

Ah!thenticity

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On September 19th, 2007, GlobeNewsWire reported that Gary Black and Sam Hanna had signed a franchise agreement to open up to 24 Marco's Pizza locations in Iowa¹. That December, I was on winter break from my senior year in high school. Gary and Sam began work on their first Marco's in Cedar Rapids, renting the end space in the Town & Country Shopping Center, just across 1st Avenue from my parents' house. I'd never had a real job before (just mowing lawns and other odd jobs), and wanted to make some money before graduating. I was also lazy and didn't have a car, so the short walk from home was perfect. I stopped by the not-yet-open store and met Gary and the store's manager, Terry². I asked if they were looking for help and they hired me — a 17-year-old with absolutely zero work experience — on the spot.

A couple days later, I arrived for my first day of work. Terry taught me to make dough, properly chop peppers and onions, organize ingredients in the walk-in freezer, and operate the big-ass industrial oven with the conveyor belt. This was the first eight-hour shift of my life, so it sucked, but there weren't any customers. I went home tired but happy with my new job.

My second or third shift was on Christmas Eve. The store had officially opened. Eight people were working that night because Gary, Sam, and Terry expected high volume. Their expectations were exceeded. I started out throwing meats on the pizzas and passing them to the vegetable zone. Under higher pressure, we soon discovered that I was slow and bad at this job. Terry moved me to a register to take phone orders. Our three phone lines were ringing non-stop. Cedar Rapadians were excited as hell to try the town's newest pizza chain. These calls stressed me out even more than being the bottleneck on the assembly line. I could barely hear the customers, I didn't know the

1 <https://web.archive.org/web/20200514155447/https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2007/09/19/1133190/0/en/Former-Restaurant-Owner-Real-Estate-Developer-to-Open-Up-to-24-Marco-s-Pizzas-in-Iowa-Another-13-in-Illinois.html>

2 I'm using a fake name here because I actually liked this guy.

menu yet, and I struggled with the janky touchscreen system and slow computer (I assumed the “POS” label on the monitor stood for “piece of shit” because I was not yet aware of the term “point of sale”). Marco’s mailed millions of coupons for opening week, and trying to find the right discount in the menu was like clicking around at random in *Myst*. The dipshits who ran the place hadn’t even put all the coupons in the system yet. This was my first hint at leadership’s incompetence. I survived the dinner rush but I was exhausted. I walked home deeply questioning my decision to join the workforce.

School started back up and it became apparent that I didn’t have time for a job. I was involved in too many after-school extracurricular activities, and had weekend trips, and I’d be gone all spring break, and and and... More importantly, I no longer wanted to work after experiencing my first busy shift. I’d already made enough money to buy a couple Adult Swim DVDs, so I’d be okay until summer. I told Terry I wasn’t coming back. I gave no notice; not because I was a badass, just because I didn’t know that was an expectation. I spent my last few months of high school blissfully unemployed, playing music and trying and failing to have sex.

After graduation, I had a ton of free time. My parents were paying for a red stick shift 2000 Hyundai Accent for me (bless them for this) and I needed to start earning gas money if I was to continue driving around town all night with my friends setting off fireworks, stealing golf balls, and peeing on landmarks. I sheepishly returned to Marco’s Pizza and asked Terry if they were hiring. They gave me my job back instantly, and now I could pick up delivery shifts too. I even got my best friend Jack³ a job before he left for college.

I know Gary was around a lot for my first brief stint as a pizzaman, but I don’t remember him well. I’m sure he was a dick, but my story focuses on Sam. During my hiatus, Gary and Sam switched roles. Sam was now more present in Marco’s day-to-day operations. All the employees seemed to hate and fear him a lot more than Gary.

That summer was okay. I was working with my best friend, Terry was cool, and I was better equipped to handle the stress of a busy shift. I continued living with my parents through college, so I kept my job at Marco’s too. Once classes began in the fall, work started getting worse. Terry was fired and replaced with Terry Jr.⁴ The rumor was that Sam accused Terry of steal-

³ I’m using a fake name here too, just in case. It’s pretty close to his real name though.

⁴ This is also a fake name because this guy was alright. He’s not actually the first Terry’s son, it’s just a joke.

ing cash. I never found out if this was true, but I hope it was. He deserved a lot more than they were paying. Gary left the business too and was replaced by a conservative Christian couple who never remembered my name. Their kids were awful, whiny coworkers. I'm not sure if Gary's departure involved similar criminal accusations, but I suspect so. Whenever Sam was in the store, he yelled at people to work faster and clean more and exhibited all the standard tyrannical behavior. I continued working through the school year and kept my head down, taking as many deliveries as I could so I could drive around, listen to music, and be alone.

