

Shawna Estis

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SE: I'm status Indian, according to the Constitution.

Q: What band do you belong to?

SE: Little Grand Rapids First Nation in Manitoba.

Q: Have you ever visited that band?

SE: Yes, mostly when I was little.

Q: What kind of things do you remember about that place?

SE: I remember that it was a fly-in community. We would fly from Winnipeg in a small airplane that only takes ten people maximum, maybe not even that, I don't even know. And I remember we were traveling by boat a lot visiting my cousins and relatives.

Q: Why would you have to travel by boat?

SE: Because there were no roads. There was lots of lakes and rivers around the community, and even just to get to the store we'd have to get on a boat and travel across the lake to the store.

Q: Do you know why the store wasn't closer by?

SE: No, I didn't know why.

Q: Because the company that supplies food there is not owned by the band, so they're not allowed to build on the reserve. Ok, so what was your first language?

SE: English.

Q: Do you speak anything else?

SE: No, not fluently. I'm learning Cree in school right now.

Q: How's that going?

SE: It's going pretty well. I've noticed a lot of similarities with languages my mom speaks. She speaks a type, and I sort of recognize Cree words that are similar.

Q: Have you ever asked her why she didn't teach you that language?

SE: She used to tell me when I was little that she didn't remember how to speak it. But then she'd be on the phone all day with relatives speaking the language.

Q: Where were you raised?

SE: I was born and raised in Edmonton.

Q: What part of the city?

SE: We lived in Mill Woods on the southeast side of Edmonton.

Q: When did you move away from Mill Woods?

SE: I was in grade 4, so I think that was, gosh my math is bad; nine or ten.

Q: Then where did you move to?

SE: We moved to a neighbourhood called Aspen Gardens in more central south.

Q: What jobs have you had since you were 15?

SE: Since the thrift store, I worked at Shoppers Drug Mart. I worked at London Drugs; I worked at a clothing store in the mall. I've done volunteer work when I went to Centre High after high school, and I've just done a bunch of random volunteer work here and there since then, as well. After Centre High, when I volunteered there, it was at the same time I worked at Shoppers. After Shoppers I started working at Student Care with insurance plans.

Q: What was your job like at Shoppers?

SE: With Shoppers I would drive to work and then I would go into the store and check in with my little card, after putting my stuff away in the lockers in the back. When I worked. . .

Q: Did they require that you put your stuff away before clocking in?

SE: Yes. They would tell us to only swipe the card when we were about to leave the back break room, and to actually enter the ground to start the shift. The card swiping correlated with your shift, so if I worked 9 to 5, for example, they wouldn't want me clocking in at 8:55 because they wouldn't pay the 8:55 to 9 o'clock time. So it had to match your shift. I had to clock in right when I was supposed to start and then clock out when I was supposed to end.

Q: Did that strike you as kind of weird?

SE: Yes, I thought it was a little weird. The computer would tell me what time I would clock in, and from there they'd be able to figure out to pay me only for my agreed-upon hours.

Q: Did you ever clock out late?

SE: All the time.

Q: Did you get paid for clocking out late?

SE: Yes, you'd get paid for clocking out late, but not for clocking in early.

Q: Once you'd clocked in, what happened next?

SE: It depends on which shift I was working that day. If I was in the cosmetics area, we had a shared cash register, so I wouldn't have to count anything beforehand or do accounts. The only time I'd have to do accounting was at the end of a shift. If the cosmetics department was closing, I would have to take the cash back. But for the most part I'd just go into the area and start helping clients. Any time I'd need to go for a break, I'd have to go into the break room and do the clocking out with the swipe card, and do my break, and then clock back in when I was done my break. The day mostly consisted of helping clients with the items they wanted to buy.

Q: Did you ever ask why was there a different process for the cash in cosmetics than at the front of the store?

SE: I didn't really think to ask about that, no. . . . I think maybe it couldn't have been because there was only two cashiers in the cosmetics department, but there was usually three or four people working in the department, whereas in the front area when I was a cashier I would have to start the day by counting the register they wanted me to work on and making sure that I was there. Then at the end of the day, I'd have to cash out.

