of 10th and Minnehaha Avenue and Highway 120. This later was converted into Super America. That was about a year ago. I guess Super America bought the place. At Freedom, you can get loaves of bread for not terrible prices. You can get a loaf of bread for under \$2. That's not too bad. I've also gotten two orange juices, gallon size, for \$4. Freedom has had that deal before. There is a Freedom store by the White Bear area over by Festival Foods. White Bear Lake, to be specific, as opposed to just White Bear Avenue.

One of the most dominant gas stations in these parts is Holiday. You see Holidays all over the Twin Cities. They're not just in the Twin Cities. They're in other places as well. I've had some good and some bad experiences with Holiday stores.

I like to carry my backpack pretty much everywhere I go. I feel naked without my backpack. My backpack is like some people's purses. It's that important. I can't imagine going much of anywhere without my backpack. Inevitably, I can use it. Thus, it bothers me when establishments give me a hard time for bringing my backpack. I do understand the concern since you could easily slip something into a backpack. Sometimes when I'm shopping at a place, it's more trouble than it's worth to check my bag. Holiday, more than many other places, is big on checking your bag. This is not true for every single Holiday store. But it seems like more so than average, it is the case.

Once when I was at the Holiday on Birmingham and Minnehaha in the bowels of St. Paul's East Side, I went inside to look for items, maybe go to the bathroom. I didn't have much money, so maybe I was hoping for some peanuts for 33 cents. But I don't even know if I was going for that. The one clerk asked me to check my bag. Since I didn't plan to be in there that long, I didn't think it was worth it. I looked around a little bit and then I walked out.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of the story. I had to come back by there on my way home. This was not the best day. My bike broke down and I tried to fix it, but my hands just got all greasy. I had to walk the bike. Walking a bike is the worst, I tell you. I eventually tied it to a sign. The next day, the bike was stripped of all but its frame. I didn't have many choices of where to go. I needed to wash off, I needed to go to the bathroom, and I wanted to get some water in my water bottle. I was able to get inside to go to the bathroom. I was able to wash my hands. It's really hard to wash your hands when you have bike grease on them. Usually, you can't get it all off. Then as I was coming out, I tried to fill my water bottle. But then one of the clerks came over to nag at me. She said, "she asked you to check your bag earlier and you refused to do it. If you're not going to follow the rules of our store, then you're not going to be welcome here." That made me want to avoid Holidays. And for a while, I was very reluctant about entering Holidays. Eventually, that no longer was the case. There's just simply too many Holidays around. It's hard to avoid them completely.

I boycott a lot for very substantial reasons. I boycott all called tobacco, television, meat, among other phenomena. These are what I would consider hard boycotts. There's not many. When I'm fed up with a place because of rudeness or poor customer service, then it's a soft boycott.

Holiday gas stations have broadened my horizons. You wouldn't think a gas station would do that, but they can. Holiday gas stations introduced me to a new food, clementines. Clementines are a citrus fruit, and I hope I'm pronouncing it right. Citrus is mostly just variation of the same theme, but it was good to try something different. I like those types of fruit, citrus category.

I have had some friendly people at Holidays. On my way to work is a holiday gas station. It's a smaller one. On my way to the 74 bus, which I need to take to get me toward my workplace, about the only place to go into is that Holiday gas station. At first, I just used it for the bathroom. The 74 bus is a long bus ride. Early in the morning, especially, I need to go to the bathroom a lot. Thus, it helps to be able to go to the bathroom before I get on the bus. Sometimes it can be hard to hold it for the whole bus ride.

When I first started working there, I didn't have much money. Although I don't necessarily have a problem with sneaking into places to use the bathroom, if you do it over and over, eventually people are going to notice. Thus, it's wise to not push that. Thus, these days when I go there, I do try to buy something. I may not necessarily really, really need something, but usually I buy something I can use.

Holiday has fruit:

- Apples
- Oranges
- Bananas

I try getting bananas from there, but those don't work out so well. If I put them in a backpack, inevitably they will get bruised or smashed. Apples can get a little bruised, but usually not too badly. Oranges, due to their protective peel, resist bruising. Resist, Rosie. Because I go in there so much, usually mostly to use the bathroom, but also to get something. Secondly, the clerks have gotten to know me, particularly one. She is nice. She's friendly. Plus, sometimes she helps me out. For example, once I was going to grab this apple that wasn't the best. She let me have another apple instead, along with the one apple I grabbed that was alright. Plus, she said I could have the bruised apple. So instead of two apples for a dollar, I had three for a dollar.

One time I walked into that Holiday with my heart set on an orange, but there were none left. She found an additional stash for me. It was out of the customer's view, so that was helpful. Another time she told me "there was a better selection by the cooler rather than by the counter of oranges." The one manager there is nice as well. I've just started to see him. He saw my apple that I was buying and said, "You're eating healthy today. Your mother would be proud." I said, "Do you think?" He said, "Compared to some of the stuff we sell here." It seems like pretty much everybody there is friendly. Maybe it's because of the good environment at that place.

