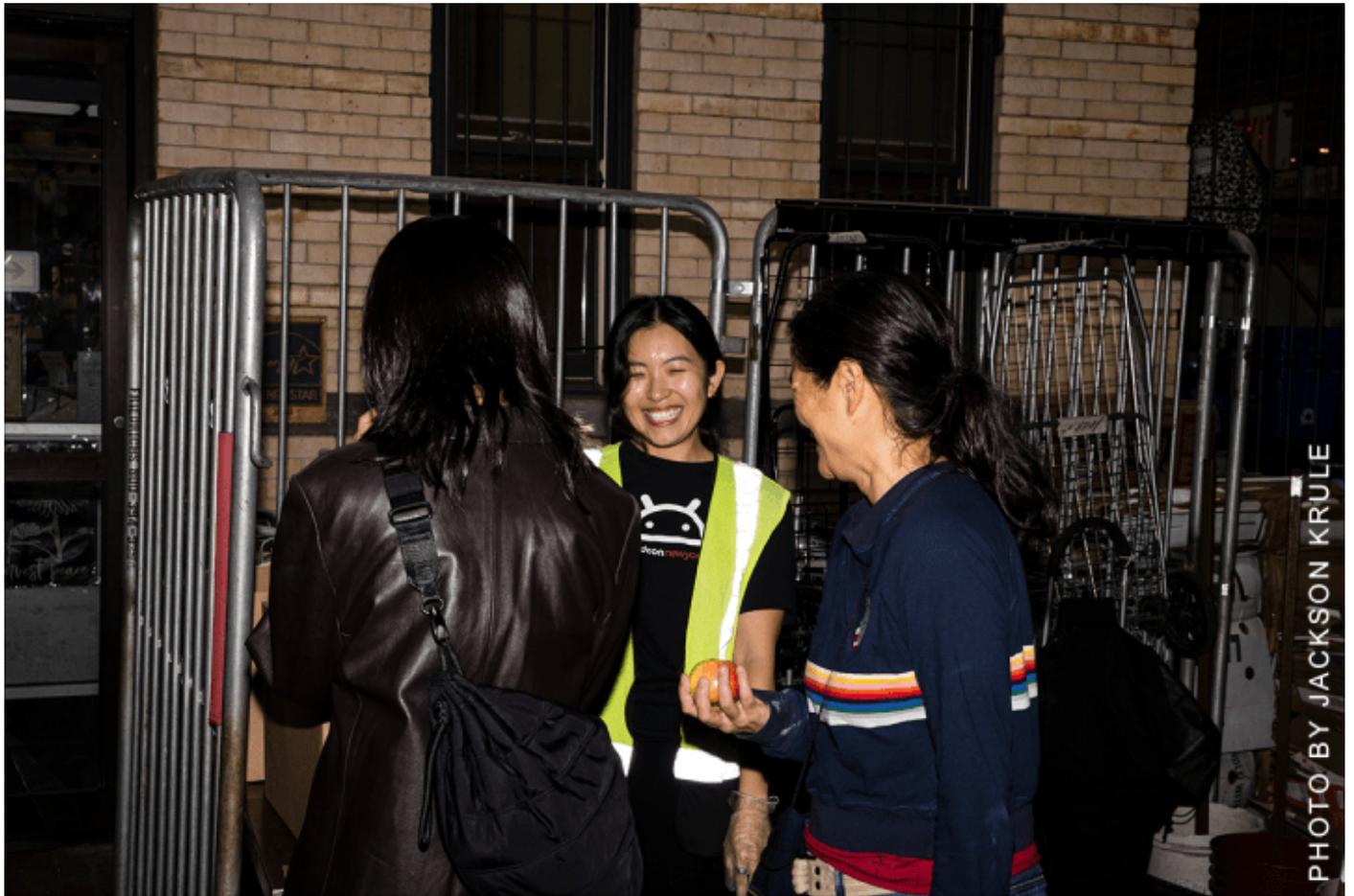


WALKING AND TALKING: THE INS AND OUTS (AND OCCASIONAL AWKWARD SILENCES) OF A HIGHLY COVETED COOP SHIFT

November 26, 2024



By Liz Welch

November 26, 2024

One of the greatest perks of being a Coop Member is not having to worry about schlepping your bounty home (if you happen to live within walking distance) or to your preferred mode of transportation, whether that be by train, car, bus or bike. The orange vested PSFC walkers, whose job is to accompany you while you push your cart back home, are such a mainstay of Park Slope that when I posted on a local Facebook page that I was looking for stories about this bespoke service, one woman commented that while she has never been a “cart returner” (the official work slot title for walkers), she dressed her toddler as one for Halloween one year—to huge fanfare.

A friend suggested that I write this story after the person who walked her towards her home in Gowanus one afternoon refused to take her to her door. He would not cross 4th Avenue, the edge of the boundary printed on the large maps that are attached to the sturdy carts that can handle the sometimes cobblestone and mostly potholed terrain.

"I live one block away," she explained to her walker, who'd dug his heels into the sidewalk. "Are you sure you can't help me?" she asked, as she unloaded her bags onto the street.

"Insurance reasons," he insisted. "If a car hit me outside of the bounds of the map then the Coop would be in legal hot water."

