

My First Job (Things I wish I would have done differently: # 245 of 1,125,152)

My first job, at fifteen, was working at Kentucky Fried Chicken in Huntington Beach. Not very glamorous, but at fifteen, you took what you could get. All of my friends worked there, which was really the only criteria for a first job—well, that and your parents willingness to drive you there. The uniforms were dark brown with orange and beige stripes...very Urban Outfitters.

The man who owned it was a WWII veteran named Bill who sported a neat flattop, high and tight. He drove an old, very old, burgundy Cadillac and looked a little like W.C Fields in polyester pants and a bolotie. I can just see him now, all in brown, hunched over a large white plastic container, elbow-deep in macaroni salad, mixing it with his ginormous hands.

More....

Bill had a little dog named "Mimi" bequeathed to him by his late wife. He always said when "that dog" died, he was going to sell KFC and travel the world. He acted like Mimi was pest to him, but he hand-made a seat in his Caddie just for her and took her everywhere with him. You know the type of man, right? All rough and grumpy but, deep inside sensitive and thoughtful.

I loved to make the famous KFC Biscuits. Every time I worked, at the beginning of my shift, I would mix the ingredients in a giant industrial mixer, roll out all of the dough, and cut hundreds of little round circles. Then I would place them all, an inch apart, on baking sheets the size of an unfolded newspapers. They were then ready to be thrown into the massive

ovens and baked until yummy golden brown.

One night, after about an hour of preparing that night's batch of biscuits, I looked down to find the band-aid I had on one of my fingers was missing. Bill always had us wear gloves, but for some reason that night I didn't. I remember looking out over the sea of uncooked biscuits contemplating what I should do. Should I trash them all and start again? Oh, Bill would be upset with me. Should I just cook them and hope for the best, betting the one containing the lost bandage would be a straggler, thrown out at the end of the night.

At fifteen, I decided to put them all in the oven and never breathed a word to anyone. I had a horrible fear of disappointing any adult and the thought of Bill, hands-on hips, shaking his head in disappointment was unbearable to me. He was such a kind but firm man, I would have died of shame. I thought I would take my chances.

I never had a customer complain, but I studied every person I rung up that night, wondering if they were the type who ate their biscuit. I played the horrific scene in my head over and over again, "Mommy, what's this?" or worse, "cough, cough....What the?...Oh, my God!"

I went back to visit KFC when I was going to college and Bill was still there. Mimi had died years before, but he stayed on. He was very uncomfortable by my happiness to see him again. He asked if I still liked to take pictures (see...so thoughtful) and gave me a free pint of coleslaw when I left.

I still think about him and wonder if he ever got to travel the world. He was probably the best first boss you could ask for. I wish I had a picture of him to show you. Isn't it sad I have millions of pictures of people from High School that I can't now even remember their names. But I didn't take one of Bill, someone I will never forget.

Originally written October 2007