

Building Profile

You may wonder how anyone could have had between 50 and 100 jobs, well, it wasn't that hard, especially in Florida, and if you live long enough you have more time to experience different fields of employment. Now, you may be wondering how old I am; we don't need to go there; suffice it to say that I'm so old AARP dropped me.

When I was nine-years-old, my aunt and uncle would often come to visit, and when they did Uncle would give me a dime to clean the inside of his car. This was one of my first jobs. He kept a small whisk broom under the seat of his Mercury, and I would use it to sweep the floor of his car. Also, under the seat, he usually had a pint of Southern Comfort Whiskey in a brown paper bag. When I finished cleaning his car, I would hunker down on the back floorboard where I couldn't be seen, and sample the Southern Comfort. Then I would stagger around in the yard, singing, and get wet swinging the water hose around, convinced that I was drunk. I was nine! I wouldn't get falling down drunk for another couple of years.

At times, it was my job to go with Uncle when he drove the three miles to the Dover Post Office to get the mail. My aunt wouldn't let him go by himself because in the past he had gone for the mail, and disappeared for weeks at a time. On the way to the Post Office, he would pull over in an

orange grove, turn the car off, open the door, pick an orange, then sit with the door open, his feet on the ground, and peel the orange half-way down. Then he would plug the orange, get the Southern Comfort from under the seat, take a big drink of whiskey, squeeze the orange and suck on it at the same time; orange chaser. Then his face would flash red, he'd make a funny noise, and say, "Whiskey's a terrible thing Benny, don't ever do it." Little did he know.

When I was ten-years-old, Uncle would sometimes pick me up before sunrise with a flatbed truck loaded with watermelons, and drive north on Hwy. 301 past the Hillsborough River State Park, where he would stop under a big Oak Tree, and we would unload half of the watermelons. We would stack them in a pyramid, (this was when I had my first back ache) then he would give me a plugging knife, and tell me to sell the melons for .25 cents each. He would then drive over to Hwy. 41 North, park on the side of the road, sit in the truck and wait for the north bound tourists over there.

I would sit under the tree playing with the plugging knife, eating watermelon, and watch the cars go by. A plugging knife is like a pocket knife but with a long, six-inch, skinny blade that could be used to cut a small plug (about the diameter of a quarter, but deep) from a watermelon to give someone as a sample. When a north bound tourist (Yankee) would stop I would give them a sample, and tell them that I had to get .50 for each watermelon or my Uncle would beat me. I'd go home with a pocketful of quarters that Uncle never knew about.

It was easier finding jobs in the past because newspapers divided the classified sections into Male and Female jobs, and then under those categories the jobs were further divided into Professional, Sales, Construction, etc. And for women, Medical, Secretarial, Retail, etc.

Decades later, I was working apartment maintenance with a guy who was very hard of hearing. We became friends, so it wasn't rude when I asked, "How long have you been hard of hearing?"

"What?"

"How long have you been deaf?"

"Say again."

"How long have you been deaf, were you born that way?"

"Oh no, it started way before that."

He came in one Monday morning all excited to tell me about a couple he had seen at the flea market that weekend.

"She was wearing a see-through blouse, no bra, and short shorts, and he didn't have a shirt on and was wearing really tight shorts, and... they must have been some of them inhibitionists."

When I was about 40 years old, I worked at a landscaping company with a guy who couldn't read or write, and almost everything he said included the phrase, "dick string". For example... I smoked some weed last night that would knock your dick string in the dirt. And... I told him if he said one more thing I was gonna knock his dick string in the dirt. And... Every time I go by there, I think about when that cop knocked my dick string in the dirt for no good reason.

One afternoon as I was leaving work, I noticed his wife for the first time had come to pick him up and was sitting in their car parked beside my truck. It was summer, I was tired, dirty, and sweaty.

The next morning, my co-worker said to me, "My wife said she saw you yesterday when she came to pick me up."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. She said you looked like somebody who'd knock your dick string in the dirt first, and ask questions later."

I worked for a friend of mine for a few months laying carpet. One morning we went to an upscale house, and the rich old lady who owned it said she was leaving and would be back that afternoon. She pointed to a Chihuahua that was curled up asleep in a chair and said, "If Mr. Tinker Toy bothers you, put him in the sun room in back."

That afternoon I was tacking down the last of the new carpet when Mr. Tinker Toy jumped up, and started barking at me. He got down from the

chair, and was acting like he was going to bite my hand. I shooed him away several times, but he kept coming back. The next time he lunged at me I tried to flick him away with the hand that was holding the hammer right when he jumped forward. I swear it was an accident. The hammer hit him in the head and he fell over... dead. I had just finished arranging him in the chair like he had been, when the old lady walked in the front door. As she was writing a check for us, she looked over at Mr. Tinker Toy, and asked if he had bothered us. I said, "No, he hasn't moved since you left".

In the 1980's, I got a job at a hotel in Las Vegas as a Shuttle Driver. There were several Shuttle Drivers, we drove big, new Ford vans, and took hotel guests to and from the airport. Our supervisor was a 40-something-year-old Filipino lady with an accent, who was always flushed, angry, and in a bad mood (draw your own conclusions).

On my first day, she called me into her office, gave me a two-way radio, and said, "You are Shadow One, when front desk calls you on the radio they say, Shadow One, and you answer, this is Shadow One, go ahead."

I walked away thinking, "Shadow One how cool, maybe I'll get a name tag with Shadow One on it. This is going to be my new handle, my new pseudonym, Shadow One. Look out, here comes Shadow One."

A few minutes later, the front desk clerk, a California girl, called me on the radio, “Shuttle One.”

When I was in my early twenties, I worked at the historic Rockingham Hotel in downtown Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It is on the coast where Maine and New Hampshire border one another. I worked there four times, about six months each time, usually from about September to February, I’m not sure why it worked out that way, or why I kept going back. It was a minimum wage job, but we got free room and board, and sometimes tips. “We” being me and some of the other young people who worked there; maintenance workers, waiters, waitresses, bell captains, cooks, etc.

The first year I worked there I kept telling my co-workers, “It gets colder than this in Florida, where’s all that cold weather and snow I’ve been hearing about all my life.” I guess it was an unusually mild Fall, and I guess they got tired of hearing me talk about it. Every morning I’d come down to the employee dining area, and say, “It gets colder than this...”.

Then on Christmas Eve, for the first time that year, it snowed... all day, and by 6 PM Interstate 95 was closed because of the snow, and by 10 PM the hotel was full of stranded people, and we had set up cots in the halls, and people were sleeping all over the place.

By midnight the hotel was finally quiet, it had quit snowing, and I went out for a walk. The Rockingham Hotel was built in the late 1800's, and other buildings up and down State Street are even older. Imagine my surprise when I walked outside for the first time that day; there were no streets, no sidewalks, no landscaping, no cars. Everything was buried under three feet of snow, a beautiful, solid white blanket of untrammelled snow surrounding these grand old houses. It was magical, there was no wind, everything glowed white under the street lights, there were candles in frosted windows, and the silence was palpable. I walked around enthralled until I got so cold I had to return to the hotel.

The next morning the temperature was 5, I don't remember if it was 5 above or 5 below. When I went down to the employee dining area everyone paused, and looked at me. I gave it a beat, then said, "Hell, it gets colder than this in Florida". Several of my co-workers threw portions of their breakfast at me, I was bobbing and weaving as toast and bacon flew past my head, one of the waitresses chased me out the back door, then locked it, and wouldn't let me back in.

I loved that place, it's now the very upscale Rockingham Condominiums, and I hope to go back someday and... reminisce.