"But what if a car hit you during the other 59 days and 21 hours of your life between shifts?" she asked, trying to reason with him. "Then who is legally liable?"

The stickler was unmoved, so my friend called her husband and waited for him and their children to meet her and help her shlep a great many bags home.

The story left us both wondering: Was this legal liability excuse true? Who came up with it? Why?



Longtime (and soon to retire) Treasurer and General Manager Joe Holtz set the record straight: “The boundaries are not about insurance at all. That is complete non-truth. The boundaries were once closer in and then they were expanded... only once, I believe.”

General Coordinator Ann Herpel added the reason for the boundaries is really about time and fairness: the Coop does not want walkers to be gone for too long as there could be other members waiting to be walked back at the Coop. The Coop also strongly advises that walkers do not enter another member’s house.

According to the five walkers who were interviewed for this story, though, those boundaries are still open to interpretation. All the walkers interviewed for this story decide on a case by case basis. Shoshana Dornhelm, a member since 2016, recalls being taken advantage of once when she first started walking 8 years ago. “One man took advantage of my newbie status and took me all the way to Eastern Parkway and Washington Avenue!”

ONE TIME I WALKED A WOMAN WHO TOLD ME ABOUT HER SEX LIFE! AND THEN SHE SAID, 'DON'T WORRY! I'LL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN!' BUT WHEN I DROPPED HER OFF, IT TURNED OUT THAT SHE LIVED IN THE SAME BUILDING AS MY RELATIVES.

The cart return shift was created for a surprising yet sensible reason. "To discourage members from bringing their cars to load outside the Coop, thereby causing the Squad One firefighters to arrive at life threatening emergencies later than they would have," Holtz explained. "Picture a curbside filled with members' cars and members loading into their cars. Picture other members needing to double park. Picture traffic coming around the double-parked cars. Picture a Squad One fire truck trying to go toward 6th Ave."

We think you're a hero, Joe! As do the following five cart returners who spoke with the *Linewaiters' Gazette* about why they love this shift and how they each interpret the (not set in stone) rules.

BELLA MUCCARI

Member since 2010

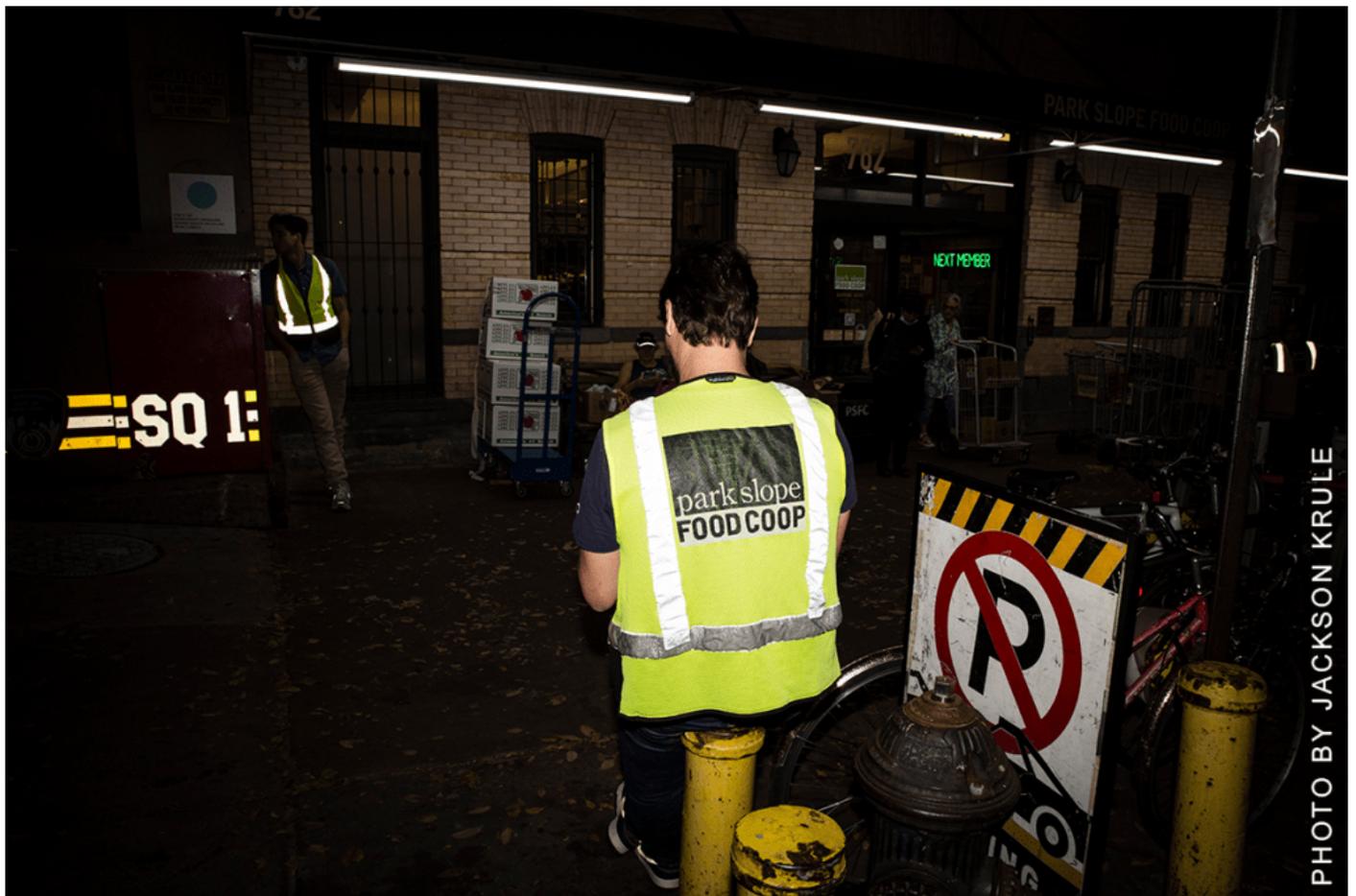
"Before Covid I did a morning receiving shift—but I always wanted to do walking! I was furloughed during the pandemic, so doing this shift was great! That was my exercise: When I did the shift, I was walking between 20,000 and 30,000 steps a day! I was in such good shape. I also banked a ton of shifts. Right now, I have 44 stored up, all from walking.

