

Welcome to the World of Work



Stories about
your first
real job

The Woolworth candy counter

The first job I ever had was shortly after I was married in 1946 at the age of 17. I got a job at F.W. Woolworth in Winston-Salem at the candy counter. What a breeze. All I had to do was sell candy, nuts and brownies all day long.

Well, I had to stock the counter, clean, weigh the product, take the money.



We were allowed to sample the goods, too. One day I sampled so many hot cashew nuts that I got sick. I never ate another cashew until a year or so ago. When I do eat them I make sure I don't act like a pig and eat too many.

In exchange for my work among all these goodies, I was paid the excellent amount of 44.5 cents per hour. For a full week's work I received \$18 after taxes.

My husband was in school under the G.I. Bill, receiving a small check each month. This paid for food and other necessities. The money from my job paid the rent on our apartment. I have had many jobs since, but they all paid a bit more.

Virginia Kinley, Woodleaf, EnergyUnited

Burger King graduate

I had just turned 16 when I got my first job at Burger King in Crabtree Valley Mall, Raleigh, the day after Thanksgiving. I proudly got into my uniform, fixed up my hair and put on my make-up. My mother and sisters said that they would come by the restaurant to get some dinner when they went shopping at the mall.

By the time my mother arrived, my hair was falling out of my ponytail holder, I had sweated off all of my make-up, my bangs were sticking to my forehead, and I was covered in grease. When I got home that evening, I declared to my mother that I had made up my mind to go to college.

Catherine Busam, Youngsville, Wake Electric

Lost and found

I thought my first day of working on a public job was to be my last.

I had been a stay-at-home mom, and two of my children were in school. My then 5-year-old daughter decided she wanted to go to kindergarten like some of her friends. So, I decided to get a job so I could send her. (Back in the 1970s, there was no public kindergarten.)

I found a job working at a sewing plant, USI in Farmville. The very first day when I got ready to clock out, I found I had lost my watch. My husband had given it to me when I was 16, and it was special to me. I vowed not to come back the next day, but my husband encouraged me to finish out the week. I never found my watch, but by the end of that week that little pay check looked mighty good.

After 35 years, I'm still working and I've had several watches, but I remember the one I lost.

Faye Strickland, Snow Hill, Pitt & Greene EMC

Generic quality

I was 14 when I got my first job at Banner Drug Company. On my first day, the pharmacist, Al, asked me if I knew what "generic" meant. Trying to make a great first impression, I said, "Of course! It is something that you inherit!"

Jenny Corriher, Statesville, EnergyUnited



Thanks to everyone who sent us stories about your first job. You can see more on our Web site. Next month we'll publish photos and stories of your gardens. [Deadline was Jan. 15.] For more themes and rules of our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series, see page 24.

A Tanner girl

I was 17 years old when I got my first job at Tanner Companies in 1981. It was a full-time job hand-sewing buttons, shoulder pads, snaps and hooks.

I still remember the day I got my first paycheck. It was only \$84, but I was so excited, you'd thought I had won the lottery. As soon as break came up, I went to my mom, who worked there also, to show her my check. She gave me a big smile and told me she was so proud of me.



While working at Tanners, I finished high school there in the lunch room through a program sponsored by Isothermal Community College. I got my diploma the same time my class graduated at RS Central.

I worked at Tanners for six years, and then at Absorba, and then at the J.C. Cowan plant until I became disabled with Lupus. You don't know how much I miss working a job. My friends at work called me a workaholic, but I loved it!

Never complain about your job. Always be thankful for it, because some people don't have a job, and some are not able to work and have to be on a fixed income.

Sharon Hardin, Rutherfordton, Rutherford EMC

Flamingo milkshake trick

My first job was as a waitress in Asheboro at The Flamingo across from Bossong Hosiery. I was nervous and wanted to do a good job.

I waited tables and worked behind the counter where there were bar stools for people to sit and enjoy a beverage or milkshake.

One time this man who worked at Bossong walked in, ordered a milkshake, and while I was making the milkshake he told me he was going

next door to the gas station. He returned, and I handed him the milkshake. He said he didn't order a milkshake. Well, I didn't know what I was going to do, because I knew he did and I needed the money.

The door opened and in came his look-alike twin. They said you should have seen the look on my face. I sure was relieved and embarrassed. They made up this joke to trick me.

Mona Manns, Trinity, EnergyUnited

Breadwinner and scholar

I got out into the working world fairly young. My dad passed away when I was a senior in high school. I had bills to pay, and our new mobile home to pay for. I made the decision to get a full-time job and quit school.

The school wouldn't hear of my quitting and told me not to. Next day, I was scheduled to go to work at our local poultry plant.

I did graduate with honors, and I got the title to my mobile home about one month before graduation.

I accomplished my goals. I didn't lose what my dad and I had, and I graduated from school. He would have been happy to have seen my last report card.

Nancy Stanley, Roaring River, Surry-Yadkin

Face-to-face with Andy Griffith

When I was 16, the summer before my senior year in high school, I went to stay with my grandparents in Manteo on the Outer Banks. They owned The Cloth Barn, and that is where I had my first real job.

One day while I was helping tidy up the rolls of cloth, a man wearing sunglasses came into the shop. It only took me a few seconds to recognize him. It was the actor Andy Griffith. I was so stunned but somehow managed to ask if I could help him. He wanted to know if we had any burlap material. All I managed to do was ask him to wait while I got my grandfather. After Andy Griffith left, my grandfather said he would have introduced me to him, but he was afraid I'd faint.

