

MY WORST JOB by Pamela Houghton

I think my worst job was my first job. I lived near Richmond in Surrey and in the 60's I was lucky enough to be a teenager and desperate to access the 60's scene. I lived too far from London to go there, but I did live near (well 2 buses to) Eel Pie Island frequented by the Rolling Stones. My ultimate dream was to go to Eel Pie Island on a Friday night. There was only one obstacle. I needed a duffle coat. My parents made it clear that there was no way they would buy me one, but I could work and save up for one. I don't know why, but it took me 2 years to save up.

On a Saturday I would work in MacFisheries restaurant, well really it's a café. They sold fish in the shop downstairs and the café was upstairs. It was on 2 levels. There was silver service in the upper level, the top tables, and ordinary service in the lower level. It was here I learned about sore feet, exotic cuisine, hierarchy at work, and heart break.

I got sore feet because it was a long day. Probably the most physically tiring job I have ever had. I was on my feet from 8:30 to 6 and then had to catch 2 buses home. It was exotic cuisine because I had never met a toasted sandwich until I worked there. We had the revolutionary toasted sandwich machine and had to butter the outside of the bread. Not only did we offer cheese and tomato toasties, but, the exotic ham and pineapple toasted sandwich. It is still my favourite today. It was here that I learned how unfair the workplace was going to be and that hierarchy rules. The busiest time in the restaurant was obviously at lunch time and the sophisticated customers booked the upper level for lunch. The pay was minimal but the tips could be very good. However, you really only got tips when customers came in for lunch. And you really only got tips from the sophisticated customers who knew that was how you behaved, even in a café. But at 12 o'clock a team of older ladies would swoop in to wait at the top tables, serve the lunches, pick up the tips, and go home at 2:30, leaving the rest of us to the lower tables for the odd coffee, maybe a sandwich, perhaps a piece of cake, but certainly not worth a tippable service.

Finally the heart break. MacFisheries was in Hounslow the nearest town to Feltham where I grew up and so did Freddie Mercury. The café became a draw for all my friends who didn't have to work to save up for a duffle coat. They would congregate on the lower level for a coffee and I would try not to look as though I knew them or linger when I was serving them in case I got into trouble. Over the months I watched the love of my life, David Collins, develop a relationship with one of my friends. She was so cool with her bouffant hair, her mini skirt and boots while I presented with my hair tied back, my waitress outfit and flat sensible shoes. Often hot and bothered.

I finally bought my duffle coat, but I never got to Eel Pie Island. It got closed down because of the drugs and by then the Rolling Stones were too famous to appear there.

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