

Cashier's smiling service registers with students Elga of HUB's Lion's Den has pleasant words for all

By TONIA STIVALE
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

When a cashier takes your money, how often do you get a smile? How often does the cashier look at you instead of just your merchandise? It happens, but not too often. Business is business and you're lucky if the cashier doesn't drop your change on the floor or push you hurriedly aside to get to the next customer.

Elga Eckley is different. Elga has worked as a cashier for 11 years at the HUB's Lion's Den. Her experience shows. But unlike those cashiers whose years behind the register have soured their rapport with their public, Elga still loves her public and her job.

From 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Elga analyzes the contents of students' trays, quickly rings up the bills, exchanges cash and manages to squeeze a few seconds out of each sale to say something kind or witty to a customer who was only passing through and never really expected any humane treatment.

Watching Elga in operation is uplifting. A student slumps to the cash register, downcast perhaps by a failed test or a broken love affair. He hands Elga his money and starts when he hears her say, "How are ya honeybunch?" He'll smile then, quite pleased with himself that anyone cared enough to ask about his day.

Someone like Elga would have to like her job. But Elga responds candidly, "I don't know why I even work here. I could go to a supermarket and make \$6.00 an hour." She pauses, her flashing brown eyes still for just a moment, and you realize she's not earning \$6.00 an hour in a supermarket because she just wouldn't be happy there.

"I like kids," she says. "I always did. I've seen 'em grow up, from freshmen to seniors. They come back to visit and it's nice to see them." To a student walking through the line, she winks and says,

"Have a good day now!" No wonder they come back to visit.

She takes a puff of her cigarette and her tone grows serious. "All these years I've been working here, I'll tell ya why I like it. People are nice, but the kids are special. They're polite, they're fun. I can kid with them in any way, sometimes in a smart way," she adds conspiratorially.

"They smile and never get mad at me and they compliment me. They come to me with their problems. Some kid told me the other day his father died. This one's in love and that one's flunking out, while the one's getting A's. It's like a confession center here." But Elga listens, because to her, the students are her children.

Elga has her own children, but they are all grown and gone from the nest. "You need kids," she shrugs, "so I call the students my children. They want attention. They want somebody to care for 'em and I do."

Elga confides a favorite anecdote. "One of the guys I always kid with, he's real tall. Well, one day, I said, 'Hiya big boy,' and in back of him was this short fellow. He looked up at me and said, 'How come you never say that to me?' Well, I felt kinda bad about it, so the next day I saw this guy, I grinned and said, 'Hiya Sweet and Low.' He got a kick outa that!"

Elga's boss, Melvin Getz, Food Supervisor for The Lion's Den, pulls up a chair. "Do you want your picture taken with me?" Elga teases.

"She'd have to have a wide-angle lense to get us both in there," he teases back, laughing wickedly. "Make sure you get her with her mouth open, that's normal," he adds.

"When he talks to me like that, he likes me," she assures me.

"I'd say something nice about her, but she's sitting here and I don't want her to

get swell-headed," he chuckles again. Elga shoots him a nasty look, but it doesn't last for long. Soon she is grinning. "Excuse me a minute, I wanna get a Coke."

Once Elga is beyond earshot, Getz levels with me. "She's an excellent cashier — one of the best I've seen. And she's really good with the kids. I think it's because she mothers them. The kids are away from home and they're real glad she can talk them out of their shells. "She does have a way with the kids. She's real fast on register. She usually has the trays figured out before they get there. She's working back of the line about three trays."

Elga returns and he says, "She's a pretty good cashier even though she is a little on the old side." "I'm like an old wine," she retorts, "the older I get the better I get!"

"It's that old imported stuff that you gotta watch," Getz says.

Elga came to this country from Bulgaria in 1947. "I'll have thirty years in this country December first," she says proudly.

A backlash from Getz is inevitable. "What thirty years here and forty years in Bulgaria?"

"I'm 53 and I'm proud of it," she says, "I'm not gonna hide my years!"

