

Petro-Canada did not deviate from the Gasoline Handling Act and would easily terminate you if you did. However much I didn't like the abuse and the low status and the brown acrylic sweater, I didn't want to get fired. I appreciated a job that let me spend a lot of time writing for my radio show. Also, I was getting, like, \$1.25 above minimum wage so for all the lack of perceived status I was actually livin' large.

Anyway, I wouldn't turn on this guy's pump until he put his cigar back in his truck or something. He walked halfway up to the booth and started yelling at me, something about ripping my lungs out through my nose. I was familiar with removing lungs via the nasal passage as a step in the ancient Egyptian art of mummification but this guy was no Egyptian. He was a 6'3" monster. My boss also realized the man was not shouting mummification instructions, but threats, and went out onto the lot to talk to the guy. The guy started yelling at my boss, offering a speedy passage into the afterlife. I have to commend my boss, all 5'8" of him, for standing up to a man half a foot taller and 100 pounds heavier. For a few moments during their verbal altercation, I thought the 6'3" monster might actually pound/kick/stomp my boss. I realized then that I'd have to spring into action with the axe handle. Would I have time to put on a cape?

Luckily, the monster's rage subsided before it came to blows. He got back in his truck and drove off. Whew.

Later that night at work, I began to replay the altercation in my mind. If the monster did start pounding on my boss I'd have had to grab the axe handle and use it. Finally, eh? But I realized as well that, at an even less impressive height of 5'7", I'd not have been much of a threat to a 6'3" monster made muscular by a job that required him to move Chubb floor safes around by hand.

Assuming I could have gotten under his reach, I would only get in one blow before he snatched the axe handle away with one hand and wrapped his other hand around my neck.

The net effect of my single blow would be to deepen his rage and provide him a complimentary weapon.

The axe handle, I concluded, was only useful for defense in the event an enraged Girl Scout showed up on our lot and tried to menace someone with the jagged edges of a broken whiskey bottle -- an unlikely scenario given my gas station was not located in Tacoma. More conclusions began to fall into place like tumbling dominoes:

1. This axe handle, such as it is, is not effective against those most likely to erupt in violence.
2. The axe handle is needed to defend life.
3. I'd only be able to get in get one good whack with the axe handle.
4. That one good whack then has to have stopping power in the form of driving broken skull fragments into an assailant's brain.
5. I don't have the strength to do this with the axe handle, such as it is.
6. The axe handle, therefore, needs certain modifications.

I went to the repair bays and got several lead tire weights and some radiator hose clamps. I clamped on several pounds of lead to the business end of the axe handle.

After I was done I proudly held my creation before me. I tested its balance. I imagined bashing in the head of some guy wearing a baseball cap that said "Wine 'em Dine 'em 69 'em" and an anti-Free Trade t-shirt featuring an American eagle rogering a Canadian beaver from behind. My axe handle needed a name. I called it "Sting".

At some point while I was studiously tightening those radiator hose clamps, I did ask myself what in the world of gasoline retailing had brought me to this, brought me to a point where I was using my intelligence and creativity to determine how lead tire weights could be added to the end of an axe handle in sufficient quantity to kill a man?

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## Life without Senza Titlo



By Karl Mamer

Back in the '80s my friend Terry did the post-high school romp across Europe. He liked the warmth of the inexpensive Italian *pensiones* and met a lot of interesting people there.

One day he and a couple people went to an art gallery in Venice. There was some sort of modern art exhibition going on. Since everything was in Italian, they didn't have a good idea what the exhibition was about. The works were by different artists. As they looked at paintings, they noticed many were called "Senza Titolo".

This was a clue.

All the abstract paintings must be something about the life of someone named Senza Titolo. They reasoned Senza Titolo was a person of great influence to all these other artists on display. Since no painting was signed by Titolo himself, Titolo must have died. They further reasoned that Titolo had probably never been a recognized artist in his time, but since so many people were honoring him, he was possibly a great teacher. Clearly, then, this exhibition was in honor of the great and influential teacher and probable humanitarian Senza Titolo.

Proud they had unlocked the secret of this display, they began to examine each abstract painting to determine if it was capturing the loves, the triumphs, the suffering, or the ultimately painful, dramatic death of the great Titolo.

After this went on for a bit, they struck up a conversation with a gallery attendant fluent in Italian and English.

They asked him "Who was this artist?"

"Which one?"

"The one the exhibition is in honor of."

"I do not understand what you mean."

"Most of these paintings are dedicated to Senza Titolo. Who was he?"

The attendant smiled. "Senza Titolo is Italian for 'untitled'."



## The Use of Deadly Force in the World of Gasoline Retailing: Is an Axe Handle a Customer Service Person's Best Friend?

A long time ago I used to work at a gas station. For security purposes, we kept an axe handle under the counter. This is Canada so keeping a .44 would be frowned upon. This is Canada again so keeping a .44 might be considered overkill. Or would it be? Lemme explain.

Gas retailing changed rapidly in the mid'80s. The price of gas in Canada was going up and up and the price of gas in the USA was going down and down. My gas station was right next to the tunnel to the USA and people could easily nip across the border to fill up for about a third less. Like I say, the face of gas retailing on the Canadian side had changed. Customers were less friendly.

From the get go, gas retailing is what marketers call a "negative purchase". When you buy a coffee and a muffin at Starbucks, you're fulfilling a basic need. Evolution has wired you to react with joy and pleasure to all things leading up to need fulfillment, not to mention the actual act of satiation. It's a positive purchase. However, no one enjoys buying gas, especially at self-serve gas stations. Gas is expensive and it gets your hands stinky. If it's winter or there is a hard-driving rain, you get cold and moist. So by the time a customer gets up to pay, he's not in the best of moods. You know?

Now work into the equation that your customers perceive your gas is needlessly expensive and the gas station you work at is a Petro-Canada, the government-owned gas chain. Also work into the equation you're a person in a booth and you wear a brown acrylic sweater. You are not an authority figure in any sense. You're dirt. In many people's minds, as a Petro-Canada employee, you're practically a contemptible public servant on par with a tax collector.

Day-in-day out I took random abuse and heard the same joke about Petro-Canada again and again.

**Dirt Bag Customer:** Hey, do you know what PETRO-Canada stands for?

**Me:** Gosh, no.

**Dirt Bag Customer:** Pierre Elliot Trudeau Rips Off Canada. Hehehehe. Why aren't you laffin', fag?

It was a good joke the first time I heard it in 1979.

People would get pissy too when their car would break down and wonder why you, a 19-year-old schlep trying to earn a BA in Psychology, couldn't fix a car Sunday night at 8 pm and why no garage was open at that time of night... on a Sunday... during Superbowl.

Day-in-day-out I looked at that axe handle but never had to use it. Sure, I wanted to use it. But I was, after all, locked in a booth and well-protected by 4 millimeters of standard single pane window glass. However much I wanted to strike out at someone who assumed incorrectly I had a say in Federal energy policy and verbally savaged me for it, it was not an appropriate legal response.

*Head down, Karl, worry about tomorrow's multiple choice Psych test. One day you'll earn your BA, get out of this podunk town and move to Toronto and work in insurance.*

There was one incident, after a couple years of working, that got me thinking hard about that axe handle. Some guy pulled into the gas station and was trying to do some bizarre, dangerous thing, like smoke while pumping gas. Petro-Canada, a few years previous, had been sued successfully for millions of dollars by the family of a boy burned to a cinder. A Petro-Canada employee helped the 10-year-old kid pump 25 cents worth of gas into a mason jar which blew up in the kid's garage. After losing the suit,