

Gurgle goes the Fuel-tank

by John A. Hosh

My father's farm had a variety of fuel-tanks. Each tank held a different type of fuel. One tank held diesel fuel for a tractor. One tank had gasoline for another tractor. One held gasoline for a car; and so on.



When I was 20 or so, my father said he wanted to show me something. I went with him toward the farm's fuel-tanks. When my father and I were near the tanks, my father asked if I noticed anything new about the tank that held diesel fuel. I said I noticed he had painted the word *diesel* on the tank. My father said he

had painted each of his tanks with a word or a symbol to indicate what was inside the tank. He said he had marked each tank so the fuel-delivery-guy and everybody else would know which tank held which fuel. I suspect the fuel-delivery-guy told my father to mark the tanks.

One day my father told me to fill the tractor that used gasoline. After I had filled the tractor with gasoline, my father hurried toward me. He asked which tank I had used. I told him I used the tank that had the drawing of a tractor on its side. My father told me he had decided to put the gasoline for the car in the tank that had the drawing of a tractor on its side. He said he had put the gasoline for the tractor in the tank that had the word *car* on it. I asked my father why he did not tell me he had put the tractor's fuel in the tank marked with the word *car*.

My father told me he did not tell me he had fuel for the car where the tractor's fuel should be

because he wanted to teach me a lesson. I asked what the lesson might be. He said the lesson was that I should ask him if he had made any changes since I had last done something for him.

My father said I was on his farm. The tanks were his, he said. He could put the fuel in whatever tank he pleased, he said. It was not for me, he said, to assume that, just because he had something arranged one way on one day that he could not have it another way on the next day. It was not for me, he said, to jump to a conclusion about what he had done or what he might do. It was his farm, and so he could do what he pleased. He said, if I had any good sense, I would always ask him how I should do what he wanted. My father said it was crucial that I always — ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS — ask if he had changed his way of doing things. He said there was no reason not to take a few seconds and to check with him before I did something foolish.

Some days later my father asked me to put fuel into the car. I asked him what tank he wanted me to use. He asked me what tank I thought I should use. I said I thought it would be good to use the tank that held gasoline for the car. He asked me what tank I thought had the car's gasoline. I said it was his farm with his tanks. I said it was not my place to jump to a conclusion about where he had put the gasoline.

My father told me that, if I were not so stubborn and dumb, I would be able to work out that he had gone back to his original system so that the fuel for the car was again in the tank that was marked as having fuel for the car. My father said it was downright stupid to ask him about gasoline after he had gone to all the trouble of painting the tanks to make it easy for everyone to know what fuel was where.

I reminded my father that he told me to ask — ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS — if things were now as they had been up to now. My father said that *always* did not mean *all the time* or *every time*. My father said there was no point in asking questions to which any fool would

already know the answer. He said, if I used my head the way he used his, then I would not need to know things all the time and I would not need to pester him with questions.

I asked my father if I could assume, given what he had just said, that he would trouble himself to let me know if a tank held a fuel that did not match what was indicated on a tank. My father said it was not my place to assume things on his farm. He said he could see I was just like his brothers and sisters. He said he was the only one who was not stubborn and dumb.



I suspect my father devised bizarre lessons for me because he was afraid that, if he ever behaved with any good sense, the gods and goddesses would not welcome him to Mount Olympus. Because so many people behave as my father did, I surmise many people fear that the gods will not lift them into the clouds. It is a shame more people do not go for airplane rides to see what the clouds are hiding.