Vicki Martin, Shelby, Rutherford EMC

Welcomed at Burroughs Wellcome

At the age of 22, I got my first job. It was a tremendous challenge, because I was disabled. I was stricken with polio and meningitis at the age of 11 months old. I walk on crutches and wear a long left leg brace.

I wanted to work even as a teenager. I first wanted to be a nurse. As I grew older I wanted to become a secretary, because I felt being in the administrative field would be better for me physically. I wanted to become a secretary like Lucille Ball.

I attended the Greenville School of Commerce for Secretarial Science. It was a nine-month course, and I graduated with a diploma. The instructor guaranteed you employment if you completed the course. She would send you on interviews just before graduation. About two weeks before I graduated, she began to set up interviews for me. Within two days, I was hired. I really was looking forward to going on interviews and was disappointed that I was hired on the first one. But sometimes we don't know what is best for us at that time.

The job was with one of the finest companies in Greenville. Burroughs Wellcome Company hired me on Feb. 7, 1980. I worked there for 15½ years.

I began working in the shipping department as a Clerk II, then transferred to another department as a Clerk IV. This was the highest clerk you could become, and I performed administrative duties. Being disabled was less strenuous for me because Burroughs Wellcome accommodated the disabled in their workforce.

I had to come out of the work world in 1995 because of problems with my right knee and surgery for arthritis. Also, post-polio syndrome caused me to experience some fatigue.

Even though I did not get the Lucille Ball secretarial position, just being part of Burroughs Wellcome paid off for me, and to this day I am reaping the benefit from my first and only job.

*Patricia Brown, Greenville
Edgecombe-Martin County EMC*

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The bagboy at A&P

At 16 I entered the working world as a bagboy at my local A&P supermarket. The A&Ps were once common in the South and are now defunct. I worked there 3½ years, through a year of community college.

The A&P was an old-fashioned supermarket with checkers, bagboys, produce clerks and meat cutters. The checkers actually had to ring items up on the cash register, keying in the price sticker amount, and were checked randomly by the head cashier for speed and accuracy. The other bagboys and I were expected to place items neatly into the paper bags and in the proper order, with heavier items on the bottom and bread and eggs on top. We then pushed the items in the shopping cart out to the customer's car and placed the bags in the vehicle.

We were always polite and were occasionally rewarded with a small tip, which made our day. We wore dress shirts with neckties and a long red apron tied behind our backs. Today I yearn for that type of customer service and employee pride.

Tim Stewart, Hope Mills, South River EMC

With Mom at Hudson-Belk's

Mom and I decided to work a Christmas job at Hudson-Belk's store in downtown Raleigh. Neither of us had worked in a store, although Mom did have experience as a bookkeeper. But I only babysat as a job. Mother worked in fine jewelry, and I worked the stationery and book department.

The best part was getting up each day and heading off to work with my mother. Our day included taking a break together and having lunch either in the cafeteria upstairs or at one of the lunch counter's of Woolworth's or Kresge's.

The sad day came when Hudson-Belk's left downtown Raleigh. My first job taught me confidence and the ability to take on a new experience, but the best part was being in a partnership with my mother.

*Anne Wright Andrews, Avon
Cape Hatteras Electric*

Drug store courtesies

My first real job came my junior year of high school when I worked for a local pharmacy. I was what they call now a pharmacy technician. I counted pills, typed labels and worked the register. I loved my job. I made good money, for a teenager, and I did not go home smelling like a burger. My boss Grady was really tough though. He expected perfection, and when he did not get it he let us have it. There were several girls my age who worked in the pharmacy summer, weekends and after school.

There were many nights when I would go home crying because of something my boss had said or done. I would tell my Dad and he would always tell me, "That builds character." Well after working there I should have enough character to go around the world. My boss saw my Dad quite frequently in social situations, and he always said such nice things to my Dad about me. I guess that is why I stayed as long as I did. I respected my boss, and he taught me what it meant to be a good employee. He believed no one should wait more than five minutes on a prescription. If the big chains only felt that way!

My Dad always said if I could work for Grady that I could work with and for anyone. Because of that work I pursued a career in the pharmaceutical industry. I worked in drug research for many years.

I am now concentrating on raising my two beautiful boys. I only hope that their first job gives them as much as mine gave me.

Page Crater, Lexington, EnergyUnited

A lesson in silence

When I started my first job as Davie County High School librarian, I didn't know I would inherit homeroom responsibilities. They were good kids, but not much younger than I.

All went well until the first reporting period when pupils returned for report cards. Until students cleared their library account, teachers would hold their report cards. My homeroom group fidgeted while I attended to a long line of protesting students with outstanding debts and overdue books.

Soon my students felt free to talk with blow horn voices. I warned them several times to quiet down, but they continued. As the line dwindled, I turned my angry attention to them. I would make sure this wouldn't happen again.

I wouldn't release them to catch their bus. We all heard bus engines revving. Their eyes rolled, they squirmed, but no noise. I held firm. We watched others dashing for their busses, but my class sat still. I didn't care if I had to drive everyone home. They weren't going to do that to me again.

Bus noises grew louder. Worry showed on faces. Believing I had made my point, I said, "You can go."

They ran like Olympians. Had I held them too long? I waited, knowing I might have to drive 24 students home. I waited. Silence never sounded so good. ☹

*Gail C. Johnson, Minnesott Beach
Tideland Electric*

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Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

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Where did you go, when, what happened?

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Wedding Stories

Your favorite wedding story and photo.

Deadline: April 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. One entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos should be a minimum of 1200 by 800 pixels.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
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