CHAINED TO THE GOLDEN ARCHES
By Indi Donovan

"My father taught me to work; he did not teach me to love it."
- Abraham Lincoln

I've wanted to work since I was sixteen. I liked the idea of earning my own money. But, in my personal quest to find work, I had a few bumps. Actually, it might be more accurate to say roadblocks. In order to work at that age, I needed to wait until the summer. Then, I needed working papers from the school. To get working papers, I needed a physical. My folks stalled on both and my mother eventually got a small job, which but my job hunting on hold until I got my driver's license.

In the same September that I started college, I finally got my license. I was free to start putting in applications when I had the time. And that's exactly what I did for the next several months. Collected applications. Filled them out. Handed them in. Waited. And waited. And waited. This went on until around the last week of January, including a slight delay for the holiday season. Out of all my applications, I think I got four or five calls back at the most and nothing came of any of them. Finally, a McDonalds called me in for an interview. After the interview, she asked for my shirt and pant size and told me to come in a few days later for orientation. Finally!

The game plan is to be here for at least a few years. Maybe longer, depending on where I end up transferring to after my time at SCCC. Somewhere in the back of my mind, those few years can't pass soon enough.

I'm almost always working the lobby. Basically, I just have to keep things clean and stocked. Sounds simple, right? Well, with some factors thrown in, it's easier said than done. I can still remember one of the first things my higher-ups told me during orientation. I was told to treat the customers like I'd treat guests in my home. Aside from the fact that we don't really get a lot of guests at home, I could see what she meant. You have to be nice, after all. It's a good policy.

Maybe we should tell the customers about it.
I go through my day, looking at some of the shit I have to deal with and all I can think of is the 'guest in your home' routine. This isn't how people act when they visit someone's house, is it? When I visit my best friend's house or a relative's house, I don't do anything even remotely like this. I don't leave garbage all over their tables. I don't trash their bathroom. I don't spill shit somewhere and then not say anything about it. I make an effort not to make a mess and, if I do, I pick up after myself. That's what we like to call 'being responsible' or 'being respectful', among other phrases or words.

However, I go through the lobby and find that these people don't act like welcomed guests in the house. That act more like that uncle that makes you cringe every time he comes over cause he gets drunk and wrecks the house, but he's family so you have to be nice to him. A few fries or crumbs I can understand. A stray wrapper or napkin falling under the chairs is fine. But, I go through my little patrols and see things that I just can't get over. I have no idea how someone can leave a table like this.

I find that someone spilled their soda and, rather than come find me and tell me that they spilled it, they just get up and leave it there. Why? They think they're bothering me? I don't care! Half the time, I have nothing to do. Is it an ego thing? They don't want to admit they accidentally bumped their soda off the table? People have come to me with worse and I've only been here a few months. I've had mothers come up to me from the playroom and ask to borrow my rag because their kid wet their pants in the playground thing in there. And these people can't own up to spilling their soda?

I've had people pull me aside on several occasions who, after seeing the rag and spray bottle in my hand, asked me to wipe down their table first. Why? For obvious reasons. Someone left something spilled on the table, but never bothered to wipe it off. I don't mean one little drop of ketchup or something. I mean spilled. There is shake, soda, ketchup, or some other unidentified substance dried on the table. And, since the first customer couldn't be bothered to take five seconds out of their lives to wipe it off themselves and I didn't know about it until now, it had dried on the table and I practically have to use acid to get it off. Now, what
leaving it, forcing me to waste my time on something that could have been cleaned much quicker a while ago?

I've had people leave their food, wrappers, and trays on the table. Some people have even just scattered their garbage all over the general vicinity. I really don't understand it and it's got to be the one thing that always hits a nerve with me at work. Mostly because I can't really do anything about it right away. I'll find trays unattended and I have to leave them there and just keep checking on them. For all I know, the customer could be in the bathroom or something. I can't just throw their food out because they went to the bathroom. So, I leave it alone and just keep checking on it...And checking on it...And checking on it. Believe me, it's frustrating to know I could have jumped on that but had to wait because of the slim chance that the customer might actually intend to come right back and throw their own garbage away. I don't understand what's so challenging about it. You take your tray, go to a garbage can, throw your garbage out, and put the tray on top of the garbage can. It's not heavy. I do it all the time. It's not hard to find a garbage can. There are five of them in the lobby alone and four others in the playroom. All but two of all these garbage cans right next to a door. You can drop it off on your way out.