My experience has been mostly great. People appreciate that you are doing them a favor. While the rules are, 'Don't go outside of the range,' I decide on a case-by-case basis. I always try to be thoughtful and considerate. And I almost always say, yes.

There was one time when a woman who was younger than me told me to run and help her get to her bus. I did not do that. She missed the bus and said, 'Well now we have to walk all the way to Flatbush!' And I did do that.

Members share all kinds of interesting information with me: I once walked a guy from Scotland, and told him I was visiting his country that summer. He gave me tips of places to go in Aberdeen!

Another time, I walked a woman who told me about her sex life! And then she said, 'Don't worry! I'll never see you again!' But when I dropped her off, it turned out that she lived in the same building as my relatives."



MARIE ROMANO

Member since 2001

“Prior to Covid, I worked in the Coop’s office. I loved it and really enjoyed helping members with their accounts. After Covid, the set up in the office changed and I preferred to have a shift outside. I started the walking shifts as FTOP and then signed up for a regular shift.

I love being outside and at the same time helping members walk their carts to a destination. In addition to the walking, the sidewalks in the front should be cleared of debris and carts returned to their proper place.

The majority of people that I walk with drove to the Coop and parked nearby, so those are typically short walks. If someone says, ‘I need to go beyond the boundaries...’ I will take them if it is a block. My goal is to always service the members. For example, if I’m coming back from a walk, and see a shopper emptying their cart on 7th Avenue, I will offer to walk back with two carts. The shoppers are grateful, kind, love the Coop and always come first!”

SHOSHANA DORNHELM

Member since 2016

“Walking shifts are the best shifts the Coop has to offer, hands down! If I couldn’t be a walker, I don’t think I’d even be a member anymore. I love everything about it—being outside, getting exercise, even when the weather isn’t perfect. It doesn’t even feel like work to me. Plus, I prefer talking to people one-on-one more so than with people in a group setting, like how they described the coveted cheese packing shift during my orientation. That shift sounds like a nightmare to someone like me!

When it comes to walking people outside of the limits, I don’t mind going a block or two out—I believe that’s a good ‘buffer zone.’ Most people will let me know upfront if they’re in those ‘outer limits’ which I appreciate. In my experience, not many people have pushed those limits, but there have been some. When I first started eight years

ago, before limits were posted on the carts, one man took advantage of my newbie status and took me all the way to Eastern Parkway and Washington Avenue!

My most memorable walk was during the marathon last year. A family parked their bikes across 4th Avenue and Union Street, and we had to weave with the full cart through the runners (and then right back across, alone!).

I've had some really amazing conversations with people over the years. I've met journalists, doctors, people who have immigrated from other countries and people who have been here their whole lives. I especially love talking with people who have gone or are going through career changes, because I'm going through that too and it's encouraging to share the successes from our experiences.

SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO NOT WANT TO TALK AT ALL... IF THERE'S EVER AN AWKWARD PAUSE, I CAN ALWAYS ASK IF THERE WAS ANYTHING INTERESTING IN THE PRODUCE AISLE. IT NEVER FAILS!

I was nervous during my shifts when I first started walking. There was a lot of pressure to strike up light hearted, positive conversations with strangers. Over the years though, I've grown to be more attuned to people's energy and their social needs. Some people seem to not want to talk at all, which is great too—I'm always happy to daydream on my own for a bit. Having to read people's moods like this has helped me grow in all other areas of my life. And if there's ever an awkward pause, I can always ask if there was anything interesting in the produce aisle. It never fails!"

HANNAH DIAMOND

Member since 2012

"I missed the community of the Coop during lockdown—walking was the first shift that became available. I had previously worked checkout, which has similar advan-

tages in that I got to meet a whole cross section of Brooklyn. In day-to-day life we don't often get to talk to new people or meet people with lives very different from my own. As a walker I talk to people of all different ages, backgrounds, professions, etc.

I love talking to people and learning more about my community. I've talked to authors and directors and then read their books & watched their movies. I learn about jobs I never knew existed. I sometimes walk people back to their beautiful browns-tones and hear how cheaply they purchased them in the 1970s.

I also have 'regulars' who shop regularly at the same time, so I see every shift. I work by myself so in a way it's like having co-workers. We can catch up without really knowing each other.