"I'm gonna work till I'm 65 and now just because he doesn't think I can make it. But maybe not, my mind's startin' to fail me. People think I have a computer mind when I'm on the register. Well, I don't. After you work so many years, you automatically look at the tray and you don't see a hamburger or cheeseburger, you see 55 cents or 45 cents."

"Kids can't understand that, but that's the way it's done. When I see someone's got a \$1.20 tray and \$2 in his hand, I have 80 cents in my hand right off the bat. It's a kind of game all day long, but it's a nice game."

Trust is the name of one of the games played at the cash register. "When we're in a rush, I don't have time to count money any more than the kids count theirs. When I give 'em their money, they put it in their pockets. They trust me, I trust them, we have a trust going."

"Or they'll come in and say, 'I only have 19 cents for coffee.' All right, I have a box that I call the poor box. When I find nickels and dimes on the floor, I put 'em in the box. And I give 'em that money. It comes in handy. But the point is they won't hand you only 19 cents and not tell you about it. And they always pay me back, every time."

Elga's brown eyes are still for just a second, then she laughs heartily. "Why wouldn't I like it here?" It's obvious that she does, and the students pick that up. "That's 'sweet thing,' as I call her," says Mike Kusuplos (8th-business logistics). "She always has a good word for you. She's a wonderful lady and it's wonderful to see a smiling face."

Elga's smiling face sets off a chain reaction. Her laughter is infectious, her candor appealing. "Dieting's nothing more than mind over matter. My mind says it doesn't matter!" or "Cigarettes are my weakness, but I quit. I quit every night and I start every morning."

Elga takes a last sip from her Coke glass and a last drag from her cigarette. I ask her if she wants to say anything else, before she goes back to her cash register. "No," she says emphatically, "I'm getting conceited now."

She stands tall as she takes her place behind the register. As she deftly rings up the sale for a bright red apple, she leans toward the student and declares, "That's a nice apple you got there." The student leaves, smiling. I notice a small sign taped beside the register. It reads, "Keep on smilin'." Somehow I know that Elga passes the message along.



Elga Eckley, cashier at the HUB's Lion's Den, rings up a purchase on her register. Elga has been giving out change and kind words for her customers during her 11 years at the register.

Fantasy, sci-fi books catch student interest

By DEBBIE CAIN
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

With students busily preparing for final exams, asking anyone the question: "What are Penn State students reading?" would generally draw the response, "Textbooks, of course."

But a survey of local bookstores suggests this is not necessarily the case. Reading material in demand varies from the newest hardback Tolkien to Cosmopolitan magazine.

Jan Bixby of the Student Bookstore says that the biggest seller right now, despite the fact it is available only in a hardcover edition, is "The Silmarillion" by Tolkien. Due to its popularity, other Tolkien books such as "The Hobbit" and "Fellowship of the Rings" have seen a sales boost, as have guides to Tolkien.

The Tolkien craze seems to have spawned a renewed interest in fantasy as the steady trade in books of this sort at the University Book Centre suggests.

Science fiction, too, is big in this community.

"Science fiction is huge in State College," says John Osborn of the University Book Centre. "We are constantly buying and replacing titles in this area. It is one of the biggest, if not the biggest seller overall in this store." Books in this category do well at other stores downtown, with Kurt Vonnegut books doing exceptionally well.

Horner's Bookstore on College Avenue reports steady sales in Vonnegut books. In addition, Frank Horner mentions the recent interest in books written about life after death.

Osborn says there is a fad peculiar to State College — that of interest in books about the Hitler era. Osborn has new novels constantly arriving to fill the demand for this subject.

Bookstores all over the area see a steady audience for romance novels and sports books. The Rosemary Rogers books like "Sweet Savage Love" and



Jill Fonda (4th-biology) takes time out from studying to read Psychology Today.

other romantic novels draw the women, while personal sports experiences make book buyers out of the men, Osborn says.

Best sellers, whether hardbound or in paperback do very well in this area, although as Horner says, the sales drop off noticeably after the books appear. Among the best sellers doing well in

bookstores locally is the latest James Herriot book, "All Things Wise and Wonderful," the third in his series focusing on a veterinarian in England. "The Dragons of Eden" by Sagan and "Your Erroneous Zones" by Dyer both listed on the Time best seller list are in big demand, as are "Trinity" by Leon

Uris, author of "Exodus," and "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues" by Tom Robbins, about a model turned cowgirl and her adventures on an all-girl ranch.