Q: How did you get there? You said you drove?

SE: Yes, I drove, because I had my license.

Q: Was that one of the main reasons you got a license? Was it easier finding jobs after you had a license?

SE: Yes, definitely it was. When I was looking for jobs, I remember at the time a lot of the requirement was to have reliable transportation to and from the location.

Q: Where did you work after Shoppers?

SE: I worked at a clothing store after Shoppers Drug Mart, in a mall.

Q: How was that different, as far as your interaction with customers?

SE: It wasn't different with the customers, but it was different with co-workers and other employees. The position was a lot more independent, and I didn't see any of the managers or supervisors at that particular time. I just had one other co-worker the entire time I worked at that clothing store.

Q: How did you feel about the absence of an on-site supervisor?

SE: I think it was more stressful, because there was nobody to turn to. The co-worker wouldn't always have the same shift as me, so sometimes I'd be working completely alone. But there were still tasks that had to be done. I specifically remember our manager saying that they check the cameras to make sure we do all the things they wanted us to do in a day. That was a little strange.

Q: Did you ever run into disgruntled clients?

SE: Yes, I've experienced disgruntled customers in pretty much every job that I've had, because every job I've had is in customer service, or was in customer service. Usually, I'd just try to de-escalate the situation. I would recognize that they weren't angry or upset with me in particular, so I would just try to handle the situation kindly. In the end, in customer service, they teach you that the customer is always right. So even though they're upset at something that perhaps I didn't do, it was good to let them be upset and to listen to their reasonings behind their dissatisfaction. Mostly it was just easier to let them have what they wanted. It was something like, oh the price of this item is coming up for \$2 more, for example, it should be this. When you're selling products at a store, there's certain practises that should be adhered to, and correcting the price right on the spot is one of those things that you have to do when you're selling consumer products or goods.

Q: Did you see escalations happen between customers and coworkers that didn't need to happen?

SE: I think so. Also, just understanding policies and, I won't say rules because they weren't really rules, but just policies behind how to handle certain situations. A lot of times it's usually just a computer error, so fixing something that somebody is upset about is easier. I supposed, yes, the anger is unnecessary. I think it speaks to maybe how other people handle situations, thinking that in a customer service setting raising your voice or being angry solves it. Anyway, it doesn't need to get to that, is what I'm saying.

Q: Takes us through a workday in the mall.

SE: My day started either driving or walking to work, because I lived near the mall that I worked at. I had a key; I was the keyholder. So, I'd have to open the gates to open the store up. I'd go to the back, grab the cash register, count the cash register, and then wait for customers to come in. On the down times, I would have to do tidying and things like that, usually dusting and cleaning the mirrors, so that when people were trying on clothes they'd have clean mirrors. There were lots of fingerprints on the mirrors.

Q: What would happen at the end of the day?

SE: At the end of the day I'd close the gate to the store so no customers would come in, and then I would have to sweep and mop the floors, and put the cash register in the back in the safe.

Q: In all of those service jobs, how was the relationship with management?

SE: They were all pretty good. The thrift store was good; London Drugs and Shoppers Drug Mart were also both pretty good. The clothing store was a bit questionable. Management wasn't around, and in fact that was the only job that I've ever had where it actually ended up going badly, where the last few weeks went unpaid. I suppose I was hired when the business was faltering, and management was filing for bankruptcy. They made me work for three weeks unpaid.

Q: How did that happen?

SE: Actually, what happened was that one day I'd gone to work to open the store, of course, and there were the people at the mall. I guess that are involved with the leasing of the space, and they told me that I couldn't open the store. They asked me if I was the manager. I was like, "I don't know anything about it." That was very unfortunate, the first situation I ever had where I wasn't paid, or there was shady business going on, I guess. I'm not sure.

Q: Was that at the end of a pay period? I assume you got paid once every two weeks.

SE: Yes.

Q: So, was that at the tail end of that pay period? How did your pay get three weeks behind?

