

All of My Bosses' First Jobs

The Thompson's Babysitter

Mrs. Jayson had also been a babysitter when she was my age. On the porch of her house, we watched her twins playing on a play structure of primary colors, and she told me that she'd babysat for a family with twins when she was a teen. "Thank God for that," she smiled at me, "Maybe someday you'll have twins too."

Camp Counselor at Firesong

Technically I was a volunteer counselor because Camp Firesong didn't pay their staff, but Casper—that was his counselor name. I can't remember his actual name—regularly told me after our weekly staff meetings that it was okay to talk to him about anything, that he didn't want the fact that he was my boss to make me feel uncomfortable. "Oh," I said, "I didn't realize you were my boss." He said, technically yes, he was, but the counselor who had been his first boss was now one of his best friends, and he hoped to continue that kind of relationship at camp.

Daughter of Morris Jansen who began Jansen Farms

I don't think Lesley had officially ever had a job. She'd grown up on the farm she now owned, and when I told her I couldn't cut the weeds around the strawberries because that plant gave me hives, she looked down at the leathery skin on her arms and frowned.

Server at Chuck E Cheese

Jeremy felt like my first boss because he didn't pay me in cash or with his personal checks. Also, he just looked right; when I heard the word "boss" someone like Jeremy appeared in my mind. While explaining the espresso machine to me, he told me how grateful he was to find someone willing to take the overnight shift. I came to love those late hours. I could finish homework assignments and make the occasional double shot cocoa smoothie for the stoned kids who walked through the drive through late at night. No one was there watching over me, and I felt a sense of freedom that was hard to find in other areas of my life at that time. Or at least that's what I thought. On one of my days off Jeremy left a message on my cell phone to say that he was going through the footage from the coffee shack's security camera, and he couldn't help but notice that I was doing a really good job of regularly wiping the counters. He wanted to promote me. He said that when he entered the service industry, his manager had only noticed the things he did wrong. He wasn't like that. I stayed another month at the coffee shack, but now that I knew about the security cameras, the place gave me the heebie jeebies. I felt like Jeremy was there with me in the shack but unannounced, like he was hiding under the register or in the closet where we kept the trash.

Sales Clerk at Borders

Jameel said I was lucky to get the work-study position in the library. He'd had to wait a year for a spot to open, but once they needed someone he was an easy pick. "Because I worked at a bookstore back in Lawrence. I have a lot of experience with books." I tried to think of a reason

why the staff had chosen me for this position. "I used to work at a summer camp," I tried. "Yeah," Jameel said, "I know."

Paper Delivery Boy for The Wabash County Herald

It wasn't until I'd been at the company for a year that I found out what Brock's first job had been. "I was a paperboy," he told me when I finally asked him at a coffee shop where I planned to ask for a raise. This was the small talk that I had prepared. We'd joke about our first jobs and then eventually we'd discuss the fact that I had been working at the gallery for a year now. This would allow me to begin making my case for a raise. But then, bringing our cappuccinos back from the register, he told me, "You know, when I was younger, when I was your age, all I wanted was more experience. I wanted to gain skills. Money wasn't really as important." He nodded towards a couple leaving a table by the window. "I bet you feel similarly," he said placing the cups on the table, "So I want to know, what is it you want to do for the gallery in your second year?"