

REQUITED LOVE: MY FIRST TIME AT THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP

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By Leanna Katz

It was just as I had imagined. No, it was better.

I arrive and lock my bike to a bike stand near a slender, blonde man. He is muttering to himself in what I venture is Swedish. He is trying to stack a box of five broccoli heads atop a box of beers in the child carrier fixed to the back of his bike. He tells me, “I never leave thinking ‘that was easy.’”

I smile broadly and march into the Park Slope Food Coop.

Up the stairs I climb to the membership office. “I’m here to pick up my membership card,” I announce to the handful of people in the room. A blonde ponytailed woman

fishes my card from the stack and hands it to me. I accept it with both hands and bow: thank you.

I'm in! After untold inquiries about the timeline for accepting new members. Dashed dreams as the date moved from early summer, to late summer, then fall, or maybe winter. My longing to join stretched over a year. November, predicted my friend with an infallible intuition. On November 30, the gates opened.

I proudly present my card to the man at check-in and wander in awestruck.

Three varieties of shopping vehicles await: baskets and carts, large and small. I grab a large cart. There is no clear path, unlike most supermarkets where colorful displays nudge shoppers along fluorescent-lit aisles. Here, I create my own destiny.

I start toward the eggs. Dozens of eyes look straight at me with approval: yes, they nod, you belong. \$2 less than the nearby supermarket for free-range local eggs. Their albumen halos float around me. I pick a dozen and open the carton. There is one small crack. I don't mind 'em a bit cracked, but the second box does the trick. Byeeee-foreverkeyfoooooods!!!

I'm pulled by the magnetic force of avocados and tenderly place a couple in my cart.

Next, I hit the veg. I watch greens being sprayed with water as though in slow motion. I imagine men fantasize about women caught in the rain like this, bodies surrounded by suggestive mist. Don't mind if I do, bokchoy, broccoli, *and* broccolini!

Onto the berries, I peruse. Hello pretty little blues, hop into my cart.

Around the corner, I spy soup. Of the three varieties, I easily pick cauliflower spinach. \$3.50 for a beautiful little tub. Reasonable sodium content to boot.

I am free of the choice overload stress that most supermarkets induce by shoving 40

brands in my face, none of which appeal. I know what I want and I go for it.

Next stop: orange joy, I mean, juice.

One refrigerated case over, olives. A big bag for \$2.04. *Pourquoi pas?*

I look up. My eyes meet cheese. I'd heard tales of the abundant and inexpensive cheeses. The bounty at my fingertips, I am struck by the realization: I don't care much for cheese. Specialty cheese shops' expensive prices had tricked me into believing I desired cheese. *Mais non. Au revoir, fromage.*

I breeze by the freezer section. Meat, don't want to meet ya.

Sushi stops me in my tracks. \$4.10 for a tray of brown rice salmon avocado rolls. Idiosyncratic prices speak to the part of me that sets my alarm for 7:14 am and makes twice-daily wishes at 11:11.

Across the aisle are pastries—gluten-free and vegan—muffins, scones, croissant, turnovers. Bread. More fresh bread than I can process.

And then – frozen *slices* of pizza. Who ever heard of frozen slices of pizza? But knowing they exist, how can I go on without a slice in my freezer?

(On my next visit, I discover the sandwiches. The poetry of smoked salmon with potato chips on a ciabatta bun. Neatly wrapped in checkered blue wax paper. Each deserves no less than an epic of its own.)

I'm grooving through the aisles, Neil Young crooning "Fly Me to the Moon." I exchange apologies with other members as we narrowly avoid cart collisions. Everyone is polite, cautious, in a permanently apologetic state for being in another person's way and simultaneously grateful for the cramped coziness. It's like a living room party with too many people (think: pre-COVID) who are all good looking (or maybe I

just have a very particular earthy-granola type).

Over the loudspeaker, someone makes a rambling announcement about buying chocolates as the perfect holiday gift. A woman walks by, “Not a perfect gift for me, I don’t even like chocolate, Marlene.” She seems to know the voice on the loudspeaker personally.

Another announcement: a member has forgotten his wallet and is wondering if anyone could pay for his groceries and he will Venmo you back. The announcement inspires my daydreaming of a society where the wallet-less fool could take according to his needs and give of his labor.

I float down each aisle of this dreamy labyrinth in a love-struck stupor.

Finally, I come down from the clouds and land in line for the cash register.

A double faux pas cashing out: I am in the line for small carts, but have a large cart though I don’t have a large number of items. And, I try to pay with a credit card.

Small talk with the person working at the register—objectively perhaps just fine—in my euphoria is a delight.

On my way out, I notice a man with dark hair and a long-lens camera slung around his neck. Thank you, attractive stranger, for wearing that stylish outfit as you work the register.

Park Slope Food Coop! I squeal inside. You are perfect. God created you in her image. It wasn’t easy, but it was worth it.

VIOLIN

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