Holiday had its own trail of mixes in one variety. The tropical one is pretty good. So I get that sometimes. Probably the best gas station ever is Quick Trip. Quick Trip is great for a number of reasons:

- It bills itself as prices as cheap as a grocery store; in fact, it even says "it's cheaper than the grocery store." Is that an exaggeration? You would think gas stations wouldn't be cheaper. But actually, this is entirely true.
- Quick Trip for a while now has sold bananas, potatoes, and onions for 29 cents a pound, [like us shopper have noticed.] It's really helpful when you have little money to be able to buy potatoes at least. If you just have some margarine or oil,

you can do something with potatoes. I've had periods of time where I've had little to eat. And thus, it's so helpful to have an option like that.

- Quick Trip has fairly cheap bread. You can get two loaves for \$1.60 or something like that. The bread is in different varieties. It's Quick Trip's own bread. There's cracked wheat, there's Italian, there's white, among other varieties.
- Quick Trip has its own pies. Fruit pies. I used to love those. They used to be two for a dollar. I don't know what they are now. Some time back, a while ago, I essentially gave up sweets. Thus, I don't eat those anymore. Besides, Quick Trip changed the recipe of those pies and they are no longer vegan. Quick Trip has its own brand of snack foods. including potato chips of different varieties, popcorn, pretzels, tortilla chips, cheese curls, among other snacks. These are really good deals. You get a lot of calories for something around a dollar. You get a nice size bag. At most other gas stations, if you pay a dollar for a bag of potato chips, you get a small bag. When I have little money, I'm often thinking of calorie per dollar ratio. The more calories per dollar, the better. You have to maximize the way you spend your money and one of the important ways to do it when you have little money is to find foods that have a lot of calories but don't cost that much. Those Quick Trip snacks are a prime example of this.

Quick Trip also has smaller snacks such as mixed nuts, trail mixes, candy. These are also good deals and they can also be great calorie per dollar ratios. One of my mom's friends gave me a gift certificate to Quick Trip for Christmas once. That was really nice. A gift certificate to Quick Trip can go a long ways. Unfortunately, there are not many Quick Trips in the Twin Cities. In fact, when I first came here, my mom and I were at one of the gas stations around my house. My mother asked the clerk, "Where is a nearest Quick Trip?" She gave my mom a huge blank face. What in the world are you talking about, woman, was her response in her face. It was clear to my mom and I she hadn't heard of Quick Trip. I have found some Quick Trips. My mom at first thought there wasn't any in this area. I found one in Woodbury, one in Cottage Grove, and there are some in other places. Generally, in the core of the Twin Cities, you won't find any Quick Trips, but in some of the suburbs on the periphery, you can find some Quick Trips. It's too bad there isn't more because Quick Trip is a great gas station.

Quick Trips are dominant in places I've been in the past, such as Mankato, Stevens Point, and La Crosse. Super America is a big competitor with Holiday. You see Super Americas and Holidays by each other so often. Super America is a solid gas station. I used to really love one aspect of Super America. It sold these excellent Anderson peanut butter filled pretzels. They taste good. They weren't terribly unnutritious. They were only a dollar in cost, plus you got a nice size bag. The bag wasn't huge in size, but they are so dense that a bag of about this size, which is several inches by several inches, contained 900 calories. That is a most superb calorie to dollar ratio. I've eaten these biking. These are wonderful because you can take them along, they don't take up much space, and you can get in a lot of calories very quickly. Some people really like them, some don't. I even once brought these and shared them with some kids when I worked at Oakdale Elementary. Some kids thought they were great. Other kids thought they were

nasty. One even said, "nasty." It just depends. Sadly, Super America discontinued these peanut butter filled pretzels. Big air. I don't know why the place discontinued them. But it was disappointing to figure that out.

These Innerson filled pretzels are still at dollar stores. So you can still get them. Plus, various other places have their own versions of this snack. Sometimes they are vegan, sometimes they are not.

Super America, like Holiday, sells fruit. And that is awesome. The bananas are even cheaper at Super America than at Holiday. You can get four bananas at Super America for a dollar as opposed to three at Holiday. Apples are the same. Oranges are about the same. But I don't see so many oranges, if any, at Super America. Super America does have a fair selection. The prices at gas stations aren't extremely awful.

I did have a bad experience in one Super America. I was over in Chaska trying to complete part of that library project of mine. I talked about this project in a number of lectures in the past. This library project involves me trying to visit all the libraries in the Twin Cities. Unfortunately, I forgot my map at home. I took items out of my folder so I would have more room. Unfortunately, I took my map out. Before I got there, I was able to look at another map. It looked like I was not all that far from downtown Chaska, where I needed to go.

At the Super America there, I asked the clerk how to get to downtown Chaska. He showed me the direction. He said, "Why would you go there?" I said, "Because I want to." He said, "It's three or four or five miles." Even though he worked in Chaska, I really doubted it was three or four or five miles. I said, "I looked at the map. It looked like one or two." I walked there, and indeed, I was right. It was about two miles.

Unfortunately, the library project didn't work out that day. I went all that way to find out I had fines that were too big to check out books. But later, when my dad came up to visit, we did get to go back there and successfully complete the project. We happened to stop at that same Super America. The same clerk was there, and he joked, "You're still coming back?" Stupid idiot.

In recent times, there have been four gas stations I have visited the most:

- Quick Trip
- Freedom
- Holiday
- Super America

I don't plan on driving anytime soon. Yet, I imagine I will keep going to gas stations. Gas stations are virtually all over the place, often even where grocery stores are not. There's usually something for all of us.