Everyone at the Coop has an interesting story, and walking is the best way to hear as many as possible."

HEATHER HOPE

Member since 2010

"I'm a night owl. The walking shifts are usually posted after midnight. I check around 12:30 a.m.—and then sign up as soon as they are posted.

As for the rules, you are not obligated to push someone's cart. But I had one woman who was so pregnant she looked ready to pop. Her house was on 8th Avenue, so the walk was all uphill. I was happy to push for her. Another time, I walked an older man with mobility issues, so I offered to push his cart.



ILLUSTRATION BY OLEXA HEWRYK

Recently, I was walking a woman who had a newborn baby strapped to her. I had just started to seriously look for work after a long stint not working. As we were chit chatting, I told her I was looking for a part time job. As it turned out, she was on maternity leave and the owner of this local business! She asked me a few questions of what exactly I was looking for regarding employment and when I shared my previous work experience, she thought I could be a good fit.

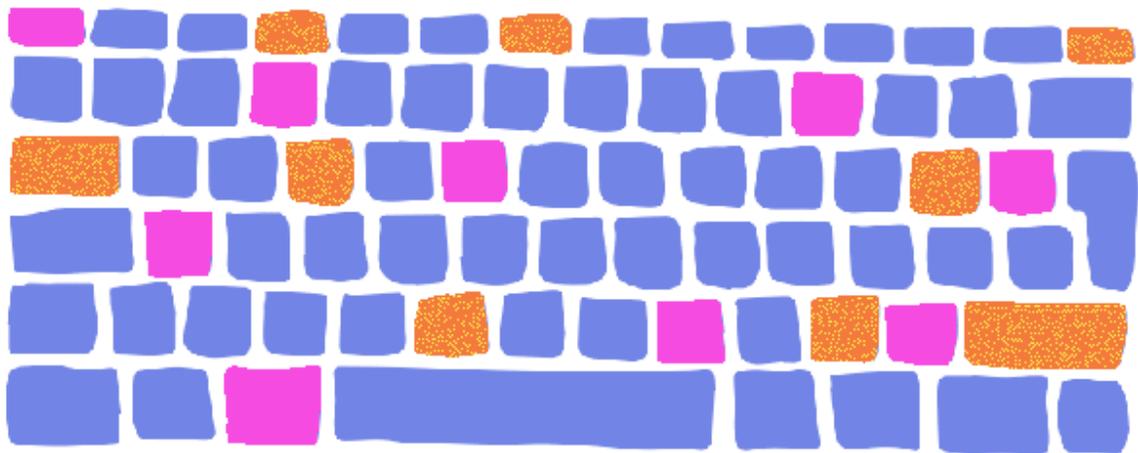
She gave me the email of the person who was hiring. It was so kind! When I sent that person a message, I learned that the job had been filled. A month or so later, I got another email for another position. I had an interview with them on Friday.”

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

NOVEMBER 26, 2024

November 26, 2024

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



MEMBER INVOLVEMENT IN GC TRANSITION

Fellow Members,

We've been informed that Joe Holtz's current role will be split in two and that our Coop will hire two General Coordinators to replace him and that one will be GC for Fi-

nance, a new role.

I'm curious how this decision was made, and how this specific split was determined. As another member wrote recently, Joe's role has been enormous—hard to imagine how he did it all! At the same time, it seems that member involvement in the decision to reconfigure is vital and there are many ways that this job might be shared.

Members have a lot to offer as we make this transition. How can we be involved?

In cooperation,

Kathy McCullagh

FIGURING OUT TOGETHER HOW BEST TO FILL JOE HOLTZ'S ROLE

Dear Fellow Members,

In the November 5 issue of the *Gazette*, Elaine Roghanian wrote about member involvement in the search for Joe Holtz's replacement. I thank her for bringing this important issue to us and hope that we will soon hear from the Personnel Committee and the General Coordinators about a means for member-owners to share their thoughts about this important role.

While it would obviously be impossible for over 16,000 people to interview or screen candidates, surveying members about what they hope for in a new leader's vision, skills, experiences and strengths would offer a more informed perspective to a smaller search committee.

Hoping that we hear how to get involved in the search,

Thomas Cox

HYBRID MEETINGS

Dear Editor:

The October GM articulated another clear case in point for why hybrid GM meetings make the most sense for the membership. While the main agenda topic was around whether to trigger a referendum to allow all members to weigh in on mask wearing requirements on the shopping floor, the discussion at the GM was centered around the merits of mask wearing rather than whether a referendum was prudent.

I couldn't help but feel that most of us who voted in one particular direction of the referendum vote at the meeting would have felt differently about the merits of a referendum should we have felt differently about mask-wearing. That seems wrong, given that one's opinion on the merits of a referendum in a cooperative is not tied to his or her opinion on the mask wearing.

Hybrid meetings would go a long way towards resolving these conflicting forces once and for all. It would mitigate the opportunity for packing the vote on one side of the issue at a GM meeting, and would allow for more input on issues from the general electorate, which was the whole point of the referendum vote in the first place.

Allen Nisanyan

LET'S BE THE BEST SUPPORT ORGANIZATION WE CAN BE

Fellow Members,

This morning I saw a Coop post showing discounted generic products on sale. I appreciate the effort to offer more low-cost items, and hope it grows. As a nonprofit, we can help people who struggle with the high price of groceries as income disparity is likely to worsen.

