

My Life in a Nut Shell



Peanut production told by a nut.

A bunch of us were ripped from our homes two days ago. We lay here, motionless, all piled up among dirt and debris. Without water or shelter, we are at the mercy of direct sunlight. I can literally feel my skin drying out as we wait for our next traumatic moment.

I suddenly feel the earth beneath and around me jolt. The air is filled with dust and a deafening hum. The culprit is a monstrous vehicle. Its shadow blankets the entire area. Whispers inform me this is the big move we have been waiting on. The combine.

Before I have the chance to respond to the sight of it, all of us are swept up like we are nothing by a large rolling mechanism. We involuntarily do somersaults in simultaneous chaos, going over each other, under each other, through metal gate-like spaces and are separated from the rubble we laid upon. I have only a dark narrow view as I tumble my way to the top where I can see the dirt, roots, and plant material spat back out to the earth.

I am known as a runner. This does not mean I am your local track and field or cross-country star. I am your average peanut. So average that out of

the four types of peanuts, runner peanuts account for 80 percent of peanuts produced in the United States. The four types of peanuts are: Runner, Valencia, Spanish, and Virginia.

Runner peanuts, like myself, are commonly found in peanut butter. All-natural peanut butter is made with Valencia peanuts that have a sweeter flavor. Spanish peanuts are known for the red skins and can be found by the can at grocery stores. Finally, Virginia peanuts are the ones purchased at sporting events or thrown on the floors of some restaurants. Runner variety or not, we all have a long road ahead.

This is the only thought I can process before there is a downpour of my family, peers, and even strangers. We all form a mosh-pit. We are shimmying, colliding, jumping and squirming. When the noises from the combine stop, so do we. The entire crate that we have been dancing in lifts and we are spit into an unexpected sky dive. I do not even own a parachute. The landing is not as rough as I anticipate. Instead of hitting the metal walls of the truck, I land on my kid sister who cushioned my fall.

We are leaving the land we have called home for the past four months. The farmer that has watched over us during our growth completely



Photo courtesy of Texas Peanut Producers Board

Drying out and waiting for the combine.

loses control of us as he sends us off to the shelling facility. We pass the Gaines County sign and head to Pleasanton, Texas, home to one of four shelling facilities in the state. This is where my fate will be determined.

We have six hours in the truck together. Even though we have all had a long day, we stay up talking about what will happen next. What we are to become in a short amount of time. Some talk of fame and fortune like being made into a peanut M&M and starring in a commercial. Others just want to catch a good baseball game or circus performance. Not me, I'm scared of bleachers and elephants.

I come from a family of highly influential peanuts. My great great grandfather is Mr. Peanut. You know, the nut with probably the longest shelf life of any peanut I know, commonly identified by his monocle, top hat, and cane. He has great fashion sense.

My father is known in the airline industry. He flew with Southwest Airlines so much; he has enough reward miles to fly absolutely anywhere for free. So he flies daily and is everyone's favorite passenger.

As for me, I'm crossing my fingers and hoping I become peanut butter. I have a good chance but somebody will have to see past my shell and red skin before I can get there. Who doesn't want to be popular, tan, and smooth?

After hours of daydreaming and visiting, we arrive at the facility. We are unloaded and we begin our extreme makeover process. All of us are dirty from the day in the field, combine, and truck. We tracked in dirt, rocks, and maybe an insect or two. All of us are immediately bathed and we get rid of the extra stuff we tracked in by mistake.

My shell is removed. It is quick, painless, and refreshing. Underneath that hard and dimpled textured shell is a layer of handsome red skin. I say my goodbyes to the peanuts going into oil and the rest of us head to the next thing.

This runner isn't done. My next stop is to get roasted. It is almost like getting vaccinated but way hotter. Roasting is the process used to get rid of any salmonella or e. coli that may have found its way to me during my long journey. Once I am cleared, and get that extra bit of flavor from roasting, I bid farewell to friends and family. Those that are admired for their red skins go on to their destination separate from mine.

The rest of us are carefully inspected. I get excited. I may actually become peanut butter. My comrades and I head to the blanching facility for



Photo courtesy of Texas Peanut Producers Board

In the combine doing somersaults.



“It just amazes me to watch how far that peanut has to go and how long it takes it before it gets back to the food chain.”



Photo courtesy of Texas Peanut Producers Board

Involuntary sky dive onto my kid sister.



our exfoliating facial. To my surprise, my newfound red skin is completely removed. Underneath, I am smooth and you can see my figure. We are sorted, yet again. The peanuts I know going into candy and snacks go one way and I go another.

There are still quite a few of us left. I get excited as I see the grinder

up ahead. I have not given any thought to what being ground up is like. I immediately start to panic. What if it's painful? I wince. I am ground into tiny pieces. Not once but twice. I won't lie; I am in a little bit of pain. I pass out from shock only to wake up and take a good hard look at my surroundings. I immediately notice that I am tan. I touch my face. It is creamy and smooth in texture. I become overjoyed. I made it. I am peanut butter, the better half of many famous combinations.

I know my journey is not over yet. Shelly Nutt, Executive Director of the Texas Peanut Producers Board, said, "It just amazes me to watch how far that peanut has to go and how long it takes it before it gets back to the food chain."

I marvel at the things I have gone through and where I am now. I am put in a box, brought out to a truck, and I endure another road trip. This time I am thinking about whom I can possibly help or make happy.

Have you ever heard the expression dynamite comes in small packages? Peanuts, like myself, provide over 30 vitamins and nutrients including vitamin E, copper, and manganese. Just one ounce of peanuts has seven grams of protein and two grams of fiber. The nutrition, taste, and versatility peanuts can provide make us a favorite among many.

When I arrive at the grocery store, I am carefully placed on the shelf. I am turned around so I can see people pass by. Since I am the line leader, I do not sit there long before somebody picks me up and places me in a handheld plastic basket. I roll around in unison with the other jars and cans before I am put on another conveyer belt. This must be security because a laser scans my entire body before it gives a shrill noise of approval. I am then escorted in a plastic bag to a vehicle. This time I ride shotgun until we pull up to a food bank.

When I get out, children look at me with excitement and grin from ear to ear. I ask Stephanie Pruitt, communications director at Texas Peanut Producers why.

"We have a product that is very valuable for people," Pruitt said with a smile. **T**

Magan Escamilla
Kingwood, Texas