The Bicentennial Series, runaway sellers last spring, are still doing consistently well. The series is likely to get yet another boost, when the seventh in the line comes out sometime in the near future.

Spare moments will often find students leafing through magazines. It will come as no surprise to anyone who has ever set foot within a dorm room, fraternity house, or apartment that the best selling magazines are Cosmopolitan, Playboy and Penthouse. Bixby says that the Student Bookstore used to receive 40 copies of Cosmopolitan per week. This figure has now been upped to 80. Each week, they are sold out.

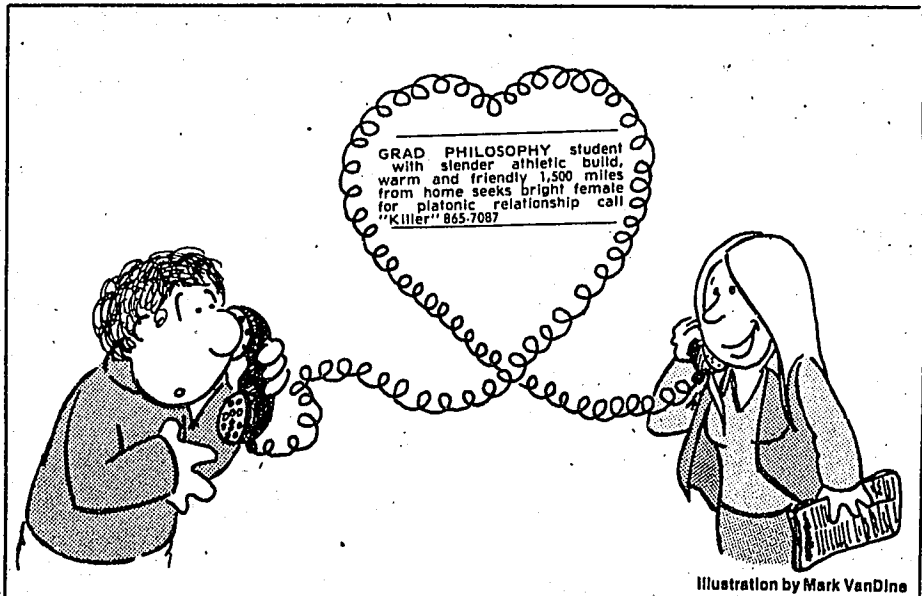
Time, Newsweek and Consumer Reports do not do as well on the newsstands as one might expect them to in a collegiate community. One possible reason for this could be the fact that students take advantage of the Campus Rates offer, and have them delivered at reduced prices. In conversations with students at their mailboxes, it was found that this was the case.

Women's magazines sell much better than their male counterparts, with Glamour, Mademoiselle and Cosmopolitan leading the way.

At this time of the year, craft books begin to show an increase in sales, as students begin to make gifts for the holidays for family and friends.

Students are showing their loyalty to their home away from home, as the Penn State book, "Road to No. 1," is being purchased in increasing numbers, chiefly as Christmas presents for family.

"The Nothing Book," a book of blank paper bound in an interesting cover is available for all budding authors.



Personal gets response

Kilian Kuntz (graduate-philosophy) recently had an experience most men only dream of — he received 25 phone calls from women requesting to meet him.

The source of this sudden popularity with the opposite sex was a personal ad in The Daily Collegian. The ad listed Kuntz' attributes, his request of "a bright female for platonic relationship," and his phone number.

Kuntz, identified as "Killer" in the ad, was not totally receptive to the attention he received. The ad had been placed by his roommate, Edward Daniels, (graduate-philosophy), and a friend, Warren Ziegler (graduate-meteorology).

"Curiosity got the better of me," Kuntz said in explanation of his eventual follow-up of several calls.

Although Kuntz said it was nice talking to some of the women who answered the ad, he wasn't interested

in any kind of a lasting relationship with the potential suitors.

