

RAINBOW ROWELL

Toying in retail reaps rewards

This summer, like the Generation X-er I am, I slacked off. I did absolutely nothing that will ever help me find a job within my majors. For four months I left the career track and just kind of hung out. I slept nine or 10 hours every night, watched TV and ate a lot of French fries. I didn't even think about journalism. Or my future. Or whether or not I actually believe I'll graduate in four years.

I didn't dress like a slacker, though, so maybe I didn't earn the title. I don't own any flannel shirts, and we weren't allowed to wear holey jeans at Toys "R" Us.

Uh-oh, maybe you can't call me a slacker; I had a job.

For the second summer in a row, I worked at Toys "R" Us—the world's biggest toy store, proud home of Geoffrey the giraffe.

Contrary to popular belief, working at a toy store isn't always fun and games—I think I've always wanted to say that. For example, I give you the June sidewalk sale, which takes place every year in the hallway that stretches from the store's entrance to the building's entrance. The managers line up tables in the long hallway by the entrance and lay out all the clearance toys.

During the sidewalk sale, an employee—quite often me—stands in the hallway to make sure no one steals anything.

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There I stood, all alone in the hot hallway, cut off from the air conditioning, the Muzak and humanity itself, with no one to talk to but the motley crew of toys: broken Skip-Its, discontinued Teddy Ruxpin tapes and an occasional New Kids, heart-shaped puzzle.

During those four-hour shifts in the hallway, I sometimes regretted coming back to Toys "R" Us. I'd make mental lists of all the other places that might hire me. I even considered telemarketing. But I



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couldn't quit.

Oh, technically, I could. I never signed a contract. But I couldn't stand the thought of leaving the toys. For a year, I had been responsible for those toys, making sure they were out, they looked nice, they wore the correct prices. They needed me.

Especially Aisle 7C, boys' action figures and accessories. Most of my fellow toy-pushers hated 7C. It constantly needed filling, was always a mess and usually clogged with 40 or 50 grabby, desperate 8-year-old boys looking for one Ninja Turtle that Playmate stopped making three years ago.

All the action figures were pegged, and the kids were always convinced that the last Bruce Wayne figure or the new Data was cleverly hidden on the top-most peg at the very back. If you've never seen a 6 year old with a yen for the second-edition Macho Man Randy Savage standing on his brother's shoulders to knock down 30 World Wrestling Federation figures, let me tell you, you're missing out.

When I had nothing better to do, I'd lurk around 7C trading info with pre-teens and sharing my wealth of knowledge with confused grandparents.

One such day, some moron had filled the X-Men pegs with X-Force figures and I was about to set matters straight when I noticed a very sad-looking woman.

I asked her if I could help her find a specific figure, and she told me—no, thank you, you'd never find him.

There's nothing like a challenge to improve my customer service so I begged her to give me a chance. She told me how her son wanted a Gambit action figure more than anything in

the world. Every night before he went to bed he'd ask her, "Mom, will we EVER find Gambit?"

But, she said, she'd looked everywhere, even at Walgreen's, and she'd never found him.

Well, Gambit, a cajun charmer, was at the top of everyone's list this summer, so of course he was never in the aisle for long, but I knew for a fact we had Gambit-laden boxes in the storeroom. I told her to take five and returned to 7C in a flash with three Gambits.

And ... she hugged me. Twice. Usually, I don't like to hug strangers. Usually, I don't hug anyone but my mom, and she makes me.

But this woman, also a mother, was so thrilled she had tears in her eyes. Two weeks later, she brought her son in to thank me personally. He treated me like visiting royalty or Michael Jordan. Thank you so much, he said. I thought he might hug me, too, but he didn't.

This may sound silly, maybe even a little dumb, but finding Gambit that day was the highlight of my summer. That day I made Andrew, age 7, very happy.

And making someone happy is pretty neat.