When I joined the Coop in 1978, I was 23, a pregnant graduate student, scraping along with part-time work and food assistance for pregnant women and mothers via the WIC program. To this day, I appreciate that the Coop enabled us to eat fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains, when we could never have afforded them in the local health food store (Back to the Land) or found them at Key Food.

When I joined the Coop, my low income wasn't atypical. As Park Slope gentrified and became whiter, so did our Coop. Over time, we have added and added more higher-end products, meeting the demands of our demographics. In the 46 years since I joined, 30+ years of union-supported work in the public schools greatly improved my family's finances. Now, I want to give the Coop food help I had to others in need.

We can collaborate to attract and serve a wider community, including more people with low income. We could decrease the markup on basics, like discounted products, staples and some produce. We could lessen requirements for income verification, so people who don't have the documents for EBT could join the Coop and pay the reduced markup. More affluent members can anonymously help fund groceries for those in need. Let's work together to improve our Coop by making it more inviting for people with less money.

Cooperatively,

Alyce Barr

Editor's Correction on Above Letter: The Coop is not a nonprofit. We are a cooperative corporation. Whereas nonprofits are not required to pay income tax, we—as a cooperative corporation—are. For more information, see our

certificate of incorporation here.

A NEW PUBLICATION BY AND FOR COOP MEMBERS

Dear Fellow Members,

Do you see our Coop as more than “just a grocery store?” Are you excited to delve into the PSFC’s role in an ecosystem of positive social action? Then you’ll want to check out *The Olive Press*, a zine from Park Slope Food Coop Members for Palestine. It’s available on our web site, psfc4palestine.org, and we distribute physical copies at each GM.

The Olive Press features Coop-specific articles centering our work within the food justice landscape. Other pieces connect our local effort for a free Palestine to a globe-spanning solidarity movement. In Issue #2, just out, a Coop member interviews his friend, a Palestinian farmer, about Gaza’s traditions of mutual support and resistance. Articles highlight a Queens-based “Keffiyeh Cup” soccer fundraiser for Gaza and the fraught history of Ireland’s support for Palestine. We cover the exciting vote by the Greene Hill Coop to join BDS. An anti-Zionist Jew and long-time PSFC member looks back on the rich history of our various boycotts as preserved in the Coop archive. There’s a recipe for rummaniyeh, a Palestinian dish served by our amazing Food Crew at a recent GM. A visit to the Hiroshima Peace Park prompts reflections on haunting parallels between the U.S. atomic bombings in 1945 and Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. There’s even a dose of Coop-specific humor in a “missed connections” feature portraying offbeat encounters that could take place in our crowded shopping aisles.

A unique mix of heartfelt testimony, fact-based analysis, must-read gossip and graphic exuberance, *The Olive Press* is a window into a movement actively supported by thousands of Coop members (around 3,000 have already signed our petition!). Check it out online, or better yet, come to the next GM and snag your very own copy.

In cooperation,

Jan Clausen

MISSED MUSICAL CONNECTION

Dear Fellow Members:

I know this is not in the traditional form of submissions to the Park Slope Food Coop but I'm wondering if it's possible to print this missed connection:

Seeking the person behind the "Shtetlicious" Spotify account. I love your playlists and have been listening for years and have been dying to meet the mysterious entity behind the account!

There is a Park Slope Food Coop playlist (bangin' by the way) and my hope is this missed connection will get back to them somehow. I want to compliment you on your taste in music!

Sophie Edelhart

YES TO A BOYCOTT. NO TO ANTI-SEMITISM.

Fellow Members,

The last 3 letters to the editor in November 6 *Linewaiters'* grossly mischaracterized efforts to boycott targeted items connected to dubious parties operating in Israel.

Sabra Hummus is co-owned by the Strauss Group which gives financial support to unprincipled Israeli military outfits such as the Golani Brigade, which MSNBC reports “have been implicated in human rights violations against Palestinians”, and have “repeatedly been accused of abusing Palestinians in the occupied west bank”.

The British retailer Co-operative Group, in a statement about its ingredient sourcing wrote that they had “stopped sourcing any produce or own-brand products from the Israeli settlements”, saying “While there are many disputed territories throughout the world, there are currently only two examples of such illegal areas: the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories and the Moroccan settlements in Western Sahara.”

Asserting that something must be done to end Israel’s decades-long dehumanization, open-air incarceration and now massacre and purposeful starvation of Palestinians is not an attack on Jewish people, but an opposition to the western colonial war machine encouraging and funding unprincipled behavior by Israeli leadership. A boycott is a non-violent effort to pressure our sibling nation of Israel to fall in line with international human rights norms.

I personally oppose all types of discrimination, hatred and microaggressions against any Jewish folks. I also stand with Jewish organizations such as Repair the World, Jewish Voices for Peace, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and Rabbis for Ceasefire in demanding that the state of Israel end the current bombardment and starvation campaign being waged on the Palestinian people and act to promote equality and full human rights for all.

Extending peace and sibling-hood to all Coop members while standing by my convictions.

