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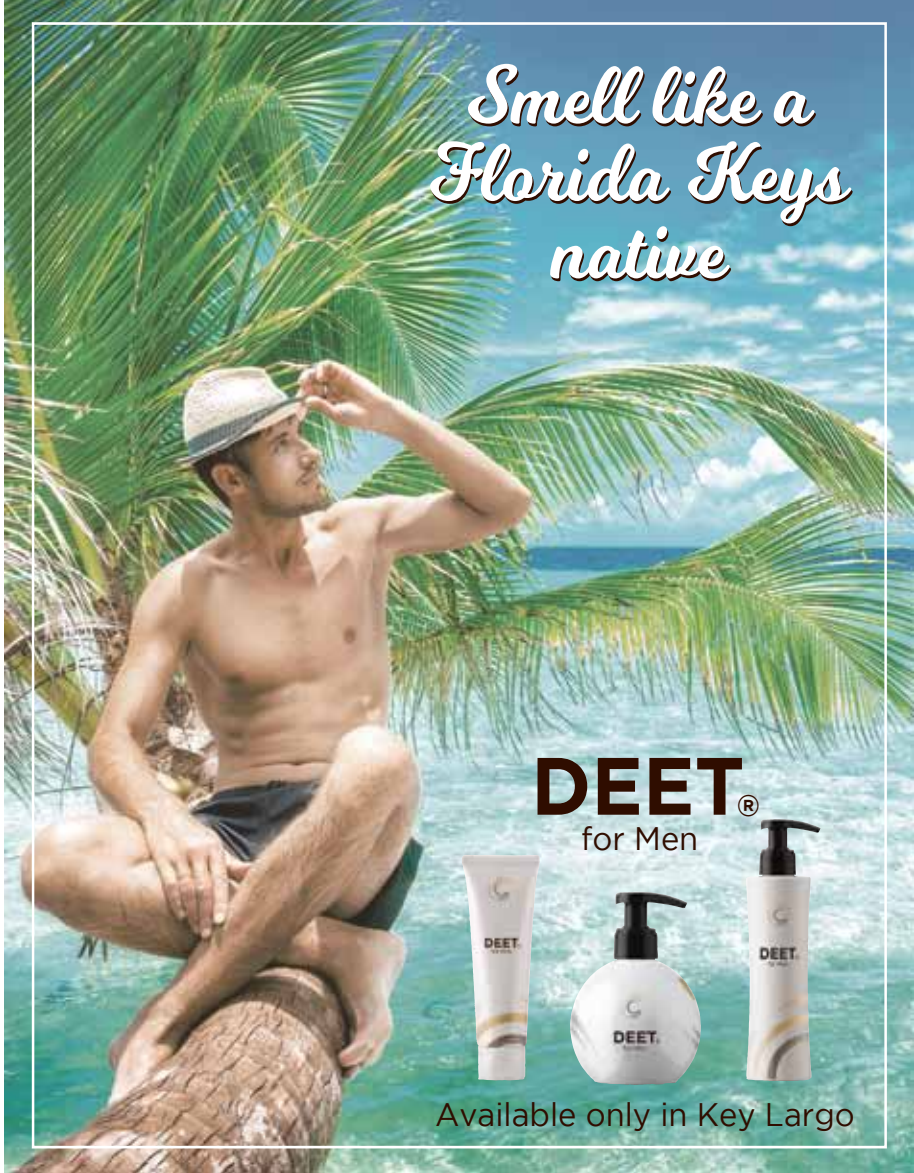
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Checking Myself Out — A blog by Luke Sommer Glenn

It had been quite a while since I had the displeasure of going inside a crowded convenience store. I'm not talking about crowded with people, I'm talking about crammed with shit that no one should put in or on their bodies. There is no way they could fit one more item anywhere without completely blocking the aisles, which two adults cannot pass by each other without intimate contact as it is.

Now that I don't buy beer and tobacco every day, I rarely have an occasion to go inside a convenience store. I usually just pull up to the pump, check the tamper tags, stick in my card, fill up and go. No fuss, no muss, as it is said.

When we were on the road going cross country, a conveniently located convenience store could be your best friend at 3 AM, espe-

cially when the sausage dog consumed eight hours earlier from the previous store is getting more demanding about an exit by the second, if you know what I mean.

Convenience stores had more personality back then, each a reflection of the area in which they were located. All the trinkets and crap gave us something to look at while we waited our turns for the, as usual, one-seat shitter. Some were even loose with their placement of the adult magazines so we could glance through the articles while we waited...

It was always a mad scramble to get out of the band van first. We startled quite a few night clerks as we busted through the door in a mad dash to locate the bathroom... "Where's the can, man?" I would usually ask. We only stopped when the van needed to stop, as in

needing gas, the van had a 35-gallon tank and would usually run for eight hours between fill ups.

The guys would grab snacks for the road and pay for the gas at the counter with a human being in charge of the interaction between consumer and cash register. In other words, they rung up our shit and gave us back our change.

Skip back ahead to the other day when I had an occasion to go into the Circle K at mile marker 102 in beautiful Key Largo. The smell of junk food preservatives was overwhelming. I squoze my way around in search of what I was sent to get. I approached the checkout counter and couldn't figure out wtf was going on. Did 10 years magically pass while I was in there?

Then it happened. I was reminded of a time when my dad could not figure out how to use the newfangled, electronic gas pumps. He was used to flipping the switch to turn the pump on, maybe twist a knob on the side that cleared the previous purchase and fill the car up with high test or ethyl, as it was sometimes called. The new style pump had 3 different grades of gas and an electronic key pad... dad, born in 1922, struggled with a basic TV remote when he finally broke down and bought a solid state model. The main reason he gave in

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was because the Eckerd Drug Store got rid of their tube tester machine... you have to be old to understand... it's a thing from last century.

Meanwhile, this century, the checkout counter is gone, in its place is a robotic looking bin. An impatient employee points and spouts directions in Spanish at me. I can work the self check outs at Winn-Dixie and our new Publix but the one at the Circle K is not very user-friendly. And the ones at Publix don't take cash which is an inconvenience, guess they don't want to mess around with change dispensers and the like.

The Winn-Dixie at 106 takes bills one at a time. It's fun to stick all of the dollar bills from the tip bucket in, one at a time, \$36 for kitty and dog treats. It's super fun for everyone waiting in line behind me as the machine spits back a bill which I fumble finger to turn the other direction and it sucks it right in... most of the time, anyway. Sometimes I have to stretch out the wrinkles a few times... I've always been good at stretching out the wrinkles.

Funny how there's always an employee to make sure I didn't forget to scan anything but never one around to approve age restricted items... cameras everywhere with facial recognition but... I remind myself that I'll be dead soon enough, it's just a thing...