DOLLARS AND SENSE

Helene Pappas

(1) I could have worked at the "Home of the Whopper." Employment was also available where "They do it all for you." But when nearing college costs prompted me to find a job, I put in my application at a small sloganless cafe on the ground level of a medical center. Although "Roger's Cafe" isn't one of the ever-popular fast food franchises, its many hidden benefits made my job a learning experience far beyond that of the average teenager.

(2) As my first day of work began, I had no idea of the responsibilities that were an essential part of this job. However, listening to my boss explain and demonstrate many of my newly-bestowed duties, I suddenly realized that for $2.80 an hour I was about to become cook, cashier, waitress, dishwasher and general manager all in one. The immediate thought of this work load horrified me; however, I was able to put my seemingly impossible duties into perspective after comparing them to the maniac lunch hours "McDonald's" employees must deal with or the deep-fryer burns to which "Kentucky Fried Chicken" workers are subject.

(3) Another aspect of my job not immediately apparent to me was the dire need to organize time both off and on duty. But I quickly learned to budget my time after spending several occasions cleaning up forty-five minutes after work (my boss didn't pay overtime) and then going home to watch the sun rise as I completed my homework. During the two years I worked, I heard similar accounts from my friends who also held part-time jobs. Their stories helped me to realize I wasn't alone in my struggle to budget time.

(4) Although learning to handle responsibility and learning to organize time were both benefits of my job, the variety of people whom I met is what really provided a learning experience unavailable in most jobs. I befriended nurses, doctors, and office workers who would take a break from their day to come in, relax and share their thoughts. Of course, I also encountered the more obnoxious persons such as the registered nurse from first floor who always asked if I sterilized my hands before preparing her food or the middle-aged man who thought he was "cute" to be flirting with a seventeen-year-old girl while his wife was at a doctor's appointment. On a regular basis, I also dealt with the live-in patients of the hospital. Every day that I worked I would receive a short visit from both Bob, the quadriplegic in his mechanical wheelchair, and Fred, the old man who, wavering between sanity and senility, would change his personality each time I saw him. Because of these people I was privileged to meet, I grew in a way the average worker doesn't really have a chance to grow.