Alan Lewandowski

DEHUMANIZATION

Dear *Gazette*:

I write this on November 9, the morning after the pogrom in Amsterdam. Israeli soccer fans exiting an international soccer game were attacked by a coordinated mob. Dehumanization of the other makes the violent mob inevitable. To dehumanize requires a sustained process of repetition and indoctrination.

What does this have to do with the Coop?

For nearly a year, the Members 4 Palestine (M4P) have been active in the Coop. M4P is part of a larger movement using dehumanization as a tactic in a larger war against the collective existence of Jews. Over the last several months, in Brooklyn, we have seen numerous anti-Semitic attacks on Jews—assaults, stabbing, slashings, an attempted car ramming and vandalism. Attacks inspired and incited by same false rhetoric used by M4P.

Speech is the most human of all characteristics. M4P has ignored multiple invitations from Coop 4 Unity to dialog. While we can understand reluctance to engage in conversations that challenge a passionately held position, we cannot understand the refusal to meet with us within the context of being part of a shared enterprise “committed to diversity and equality.” We can only assume we are already dehumanized in their eyes.

No one in the Coop should ever be made to feel as if they don’t matter, as if their concerns are not valid. This is absolutely at the heart of the word “cooperation.” Mutual dignity and respect are the glue that holds the Coop together.

The antidote to extremism is curiosity. M4P, come and learn.

Barbara Mazor, Coop 4 Unity

CONCERNS ABOUT AMY'S KITCHEN'S PRODUCTS

Dear Coop Members:

At the January 31, 2023 GM, the Labor Committee presented a discussion item regarding Amy's Kitchen, which had engaged in anti-union activities and labor law violations. In response, some Coops boycotted Amy's and some organizations were calling for a boycott.

The dispute between the company and the employees was resolved on June 12, 2024. Amy's workers say conditions have improved, and ended the boycott. The Food Empowerment Project (FEP) said in a press release, "After eight months of discussions between Amy's Kitchen food line workers in Santa Rosa, California, representatives of FEP, and executives at Amy's Kitchen, agreements were made to not only improve the working conditions for the food line workers in Santa Rosa, but the company also acknowledged those who were abruptly let go at the now-closed Amy's Kitchen facility in San José."

In the meantime, construction on the proposed Amy's factory in Goshen, NY is going forward and set to begin between 2025 and 2027, though there still appear to be several issues that require resolution prior to construction.

All that being said, I have seen no updates in the *Gazette* about the resolution of this conflict. Perhaps the labor committee could comment on the matter and let the community know if we, the membership, may now in good faith buy Amy's products once again.

In Cooperation,

Stewart Pravda

WELL DONE

Dear Editor,

I congratulate the PSFC staff. Today I read the Food and Drug Administration's list of waffle products that were recalled because of a listeria threat. I observed that the Kodiak brand, which is one that I used to purchase, was on the list. The Coop stopped selling it weeks ago.

We all should appreciate the work of the staff in taking early action in removing the product from the freezer.

Irvin Schonfeld

HOORAY FOR THE COOP!!

Dear Members:

The over-capacity turnout at our last General Meeting was wonderful to see. As a member of the Coop for (yikes!) 30 years as of 2025 and as a frequent GM attendee for many of those years, the renewed interest in participation that we've seen in recent months is heartening indeed. Yes, some of it is due to the re-activation of efforts to get the Coop on board with the internationally recognized boycott of targeted Israeli products—and its own mission statement for that matter—but there's also renewed interest and active engagement by a large segment of our membership in taking care of each other through twice-weekly masking, getting still greater democratic

participation through hybrid voting in the near future, the printing of a new educational (and often quite funny) 'zine called *The Olive Press*, etc. A vibrant and flourishing Coop is only possible with the passionate, respectful participation of its members. As a Coop elder I'm proud and grateful to belong to our beloved community.

Carol Wald

HAPPY HOUR!

November 26, 2024



HAPPY HOUR

**FOR PARK SLOPE FOOD
COOP MEMBERS & FRIENDS**

**THURS.
DEC. 5**



6-8 PM

**AT BIERWAX
556 VANDERBILT AVE
(B/W BERGEN & DEAN)
CASH BAR**

RSVP SUGGESTED [HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/COOPHAPPYHOUR](https://tinyurl.com/coophappyhour)

ORGANIZED BY THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP FUN COMMITTEE

INTERESTED IN ENGAGING COOP WORK?

November 26, 2024



November 26, 2024

DISPUTE RESOLUTION COMMITTEE (DRC) SEEKS NEW MEMBERS

SKILLS NEEDED

- Communication • Problem solving • Conflict resolution
- Dealing with complex situations
- Investigation • Writing • Research

OUR WORK INCLUDES

- Resolving conflicts between members
- Applying Coop rules and regulations
- Discussing policy issues related to the committee's work
- Investigating allegations of uncooperative behavior by members and engaging in problem-solving
- Frequent contact with committee members
- Participating in mediation, hearings and other conflict resolution methods

REQUIREMENTS

- In order to be considered for this position, any candidate must:
- Be a member for at least a year
- Have an excellent attendance record
- Possess the ability to work on a team
- Have good writing skills
- Have computer proficiency (Excel, Word, email)—this is essential
- Attend evening meetings every six weeks

We often work more than the 2.75 hours in a 6-week period. These hours are credited and can be banked for future use.

