

My first job was not work in the sense that one would expect. Allow me to explain.

At 12 years of age, my best friend was Louie Scaltrito. He lived next door to his grandparent's nursery, which happened to be the largest in the area. We would hang out at this house, and do the things 12-year-old boys did; listen to music, discuss girls, school, girls, sports, and girls. You get the idea.

However, if we wanted to leave the house and go outside, we had to morph into stealth mode, look both ways, and run as fast as possible. If spotted by Louie's grandfather, he would shanghai us into working at the nursery, which ruined a perfectly good day of potential mischief. The issue was that Louie was not a particularly fast runner, in fact he ran like a turtle, which was ironic, since he looked more like a turtle than anyone I had ever met, hence turtle became his nickname throughout our school years.

Once caught, hours of shoveling dirt, moving bags of mulch and seed followed, usually in ankle deep mud. Our reward after a ruined afternoon of this consisted of his grandfather giving us money to go buy four packs of cigarettes, three for him and one for us to split.

In the end, Louie however got the last laugh. Once his grandparents died, he inherited the business, and promptly sold the valuable land off to developers, which enabled him to spend the rest of his life as a beach bum, hence avoiding the chain that eventually attached the rest of us to the rock of adulthood. As for me, it started me on a pack a day habit for the next 14 years.

The next job that I recall was washing cars at a used car lot at the age of fourteen. Every day after school, I would scrub them down rinse and repeat. Over time, I realized that there was never turnover of cars in the lot, no new ones came in and no old ones came out. The owner of the lot paid me in cash, \$2 an hour. I was making real money! The one rule was to never, never bother him or his cronies in the trailer on the property. Guys would go in and out, but no cars

were purchased. It didn't take long to figure out what was going on. I lived in the Italian North Ward of Newark, and as such we could always identify mob guys. They did not concern me, if you didn't bother them, they left you alone. Plus, at \$2 an hour cash, I was quickly getting rich! The people I was working for were more interesting than the work involved. I didn't realize it at the time, but this would be a recurring theme throughout my early working years, learning more about life and people than about a transitory job.

At 15, I got a summer job at Monmouth Race Track, washing trays in the kitchen. Our boss would sleep the day away in his office, leaving some older kid in charge. I learned the ropes from them, which in their opinion was more important than tray washing.

In the morning, we would go high in the grandstand and watch the trainers and jockeys run the thoroughbreds in preparation of the day's races. Once deciding which horse we liked, we would then give our bets to an older kid, who would pass it on to an adult to place. Once finished cleaning the dirty trays, they would give me the okay to leave. What followed was hitching a ride to the beach, where a glorious day followed.

At 16, I worked after school and weekends in the deli of a supermarket chain named Finast. I thought that I was still making \$2/hour, until the chief butcher, a guy named Jerry who looked like he had spent way too many years in the freezer, handed me my first union card.

"Congratulations he said," handing it to me.

"You are now a member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union."

I wasn't too happy learning that I had just lost 10% of my salary, down to \$1.80/hour. It was also my first experience with entities named FICA and FWT, entities that I would despise for the remainder of my working years.

My deli manager was an easy-going guy named Norman, who was well known and liked by our customers. Norman was in his early fifties, and we hit it off well. He enjoyed what he did, and hence did it happily. That all changed when the deli district manager was replaced by a younger guy named Rick. It was apparent from the get go that Rick didn't like Norman. Rick would find fault with everything Norman did, chiding him more vocally and publicly as time

passed. Poor Norman tried to do anything he could to please Rick, but it was futile. Easy-going Norman became a nervous, stressed shell of himself. He needed the job for his family, but Rick was determined to force him out.

One day, Norman was gone, replaced by a younger deli manger named Tom. Tom and I worked well together, but the lessons of Norman I carried with me through my life. Rick was a bully, delighting in humiliating Norman until he broke him down. We have all had experiences with Ricks in our working years, and I hope there is a special place in hell for the Ricks of the world.

In college, I worked in the Audio-Visual Department. I was the A-V guy, who transported slide projectors, overheads, and a new gadget called Sony Beta Max. It was fun to watch the faces of my fellow students when the video cassette was inserted and like magic, a movie started. None of us had seen anything like it before. Most of the teachers looked for ways to use this new technology, which enabled me to sit in and observe many courses that I normally would not have access to, including watching Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*.

I am sure there were other jobs that I do not recall, but that's the way things work these days. I guess I could say the jobs that I do remember were the **GREATEST HITS** of my youth.