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Experiences of working at the Milwaukee Psychiatric Hospital by Lauren Powers

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Experiences at Milwaukee Psychiatric Hospital

(by Laurel Powers)

I worked as a waitress at the Milwaukee Psychiatric Hospital when I was about 17 years old. In 1973 I was paid \$1.26 an hour to start. I mostly worked after school the dinner hour and on Sundays during the noon hour. Sundays had the best menu because they frequently served steak and also turnovers for dessert. I also worked in the lower level in the cafeteria which is where the employees ate their meals. I served food and I also did the rinsing of dishes and put them in the dishwasher. I also worked in the office in the summer and did some typing.

We all had to wear white uniform dresses and white nurse shoes and a hairnet on our hair. I did not like wearing a hairnet but it was mandatory. During our breaks there was a break room with a TV and we frequently sat on the sofa and chairs and watched TV.

Inside the dining room people sat in groups. There were Dewey Center patients and we were told they had alcohol issues and at another table there were patients with drug issues. I never was given any of those tables. There was always someone with the patients sitting at those tables to supervise. Sometimes someone would have an outburst of emotion and they would leave the room with their counselor. The dining room was decorated very beautifully and had a classic elegance to it. The grounds were also very well kept.

Some of my friends also worked there in 1973. I started as a waitress in the dining room where the patients ate. Their menus were already made out for them according to their dietary needs. The menus were placed on their plates with everything circled they were eating. We were not to talk to them unless given permission, and that was only given if there was a question about a beverage choice or salad dressing, and also on Sundays when they were served steak, and we needed to know how they preferred it to be cooked. We were assigned tables to work upon arrival. We went to the tables, picked up the menus, and then proceeded into the kitchen. We picked up a large silver tray and went to the salad bar first. There were mostly women working at the salad bar preparing salads and they were all ready to be taken to the patients. After the

salads then we brought them beverages. I remember one patient who only drank hot water so I had to bring it to her separately.

We then stood and waited to clear the table of the salad plates before bringing out the entrees. We had to tell the cook what it was and he would serve it on a plate and season it. The cooks were very proud and skilled at their craft. There was always a head cook and at least one assistant cook. The kitchen was of a fairly big size and mostly stainless steel. One of the main cook's name was Jerry. After the meal we cleaned off the tables and put everything on the large silver tray. We took the food off the plates and scraped it into the garbage disposal and then put the dirty dishes on the counter to be rinsed off and entered into the very large dishwasher. Mostly males did that type of work. The woman did the waitress jobs. We also took off the table cloths and napkins and placed them in an area to be laundered.

The tables had to be in perfect order before leaving. There were white linen tablecloths and linen napkins. If we had no other work to do we folded napkins. I still know how to fold them to this day. The supervisor would check our tables. Her name was Kay and there was another supervisor named Shirley, Shirley chewed gum constantly. Kay was the strictest, she would click the salt and pepper containers together when she checked the tables. If everything met her approval she would dismiss us. If it did not she would call us over and show us the correction.

Overall, it was my first paid job and I found it interesting and everyone seemed to work well together and I will always remember my job and the people I worked with in a favorable way. The memories will always be there.