The kids are only a little bit better. They're not really bad, but it keeps reminding me of something I read somewhere. I'm an Internet rat. I spend a lot of time browsing message boards and I find some interesting stories. One girl has posted a couple topics about people who want to live childfree lives. She doesn't want kids. She says that this statement has gotten a surprising amount of hostility. For some reason, people hear this and tell her she's being selfish. Or that she's in denial and she'll end up having lots and lots of kids. These people have no concept of the fact that humans are actually overpopulating the world, but that's not the point of this example. The point of telling you that story was to add that these people don't sound like they've spent a lot of time at McDonalds.

They haven't seen the parents tell the kids over and over again to stop climbing all over the Ronald McDonald statue in the lobby or to stop running around the restaurant while they're trying to order food. They don't see the parents that keep yelling at their kids to eat their food before they think about going in to play. They don't see the parents who
kids whine and scream and pull all sorts of theatrics about leaving. And about the food their parents are throwing away that they all of a sudden want to eat. Either that or they're fully aware of it and want everyone to suffer with them. Parents are sadistic bastards, aren't they?

They didn't see one kid I got who had to be either the stupidest or rudest little boy I've seen yet. Usually, my shift is over at nine. Since the playroom is closed at nine, which means it's usually my last duty of the day. I have to wipe down the tables and chairs, handle the garbage, sweep, and mop before I can close it down and go home. Which means people holding out and staying late in the playroom makes my life a little more frustrating. Especially because I'm such a softy. I'm a doormat. I don't have the heart to kick people out. I just put it off, hope they eventually leave, and drop hints if they don't. It almost always works.

Almost.

When I'm ready to get the playroom clean, I put a sign out in front of the door saying the playroom's closed for cleaning. I'm right in the middle of mopping when this boy walks right through the door.

"What's that sign say?"

"The playroom's closed."

Okay, maybe I could have been a bit more polite. But, if it's any consolation for any of you, it didn't affect him at all. In fact, he walked right past me and threw his jacket on the table.

"What's that sign say? No food?"

Oh, here's the problem. Apparently, he didn't see that big tall sign that says the playroom's closed. He saw the paper signs taped to the door that explain all the rules...But no the fact that the playroom closes at nine, which I've said we needed for a while.

"The playroom's closed. I have to get it clean."

"Hey! Video games!"

And thus the kid tears off for a little side room that has some older console games in it for the kids to play. Leaving me to wonder if he was one of those kids that actually did have one of those attention disorders. Eventually, the Dad came in and got him, but not without the usual whining. That guess got a little more back-up when, as I was leaving that night, I saw the kid running all over the lobby and he tried to go in the playroom again...After I'd finished up and turned the lights out. Usually, turning the lights out is a pretty strong hint not to go in.
But, other than the antics of our not-so-respectable customers, my job is pretty boring. Working in the lobby means spending half your time looking for busy work. Everything gets done pretty quickly. It takes surprisingly little time to wipe down the tables or the area where the customers get their napkins, straws, ketchup and whatnot. Sweeping is pretty quick, too. Emptying the garbage cans eats up a bit of time. But, once you empty it, it doesn't need any other real attention for the rest of the day unless it's really busy. The only thing that takes any real time is when I have to mop an area up, but I don't have to do that until the end of the day. I'm basically just killing time till about the last hour or so.

Of all the areas I keep an eye on, the ladies room is probably the lowest maintenance of them. In fact, it's so low maintenance, it's become an afterthought in my rounds and I mostly take a look at it to kill time. People get the insane urge to throw toilet paper all over the floor sometimes, but it usually doesn't take too much work to keep the bathroom in shape.

Note that I said 'usually'. I did get trouble with the bathroom once.

How many of you readers out there have played video games like Legend of Zelda? Where you had to collect dozens of items to get anything done because all the doors were locked? And half the keys were actually on a completely different side of the game's world? Which leads to a lot of back-and-forth and things taking longer than they have to? I had a night like that.