I'm not sure I'll ever make someone that happy as a journalist, and unless I write Nike ads, it probably won't happen in advertising. So I'm glad I skipped the internship scene this summer. I had important things to do.

I found Gambit.

Rowell is a junior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

DEB McADAMS

Life frustrated by fruit, finances

I've just gone without an income for seven weeks. It's been an exercise in creative living.

Except for a few months during my housewife phase, I've had regular paychecks since I was 10 years old. I haven't always liked what I've done for paychecks. My dad used to tell me that I would have to do things I didn't like. I don't like Pap smears, but they don't make me hate my life. When I hate my job, I start to hate my life.

This absence of paychecks is mostly self-induced. While a majority of students go to college to get a real job, a growing number of us are leaving real jobs to go to college. A college degree is supposed to give us more real jobs to choose from, including those we may actually enjoy.

In the meantime, my college career is giving me exciting new experiences in poverty. I really can't remember another time when I had to purchase feminine hygiene products with a major credit card.

I've never been independently wealthy, but I've learned to expect a few luxuries, such as food. I haven't been starving, but it's a good thing I like peanut butter and jelly. There have been a few 14-hour days on campus when my body has started to digest itself.

During the last few weeks, I've coveted fruit. Anything has an entirely new appeal when you can't have it. Things like beer and cigarettes are easy to mooch. People give away all kinds of things when they're drinking, but try to bum a piece of fruit. I live on fruit. It's probably a semi-conscious effort to counteract the years I lived on beer and cigarettes.

I finally managed to buy some fruit last weekend when a friend gave me \$20. Taking a handout should probably be humiliating, but my parents used to humiliate me regularly. They were obviously preparing me for the



I asked for \$300 to buy books. He wanted to know how books could cost as much as my adoption. I told him I didn't know, but I thought they taught us that when we were seniors.

time in my life when I would be begging for fruit while my peers were taking out second mortgages.

My parents had a chance to reinforce their lessons when I called home to borrow part of my inheritance. I try to avoid borrowing from my family. It puts me into therapy. My dad asked me how much I needed. I asked for \$300 to buy books. He wanted to know how books could cost as much as my adoption. I told him I didn't know, but I thought they taught us that when we were seniors. Well, he supposed that I just had to quit my job to go to school. He said he wouldn't let me starve.

The \$300 just about paid for my books, which turned out to be of little nutritional value. A month after my dad told me that he wouldn't let me starve, I was ready to cruise the city parks for fruit trees. When my girlfriend came through with the \$20, I headed straight for a produce section. I bought bananas, apples, pears, grapes and assorted veggies. I went home and feasted like a drunken Viking.

Evidently all of the fruit enzymes in my stomach had gone into dormancy. One wreckless episode with produce, and I was going to die of spontaneous combustion. The dog wouldn't even come downstairs.

I saved my family the embarrassment of my death—alone and penniless in a basement, a victim of spontaneous combustion. I survived by fantasizing that my financial aid check

would actually arrive. I went to student accounts to beg for mercy because I couldn't pay for tuition until my financial aid came through. That would be fine, they said. I would just have to pay a \$25 late fee. Add that to the \$10 that the bank charged me for overdrawing my checking account by 66 cents, and poverty has cost me \$35 in fees. Maybe when I learn why books are priced like major appliances I will also learn why people are charged fees for being poor.

I also expected a final paycheck from my summer job in St. Louis. Five weeks ago, I was told that the check had been mailed. To where, I have no clue. I did something the post office calls "moving within a forwarding period." This is your postal service's way of saying, "If you can't stay put, don't whine to us if we can't find you." I've had four addresses in as many months. My junk mail can't even find me.

Creditors, on the other hand are telepathic. I think credit cards contain hidden tracking devices.

I should have a paycheck by the end of the week. It will go straight into the hands of my landlord. One thing that I've learned in college is that it's going to take years for me to recover financially. I hope I don't end up wishing that I would have spent the money on fruit.

McAdams is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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