SE: Well, the managers - they were a married couple, the managers. They were on vacation for a couple of weeks and they had said that when they came back, they would pay us, my colleague and me. They were understaffed and there were only two of us, so I guess we were both kind of excited about working sort of overtime-ish, because they would pay us extra for having to work over 40 hours a week. It wasn't a lot over 40, but it was a decent amount if it was time and a half.

But they had gone on vacation and said they would pay us when they got back. Then they never came back from vacation and never paid us.

Q: What did you do?

SE: I went through, I can't remember exactly what it was called. I put a complaint in with Employment Standards, that's what it was called, but it didn't end up doing anything. I still didn't get paid, but what happened was I received in the mail a copy of the documentation that was submitted for the managers' bankruptcy stuff. Of course, I was not familiar with that whole thing and didn't really know what was going on.

Q: Did you think that Employment Standards helped you?

SE: No.

Q: Do you think they kind of helped the management?

SE: Yes, I think so. I think it definitely was not beneficial for me at all.

Q: What was the job like with the insurance company?

SE: I would start the day by traveling to campus, usually by LRT and bus, or bus first and then the LRT. Our office was in the Students Union Building. We worked with the student associations at the University of Alberta, so we had our office in their building. There were three work stations or three computer desks in the office, and I would basically just enter. I'd sit down at my station and log in; I had my user name and password. We didn't have an onsite manager; our manager was managing another office in a different province. But they were always available by telephone, and I did all my training over the phone and over the computer. It was not overly comprehensive, the position itself, mostly dealing with computer stuff, and we'd have clients come in to ask questions. It was probably one of the easier jobs I've ever had, because I didn't have to do much except type on my computer. I was fairly good at typing, I suppose.

Q: Were the files mostly digital?

SE: Yes, everything was digitized; we hardly ever dealt with paper at all. It wasn't something I was used to at that time, having everything on computer.

Q: How did you feel about the training on the computer? You mentioned it wasn't very comprehensive.

SE: It was just something I wasn't as familiar with, the training over the phone and on the computer, because I have always had managers that would train me in person, face-to-face. So, this position I had in the office on campus didn't have an onsite manager, and we were doing a lot of independent work.

Q: Did you rely on your co-workers?

SE: When I first started working there, I sort of learned by watching them interact with the clients. If I didn't know how to do a certain thing, they would tell me how to do it, on the computer, for example. We sort of helped each other out a lot of the times, because we didn't have a manager or supervisor directly with us.

Q: How was it working with the clients?

SE: It was definitely a different experience working, and it wasn't working with an insurance company, it was for insurance companies. We worked with insurance companies but we worked in the insurance company, if that makes sense. Our company, Student Care, was a care administrator. They would come up with a plan that matched or benefitted the students' association at large, like all the students involved in that association. I think because of the product that was supplied with the insurance plans, that made the interactions with the clients different than what I've experienced previously, because the insurance plans had to do with health and dental expenses. Medical stuff is not cheap, I guess, so money was on the line I guess, if that makes sense.

Q: So, was it more touchy, where clients were more concerned about the minutia?

SE: Yes, clients were a lot more concerned with the product they were receiving and whatnot.

Q: Did that affect how they treated you?

SE: Sometimes, when they would be dissatisfied with the product, usually anger is the first feeling they had, and they'd express their anger towards me, because I'd be their first person of contact that they could potentially deal with to fix the problem.

Q: Did your previous experience in customer service help you deal with that?

SE: Definitely. My experience in customer service was also one of the requirements of the position. I think it was at least two years of customer service experience was required to get the position that I had on campus there.

Q: In the last couple of years, would you say that indigenating has played a larger part in your life?

SE: Yes. I think, especially in university, I think it's played a larger part in my life. In this current state of affairs with indigenous peoples in Canada, I think that more people are paying attention to the history of how Canada came to be and at what expense.

Q: How do you feel about this idea about a strengthening of your indigenating in work and life as you're working a working life these last couple of years?

SE: I think working in customer service, especially at Student Care, getting to know people, getting to know clients was part of, getting to know clients was a little bit different because of the product that we supply, health and dental stuff. It sort of prompted me to look at my whole experience in that area and made me evaluate how I interact with people. I'm not really sure how to answer this question. Off the record. . .

[END]