It was getting near the end of my shift one night, so I was starting to get a part of the lobby cleaned up to be closed before I left. As I'm getting started, one of the managers walked out of the ladies room and said a stall in there was out of toilet paper. If she opened it up for me--- you need a key to open the toilet paper holders--- could I refill it before I get started? Sure, why not? I have time to kill.

So, we go to the storeroom to get the toilet paper, which involves walking through the kitchen to an area in the back where everything's stored. We look around on the shelves and...no toilet paper. Don't you hate it when that happens? We looked around a little more and finally found some toilet paper, but the size bothered me a bit. Oh well, she's been here longer than I have, she knows what she's doing, right?

Right?
So, the manager and I go back to the ladies room, she opens up the toilet paper holder, and leaves me to get to work. So, I put the thing in. Or at least try to. After a while of fighting with it, my first impressions of the 'toilet paper' were confirmed. It was too big. In fact, it was twice as wide as the holder and didn't fit on the roll. I was basically trying to jam paper towels in there.

After a while, I took the two rolls with my back to the kitchen and told the manager that I couldn't get them in. When I showed it to her and told her what happened, she burst out laughing, then got a lot of the other people there going by showing them what she told me to try and stick in the holder. After having a good laugh, the manager remembered where the toilet paper actually was. In the closet.

What closet? Sure, I'm new, but I've been all over the building and I've never seen any closets. Want to know why I've never seen the closet?

It's in the restroom.
The mens restroom.

Obviously, I can only keep an eye on so much. I can't just waltz into the mens room because I need to kill time. I see other employees walk to the bathroom every now and then, so I'm assuming one of the guys might quickly pick up stray toilet paper or handle any messes.

So, now I have to go into the mens room to get at the closet and the supplies inside. The manager gives me the keys to the closet and tells me to prop the door open with a chair so nobody would walk in on me. I just want to get in, get the toilet paper, and get out. So, I try the key.

Doesn't work. Well, there were two of them, so I tried the other one. That one doesn't work either. I go back and forth between the keys for a while and finally just take a look at the keys. They both look exactly like each other. They're basically the same key. I check the little plastic tag on them.

Well, no wonder they don't work. These keys aren't for the closet. They're for the stall door.

So, I had to make yet another trip back to the kitchen, this time to get the right set of keys. More laughs from everyone else. Yes, I'll admit, it's funny. But, when it comes to these little escapades at work, it's only funny after I'm in the car and going home. It's hard to laugh at it when the mens room is tied up and I still have other things to get done for the night.

So, I finally get the closet keys. With which, I get the toilet
paper. Which allowed me to finally get that chair out of the mens room door that nobody tried to use at the time anyway. With which I could finally refill the toilet paper holder and get one with cleaning the side lobby. Which I had all of five minutes left to get done.

I have so many other things I could write about. My limited experience with the grill, which has given me a better appreciation for where a cheeseburger comes from. Trays that somehow find their way actually into the garbage cans. The ketchup machines that always break during rush hour when the lobby's a mess and I have better things to do than run back and forth for ketchup packets. The busloads of teenagers that always sneak up on me when I've gone off to check on something else. The French-Canadians that we get every so often. The co-workers that don't seem to have grasped the concept of what clean is as tightly as I have. I have a lot to say, but only so much space to say it in, otherwise I'd have a small novel instead of a magazine entry. But, I want to leave some advice for the next time you eat out.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you spill something, just tell someone and they'll get to it. If you can't find something, they'll help you find it or go get it for you. If someone's wrong somewhere, just say the word so someone knows about it. It's not gonna bother anyone if you come and tell us. In fact, I personally think it would be preferable to hearing about it from another customer, who finds out about it when he tries to sit down and yells at us for not cleaning up something we didn't know about.

Patience, patience, patience. Especially during rush hour or any other time that you can see things are busy.

Spare a few kind words if you can. I might be a bit anti-social, but it always makes my day to get a compliment or maybe a mini-conversation. Everyone loves compliments, including fast food workers.

Last but most certainly not least, for the love of God, clean up after yourself! It's sad to think that I'm more responsible than people older than me. The fact that these same people are raising another generation is making things look bleak for any kids that I might have that go for their first job in the fast food world.

{Feel free to send feedback or comments to sammie728@hotmail.com}