We recognize the importance of various points of view when considering cases brought to us. We are seeking a candidate pool that reflects the diversity of the Coop's membership.

CONTACT

foodcoopdrc@gmail.com with the subject line: Joining the DRC

Join us to make the Coop the best place it can be for everyone.

WORDSPROUTS REVIVED: A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP AND THE OLD STONE HOUSE

November 26, 2024

By Sarah Schenck



November 26, 2024

We are happy to announce the revival of WordSprouts, the Coop's reading series featuring Coop authors.

Due to the lack of availability of space at the Coop, we will be hosting events in partnership with our neighborhood nonprofit, the Old Stone House. Our next few gatherings will take place at the Old Stone House's beautiful upstairs meeting room.

We are seeking:

- Potential speakers (who have written a book, article, play—fiction or non-fiction—and would like to be considered for our 2024-2025 line-up).
- WordSprouts' featured authors receive 1-2 workslot credits for participating and may sell copies of their books at the event.

- We are also seeking potential squad members.

We are especially interested in addressing these two topics at upcoming gatherings:

- New approaches to community mental health.
- Our State of the Union (an open conversation about overcoming political polarization, defusing the epidemic of loneliness, and reviving our civic institutions).

Please contact Sarah at SarahSchenckFilms@gmail.com if you are interested in proposing yourself or another member who is an author as a potential special guest, or if you are interested in joining the squad.

FILM NIGHT: TIME Y2K

November 26, 2024



By Jennifer Miller and Gabriel Rhodes



HBO ORIGINAL

TIME BOMB 424

THE END OF THE WORLD
AS WE KNEW IT

NEW DOCUMENTARY
STREAMING DEC 30

max

the clock counted down to the 21st century, the world faced a potential technological disaster: a bug that could cause computers to misinterpret the year 2000 as 1900. Crafted entirely from archival footage and featuring first-hand accounts from computer experts, survivalists, scholars, militia groups, conservative Christians and pop icons, *Time Bomb Y2K* is a prescient and often humorous tale about the power and vulnerabilities of technology.

This documentary will be screened by Zoom on **Thursday, February 6th, at 7pm**. Editor Katyann Gonzalez and producer Peter Nauffts, both Coop members, will be present for a Q&A after the screening.

Katyann Gonzalez is a film editor and assistant editor working across documentary and narrative films. Her work has screened at international film festivals including Sundance, New York Film Festival and Berlinale as well as on major streaming platforms like HBO and Netflix. She is currently working on a docuseries about the Alabama Crimson Tide football team for Fox.

Peter Nauffts is a New York-based archival researcher and producer. He has conducted archival research on shows for Apple, ESPN, HBO and PBS. He is currently working on a documentary about Sun Ra for Firelight Films.

JOIN VIA ZOOM MEETING:

- <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86444661891>
- Meeting ID: 864 4466 1891

To be added to our email listserv for future screening announcements, please send a request to jlymiller@me.com.

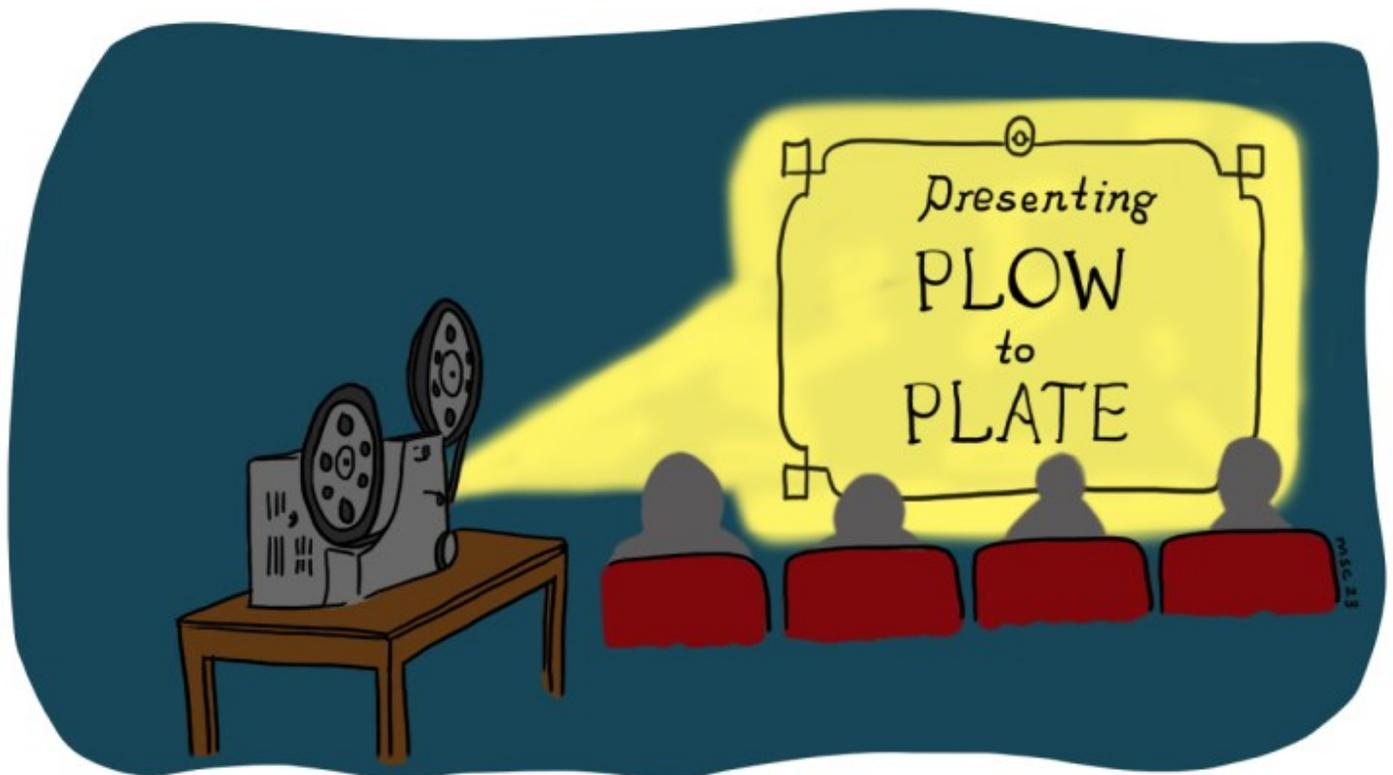
Jennifer Miller and Gabriel Rhodes live in Brooklyn and have been Coop members for

