WORTH THE WAIT: CANDID CONFESSIONS FROM THE HOLIDAY CHECKOUT LINE

January 7, 2025



By Nikia Dawkins

How do you pass the time while waiting in line? Or while waiting for life to truly begin? What keeps you going as you seemingly remain in one place? These were some of the ideas I discussed with Coop members waiting in the checkout line on the Monday before Thanksgiving. I entered the building looking for vegan pie and left with fresh wisdom and that feeling of camaraderie that seems to live at the Coop year-round. During this post-election holiday season, Coop members stood in line with full carts and even fuller hearts, eager to share their thoughts, feelings and stories. Despite the divisive political climate and the rainy winter weather, there was a spirit of optimism

and resilience in the air.

Over the course of a few hours, I bounced around some of the longer checkout lines, asking members to share how they pass the time. Most shoppers opt to scroll on their phones. Gary said, “I read the political news, the local football scores and the lack of good movies coming out at Christmas, and I get boiling mad.” He was, however, looking forward to seeing *The Brutalist* on the big screen in December. Linewaiters also spent a lot of time exploring nearby shelves. Members waiting in the main checkout line perused health and household products, but “the express aisle is more dangerous,” said Anna**,** due to the abundance of snacks. Alejandra, who was not only waiting in line but also waiting for her partner to return with frozen blueberries, confessed that she often stares at the shelves and shelves of vitamins. “There are so many things and I have *no idea* what they’re for!” she said with a laugh. “I wonder if they work. I wonder if there’s a difference between brands. Like, is there something that’s being spoofed and another that isn’t? I don’t know! Like, what is CoQ10?”

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Experienced shopper Doris said she always checks out the end-cap with discounted products and odd specials: “Today I found soft-glazed gingerbread cookies for $2.42. There were all these fancy things today. So much fun!” Susie Jen announced excitedly, “I read the *Gazette*!” Other members like Katie choose to enjoy a book on their phones. “Usually I listen to some sort of audiobook,” Katie said, “some cheesy romance that I will *never* admit to.” Cheryl was reading *Birnam Wood* by Eleanor Catton, about guerrilla farmers in Australia, even though she often has very little down time, while waiting. “I’m a teacher in the local community, so I always run into parents of my students at the Coop,” she said, and moments later, as we continued talking, she ran into yet another one. New mother Cecilia**,** whose baby girl was chilling happily in her carrier, said, “I usually just try to entertain this little person. And the

best way, honestly, is breastfeeding her. So many times she'll be in the cart head--butting me, so I'll just breastfeed her in the cart, which is like the funniest thing I've ever done in my life." Members like Frances even use the waiting line to work on meditation practice. "I belong to a meditation group," she said**.** "That's the glue that holds me together."



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

When asked about what they're most grateful for this holiday season, members mentioned their newborn babies, post-election feelings and strong community ties. More than one member was simply grateful to be alive. Laura shared, "I'm grateful for the people around me because in the face of an election where the inequities in our society were really clearly demonstrated, everyone I know is doing some sort of work to make the world a better place." Anna said, "I'm grateful for the abundance we have here at the Coop and for the community we have around us at this time especially." Cheryl shared, "I'm feeling like it's a blessing now to be here. How lucky we are to be in this place where we can get the food we need to celebrate a holiday with the people we love, especially in light of the political situation in our country and in our world. This is a total blessing." A moment later, she smiled and said, "Oh, there's another former parent!" Chosen family was a popular response as well. John said, "I'm grate-

ful that I have friends and that I'm going to make a mess of comfort food and eat it with them to keep my mind off of other things." Katie said she's most grateful for her husband who had recently been out of town for four days, leaving her to take care of their two children on her own. "I'm a terrible single parent," she said sheepishly. "I'm so grateful for his competency and patience."

As the year drew to a close, I also asked members about what they've spent the longest amount of time waiting for in their lives, and answers ran the gamut from higher education to inner peace. "To have a baby," said Cheryl. **"**I was 41 when I gave birth and I waited a long time for that to happen." John said, "I'm trying to learn a new language now—Ukrainian. I'm using the Duolingo app, and I'm going to reach a point where I'm going to have to take a real class or find a tutor because it only teaches by example and that's all you get from it. But it's a start!" Many members, including Sarah Sills, said they're still waiting for social justice. Others had finally found new careers. New father Dan, whose baby girl sat serenely in his stroller, said, "I just opened a record store in Williamsburg. It's called Boom Service. Mostly old and some new releases as well. But that's been a lifetime dream." Angelina quipped, "I'm waiting for my kids to grow up so I can have some alone time." Scott had trouble thinking of an answer but then it came to him: "I'm waiting for the U.S. men's national soccer team to perform at a level commensurate with their ability."

"I'M STILL WAITING; I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M WAITING FOR."

Susie decided, after much thought, "I'm still waiting; I just don't know what I'm waiting for." Other members such as Afiya couldn't really relate to the question at all: "I don't wait that much in my life," she said. "I do the things I want to do when I want to do them. I pretty much have always done that. Sometimes I wish I hadn't, but most of the time it's OK with me." Phillip said he's still waiting to realize his full potential. Meanwhile, Alejandra said, "My college degree took a really long time. It took me 10 years to finish my undergraduate [degree]. I worked full time the entire time." Laura

said, “I have a very hard time taking time off, and I think what I’ve waited the longest for is to be able to read one novel after another. I read them at night before I go to sleep so I don’t read them very fast, but I’m really enjoying it right now.” She recommends the novels of Amor Towles, especially *Rules of Civility.* Katie said she’s waiting for “enlightenment—to feel like there aren’t any existential questions that are lingering around in the periphery and weighing me down.” Members like Gayle were waiting to feel centered or, like Anna, to have a sense of confidence and to find their place in the world. Finally, retiree Frances said with a sigh, “I’ve been waiting for peace and serenity, and I think at this late date, I’m getting there.”

Nikia Dawkins is a life-long writer and night owl who’s always on the lookout for good vegan ice cream.