Things started heating up again in summer 2009 (sorry, I know that's corny). Terry Jr. offered me a closing manager position. I'd have additional responsibilities, but they'd bump my hourly wage from \$7.25 to \$8.00. I took the promotion. **Big mistake.** I worked until at least 1AM every night I closed because I was expected to send everyone home and clean the store alone. No matter how late I stayed, I could never clean enough to not get yelled at for the store's condition the next morning. If Sam didn't stop in personally, he'd call multiple times per night to check sales numbers and labor expenses. This was a major annoyance due to the terrible touchscreen computers. If Sam demanded this information during busy hours, everything would grind to a halt as I entered a manager's password and hunted through the byzantine menu system to unearth his precious data. If the numbers weren't to his liking, he'd force me to send employees home, making more work for me. It took a few paychecks before I got my promised 75-cent raise; I had to remind management every time I saw them. An 18-year-old making minimum wage was in charge of the store several nights a week, held responsible for low sales numbers, and sweeping up every individual grain of cornmeal.

Speaking of sweeping, the store had only one (1) dustpan. After collecting 30 trillion grains of cornmeal, the dustpan broke. There was a big crack down the middle. Over the course of a month, I requested a new dustpan from Sam every shift. My requests were ignored. One day I came to work and Sam had installed a television in the dining area. I wrote Terry Jr. a note threatening to quit over the dustpan. We had a new dustpan next time I worked, but I found out another employee brought it in.

I compensated for my frustrations by stealing as much food and as many 20-ounce bottles of Cherry Coke as possible. On my manager shifts, I encouraged employees to take whatever they wanted, and would sometimes keep my friends on the clock all night. I was never punished for this.

Fall 2009 began, and the combination of closing shifts and 8AM music theory classes were taking a physical toll on me. I was desperate to get out of the store as soon as possible, so I slacked on the cleaning even more, knowing I'd get yelled at regardless of my efforts. One night, Sam stopped by while I was closing. I was nervous, but I'd done a decent job since we weren't busy. He reviewed the night's numbers and visited the restroom. He was surprisingly pleasant. We locked the front door and left together.

I had an afternoon shift later that week and Terry Jr. told me he had to write me up. Apparently, I had left the restroom a total disaster last time I closed the store! I immediately put the pieces together and understood that Sam had wrecked the bathroom after I cleaned it, but I was too shocked to formulate my thoughts and explain the sabotage to Terry Jr. I stared at him for a few seconds, deciding whether to quit, before signing the meaningless write-up form. I spent the next couple weeks going full throttle on my food/drink/time theft. When the next schedule was posted, I'd been booked to work during band rehearsal. This was another source of frustration; management asked for my class schedule but completely ignored it. I came in an hour early, handed Terry Jr. my Marco's hat and shirt, and quit without notice. This time it **was** badass. I spent the rest of my sophomore year blissfully unemployed, playing music and trying and **succeeding** at having sex.


On November 18th, 2009, KWWL reported that Sammy Scott Hanna was arrested and charged with assault with intent to commit sexual abuse and 1st degree harassment.⁵ The cops sent a woman — who'd been having an affair with Sam — into his apartment wearing a wire, and stopped him in the act of committing sexual assault. I'd like to say Sam got what he deserved, but his two (?) LinkedIn profiles indicate that he is now the president/CEO of a nutraceutical company, energy consulting company, mass marketing email/text service, and something called "Local Customer Club." I also found many photos of his water ski vacations with rich friends. Then again, his LinkedIn also says he worked for Marco's until January 2011, which I know is a lie, so this could all be a front.

Due to my laziness and hatred of job searching, I went back to Marco's a third time in summer 2010. Marco's corporate had taken over our location after Sam's arrest. I was mostly driving, and I'd take my girlfriend with

⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20160517084955/https://kwwl.com/story/11527535/police-bust-assault-victim-was-wearing-microphone>

me on some deliveries. I still stole a lot of food, but this time out of joy rather than spite. Corporate decided not to renew their lease with Town & Country. I showed up for work one July morning and a moving truck was parked by the entrance. They didn't give Terry Jr. any advance notice. **Not** badass. His wife had just given birth to Terry III⁶ and Marco's just hung him out to dry. I guess this story is about both the downfall of a small business tyrant and the cold, soulless evil of a national corporation.

I learned two important lessons from my first job. First, it's easy and feels good to steal from work. Second, business owners are not better or smarter people than their minimum wage employees. They're just lucky assholes.

To conclude, let's check in on our old friend Gary Black. On January 25th, 2019, KCRG reported that he had been accused of stealing around \$150,000 of merchandise from his employer, Nordstrom, and selling it on eBay.⁷ Maybe he wasn't so bad after all. 

⁶ I don't remember this kid's real name.

⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190126214301/https://www.kcrg.com/content/news/Plea-hearing-set-for-Cedar-Rapids-man-accused-of-stealing-from-employer-504883261.html>