20 years plus.

Editor's note: The film was initially supposed to be screened in November.

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: A HARD AND FAST (AND FAMISHED) FILM

November 26, 2024



By Adam Rabiner

November 26, 2024

Plow to Plate has spilled plenty of ink explaining how processed foods have contributed to unprecedented levels of global obesity and related diseases. We've also presented views on alternative healthier diets, whether they be protein- or plant-based. *Fasting: The Healer Within* takes a different tack. The film, which was co-directed by Sinclair Fischer-Gray, Saxon Fischer-Gray, Tyler Tolman and Lindsay Guerrero, is about

the absence of food, and what it does to the body and mind over time.

These effects are seen in Sinclair and his younger brother, Saxon, as they embark on an incredibly ambitious 20-day water fast followed by a 20-day fruit-juice fast. Sinclair's primary motivation is to heal his body from a ruptured disk sustained playing rugby. The injury left him with chronic knee, neck, back, and leg pain. Saxon is a healthy 26-year-old who comes along for moral support.

Before the two Australian brothers embark on their adventure, the film sets the stage with a cast of characters who explain the benefits of fasting, give the brothers advice and discuss their blood chemistry. We meet Joe Cross, a fellow Aussie, who healed himself through fasting and made the 2011 documentary *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*. Dr. Alan Goldhammer, who runs a fasting clinic in Santa Rosa, California, explains how fasting is an ancient physical and spiritual healing practice. The most important and influential talking head is the person who introduced Saxon to fasting: his mentor Tyler Tolman, who runs a retreat in Bali, Indonesia. Tyler best articulates the multi-faceted aspects of fasting, discussing its religious overtones and themes of purification, holiness and communing with oneself and nature. He also digs into the physical and scientific sides of the equation. Tolman believes that just about any disease can be healed through fasting.

Fasting: The Healer Within balances the technical and biological with the spiritual. The brothers who anchor the film are also game to flush out the toxins from their bowels using colonic machines, as well as shed their childhood traumas and other repressed emotions through a technique called "rebirthing." Biochemical processes like autophagy, autolysis and ketosis share time in the film with discussions of energy flows and other naturopathic concepts.

It is no wonder that Saxon and Sinclair use every conceivable practice or ritual to help them through their fasts. By day six, living in a trailer in the shadow of Mount Warning in New South Wales, they are already tired, hungry, uncomfortable and bored. They are boosted by a sign on the wall that reads, "You're Supported & Loved" and

occasional phone calls with their mom. Saxon misses the warmth and love of taco night with his family and writes an affirmation in his journal: “The harder the day, the deeper the detox.” Both are already struggling, weak, sad, lonely, craving food, experiencing stomach aches and at wit’s end while trying to remain positive. A good attitude proves difficult to maintain when there is no food to serve as a distraction, and little to hide behind as old insecurities creep to the surface and tell them that they are not good enough to pull this off.

Watching this up-close portrait of the brothers’ shared hardship reminded me of the History Channel’s show *Alone*, in which survivalists vie to be the last man or woman standing in a harsh natural environment—with no food and a handful of tools. Saxon and Sinclair do not face down a severe winter or a menacing grizzly bear but they experience the same mental anguish and physical transformations (each one loses 26.5 pounds in twenty days). I wish we saw more of the day-by-day vlogging during the fast.

On day 21, after the water fast, you have never seen two people relish and appreciate a giant glass of watermelon juice more than these two brothers. Finally, the film moves on to the denouement which covers the proper way to conclude a serious fast. It’s shown during a family reunion in Bali with Tyler and their parents and siblings, and two post-fast follow-ups—one eight months later, and a final conversation between the brothers three and a half years afterwards.

Despite the discomfort and difficulty, they agreed that the experience under Mt. Warning was life-changing and provided great memories. The pair learned about their minds and bodies and the art and science of fasting. More importantly, they discovered that genuine healing is an ongoing everyday endeavor.

Fasting: The Healer Within, Tuesday, December 10th, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

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CROSSWORD: ORAL

November 26, 2024

