

# Ms. Dale Writes

## NOT SO EASY AS PIE

### (How I Quit My First Job and Learned to Love My Dad)

The deal was that if I found a job, my father would chauffeur me. He smiled when I bragged I would be pumping gas down on Carillo Street, that is, until I modeled the uniform—shorts and halter top that loosely corralled my 36C's.

“No,” he stomped out of the room. That was Dad, man of few words, mostly “no.” We never talked. He never listened.

I expanded my job search to State Street, a coffee shop near the Peppertree Motel, where after a brief walk-in interview, I was a waitress. The owner, a small woman with distinctively-bad dental work thrived on staff humiliation. The veteran waitresses called her Jaws and took turns steering me away from her outbursts. The place featured fresh homemade fruit pie at a buck and a half a slice which my co-workers devoured when Jaws wasn't around. Their pie consumption had a covert quality. They mimicked and giggled. I didn't understand the joke, but wanting to fit in, naively I laughed as if I did.

I ate only one piece of pie during my three-day career as a waitress. My throbbing feet scurried to accommodate a packed house that day. When seats thinned out, I nodded to Jaws that I was “breaking” and breezed past her to the pastry cooler.

I was barely chewing the first bite at the counter when a high-pitched squeal that became a roar tightened my shoulders. Jaws' flailing arms marked time to lines on her

face pumping up and down spitting words past her stiletto incisors down on my eyelashes. She was demanding money from me. The pies were not free even to the wait staff. The Rule was that employees had to pay half. Ah, that crumb of data that I was missing.

Now I was center stage before an audience of unblinking eyes from every booth and table, reviewing my embarrassment like spectators at an Olympic event. First the stool dismount, then the purse fumble. With trembling hands I came up with the cash. At last, the score!

I paid and sat down. Her ranting continued, but the volume was lower as she swept back to the cash register to ring up my 50% discount. Stunned, I finished eating. If I had only asked, I would have been told The Rule. Worse yet, how was I going to tell Dad?

I blubbered all the way home. I didn't want to work there. I wanted to call in and quit. He listened and drove without comment. His decision came after dinner.

"You're going to tell her in person," he said as he looked over his newspaper. "I'll take you tomorrow at the same time, but I'll wait for you."

Although relieved, I didn't see the point in going back to the restaurant. With one phone call I could be free. I didn't want to face my attacker. My father calmly finished reading while I worried all night.

The next day, he rehearsed with me on the way to the coffee shop. Before I stepped out of the car, he handed me three coins. Jaws stood at the cash register near the front door when I walked in. Her eyes narrowed and locked on me. I was right on time, but I wasn't heading back to get my apron.

I blurted out, "I quit."

As expected, Jaws flashed her bicuspid, took a deep breath, hollered about being short handed. She was getting into high gear.

"And this," I put the quarters down on the glass counter, "is for the other half of the pie."

Her lips parted slightly. They quivered. No hint of teeth. When she broke the silence, I didn't recognize her voice: a mumble that stuttered then trailed off into a whisper as I walked out. "I can't be having . . . the hired help. . . eat all my pies. . ."

It's been a long time since I was sixteen, but I still remember the look on her face, the day Dad suddenly seemed pretty cool.

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