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Thank you for the happy meals

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I am proud to say that I am Golden Arches alumni.

I started working at McDonald's when I was 15 -- the only place I could get a job at that age, as long as I didn't touch the french fry bin or any other frying tables (liability, you know). I swore I would only work there until I was 16 and get a "real" job at a coffee shop or grocery store, but I managed to stay for about nine months after my birthday.

Our McDonald's was the first in the Elk Grove area, so that meant that about 7 p.m., every youth tee-ball and soccer team was plowing through the door for the night's specials on dinner -- 39-cent cheeseburgers, buy-one-get-one-free Big Macs or half-off Cajun McChicken sandwiches. And don't ask me about 99-cent Happy Meal night -- those are memories I've blocked out.

There were customers who thought that, because their soda was flat, they had earned a free meal or should get three extra sodas for their trouble. Those unhappy campers would harp on me for their carbonless beverage until I offered them an extra packet of barbecue sauce or more ice -- anything to make them feel that they had won.

And the french-fry remnants would stick to the bottom of my skid-free shoes, only to be dragged onto my dad's carpet when I got home.

But it was the best job I ever had -- considering the circumstances. When you're barely a teenager, a \$120 check every two weeks seems like some serious cash. Plus it was cool to say, "I have to work," because not everyone had a job. Now that phrase is usually followed by a lengthy groan and my bottom lip sticking out in a pout.

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They should be suspended because they should have kept an eye on that girl

They should be reprimanded, but not this harshly

It's not Sigma Kappas fault

The media is taking this too far

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My parents thought I was responsible taking 15 hours out of my busy high school week to spend behind the register. And I love talking to people, so the "May I take your order?" and "Anything else?" were easy. And for the record, I never once asked, "Would you like fries with that?"

I got promoted to drive-thru and got to be the one at window No. 1 taking orders and people's money. Now that was a treat. I'd play around with the microphone, switching from an English accent to a southern one. With the English, people just mocked me, but the southern accent made people think I was adorable. I'd tell them how much I missed my hometown of Baton Rouge, and they didn't know I had lived in Sacramento my whole life.

I found the classic fast-food restaurant to be a really positive place to work. I was rewarded for things that seem completely routine now, because things at Mickey D's were simple.

I got an "award" for best attendance record, because I went to work when I was supposed to. This is an ethic I could have used in later jobs.

I smiled at and was nice to every person who stepped up to my counter, regardless of the bad day I might have been having.

I wore my purple polo shirt and visor with the Golden Arches on it for every shift, no matter how bad I thought I looked in violet and how frizzy that visor made my hair.

McDonald's taught me the basics of having a job. Good service can make people happy. You can't please everybody. If you do what you're supposed to, you'll keep your job. If you do more than they expect, you'll move up (and let me tell you, drive-thru was nothing to mess around with.)

It was truly amazing how happy you could make someone by making their trip to McDonald's a good one. One guy left my boss a \$20 tip to give me because I was apparently extra helpful when he asked for more ketchup and napkins. I got to keep the money, too.

And, I saw how a basic business functioned. You need a team of people working together to get the job done. No way could I have made my way from the money-taking window, down the hamburger-making line, through the packaging area, down the line to fill up four medium Cokes and have it all out the window in the 3 minutes and 30 seconds we were supposed to strive for with each order.

So regardless of my constant need for Clearasil, the grease stains on my clothes and the lingering stench of beef that had permeated my skin, it was a good job. I wouldn't have had my first work experience anywhere else.

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