The ad, though partially a practical joke, was also a sociological experiment. "We wanted to see what responses we would get," Daniels said, "and to make him feel uncomfortable."

Daniels and Ziegler said that they felt there is "no place to meet people in State College." Both attended undergraduate school in metropolitan areas and Daniels said that people in big cities are friendlier than in State College.

Kuntz said that the fact he received so many calls indicates "There are many people who would really like to meet people."

"It's not my style to meet people that way," Kuntz said, concerning his particular situation. "I would like to meet people, but I prefer to do it in more natural ways."

— by Sheila Glusko

Student invents air conditioner

Heat 'fans' the flame of invention

By SUSAN FITZGERALD
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Peter Schwarze always disliked hot weather. But when he came to Penn State Summer Term 1976 as a freshman, that dislike turned to hate.

"All I kept thinking was that it would be great to have an air conditioner in my dorm room," Schwarze recalls. "But it was forbidden since air conditioners put such a great drain on electricity."

"So I decided that I was going to come up with an air conditioner that didn't need the University's electricity."

To many people this may seem like an idle wish, but for Schwarze, a sixth-term biochemistry major, it was a dead-serious prediction. Today, less than a year and a half later, Schwarze's invention — a battery-run portable air conditioner — has been sold to the Hong Kong Plastic and Metal Products Co., and is being readied for production and worldwide distribution.

Schwarze calls his invention "Portac." Unlike standard air conditioners, the Portac does not rely on a condenser to work. Instead, a six-volt battery powers a fan that blows cold air

produced by a block of freezella (the substance used to keep coolers cold).

Schwarze admits that the Portac will not be as cold as a regular air conditioner, but he says it will be a lot colder than a fan. He predicts the Portac will have enough power to lower the temperature in a dorm room 20 degrees in a short period of time.

"The most important feature of the Portac is its versatility," Schwarze says. "It was initially designed for use in the dorm, but it can be used anywhere: in the house, on the patio, in cars or campers."

"What good is it to have a regular air conditioner in your house, if you only use it a few hours a day?"

Schwarze says he is not sure what the retail price of the Portac will be, but it will be less expensive than a low-priced electric fan.

While the Portac is Schwarze's pet project at the moment, he has over 70 other inventions to his credit. In fact, Schwarze likes to call himself an inventor.

"I come up with ideas everyday," he

says. "It's not that I'm bright or intelligent. I just have an imagination."

"I look at something that has faults. Then I see what's wrong with it and what causes the problems. I can come up with an invention upon being presented with a problem."

Schwarze's interest in the problems of energy has led him to develop some ideas for the use of solar energy. After refining these ideas, Schwarze says he hopes to get a federal grant to do work in the area of solar energy.

Many of Schwarze's inventions are protected by poor men's patents. With a poor man's patent, the inventor has a witness sign a sketch of his invention, and he then sends it to himself by way of registered mail. Schwarze explains that the postmarked letter, which must be kept sealed, becomes proof of the invention.

"The poor men's patent is just as legally binding as a regular U.S. patent," Schwarze says. "I could take someone to court with this type of patent, and since it is dated I could prove that I came up with an idea first."

"But then one year after my product

would go on the market, I would have to get a U.S. patent."

Schwarze explains that poor men's patents were originally for poor men.

"It can easily cost \$1,000 for a U.S. patent, plus it can take three to five years to get one," he says. "But a poor man's patent costs only \$2.50 — the price for the registered letter — and it takes only two days for mail service."

"Even if I were a millionaire, I'd still use poor men's patents."

Schwarze says he has no specific areas of interest when it comes to inventing, though he does like electrical appliances. "I just try to get ideas that are relevant to people, he says."

Looking towards the future, Schwarze hopes to make inventing his full-time job.

"There's a need for inventors," he says. "There's too much useless research going on, and not enough inspiration for invention."

"When I tell people I'm an inventor, they look at me like I'm crazy. But being a little crazy is all part of being an inventor."



For Peter Schwarze (6th-biochemistry), heat was the mother of invention for his portable, battery operated air conditioner designed specifically for use in the dorms.