

Veronica Wood
 Assistant Food Service Manager, Oak Grove Elementary School
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...Oak Grove Elementary and what is your name and how would you like us to pronounce it?

Ms. Woods. Ms. Woods, I'm Assistant Food Service Manager here in the cafeteria.

And where do you live?

I live in Stone Mountain.

Hi, I'm Allen.. What inspired you to be a lunch lady?

Well, it's partly first of all, because of my small kids and I like the schedule for the school program. So the schedule with the schools I'm out the same time my kids are.

What is your title like---

Assistant Food Service Manager. Ms. Johnson is the manager, I'm the Assistant Food Service Manager. It's just like Mr. Tippins, Mr. Tippins is the principal and Ms. Dillard is his assistant.

Okay. Hi, I'm Sarah Dennis and I have a couple of questions. What is your favorite thing about being the Assistant Food Manager?

Mostly I like to deal with you all, the wonderful kids. I like to get to know each and every one individually.

Where do you get most of your recipes? Like is it assigned by the county or---

All of our recipes countywide. They just made all of them state approval, so all of them now is from the county. A long time ago it used to be like the grandmothers and ... ancestors used to bring in their own recipes, but now all of them are countywide.

Okay. Thank you.

Hi, my name is Joanne Martin and I have a question. When did you come to Oak Grove and how long have you been here?

This is my sixth year in the school. When I came here, this is my ... school ... and this is my third school but I've been in the county for six years.

Any other questions? No.

I'm Caroline Sales and I have some questions. Have long have you had the job in the cafeteria?

Six years.

Do you ever get recipes from other people or do you always like make them up?

Well, we used to get recipes from other people years ago, but like I said before, they are all countywide now so everyone has the same recipes.

Caroline, when you are interviewing you look at your interview... Okay. We're recording quiet on the set.

When did you come to Oak Grove?

Six years.

When did you come?

When did I come? I come the school year of '96, which was in August.

You guys ... kind of loud in here. Have you gotten used to the sound or how do you feel about the noise in the ... Put that microphone near her mouth please.

It's loud for the people who are not used to it, but I've gotten adjusted to it. It's just like regular---like me holding a conversation now. A lot of people come in and they hear the ice machine and they are like ooh what's that, what's that? And we're like it's the ice machine.

At first, did you get a headache?

No.

Hi, my name is ... and I've got a couple of questions. One is, how long does it take you to make the majority of your food?

Oh very good question. That depends on what it is. Take like if you remember the---last week I think it was when it was chicken pot pie. It takes a little longer to fix chicken pot pie opposed to hamburgers, because the hamburgers are pre-cooked, but the chicken pot pie you have to do everything from scratch.

What is your favorite food that you make for the school cafeteria?

Probably the hamburgers and the pizza like ya'll. I like that good stuff too.

Thank you.

Hi, my name is Austin Allen and I would like to ask you a question. What were you working as before you came to Oak Grove?

That's a good question Austin. I worked at Kroger for 15 years going on sixteen years and I've been in food service for over 20 years, so when I come back to the county it was just a better job.

Hi, I'm Haley ... and I have a question for you. Do you like ... the food?

Do I like many of the things? A lot of the food that's here? Yeah, some of it I do and some of it I don't. I'm sad to say that I'm a picky eater. So a lot of the stuff I like and a lot of the stuff I don't like. What about you Haley?

I like the pizza and the cheeseburgers.

I understand you help Mr. Tippins make the biscuits on Fridays. How did that get started?

Well, when Mr. Tippins hired me for the Assistant Food Service Manager position he asked me would I mind helping him on Friday mornings because he does biscuits for the staff. I thought that was a great idea so I didn't mind doing it. So I've been doing it ever since I started, which I like.

So how early do you have to get here and all that stuff?

Well I get here every day matter of fact between 6:30 and sometime after 5:00. It depends on if he has something that he has to do extra and then we'll come a little earlier, but the majority of the time it's 6:30.

Most of the teachers have to stay and work until 4:00 o'clock, do the lunch staff also have to do that?

No, the good thing about us we be here at 7:00 o'clock. Our schedule is from 7:00 to 1:30.

Like on teacher workdays do you guys have to come?

We don't come here on teacher workdays because there wouldn't be no need because the students are not here, but we do have staff development so we do have to go there.

You work on---what age did you get influenced to become a lunch assistant manager?

What age was I? Ooh that means I got to tell my age don't I? I guess I was 37. I was 37 when I came in the county food service, but like I said I've been in food service for way over 20 years. I like to cook and you can look at me and tell I like to eat. So that's good.

You said you have kids, how many do you have and what are their names?

I'm not for sure whether you all remember Cornicia when Cornicia was here. Yeah. She was here last year. Cornicia is mine, now she is in the sixth grade. Then I have one that's Courtney. Cornicia is 12 and Courtney is 9. And then also...

I'm sorry. Courtney don' go here this year. She went to her home school.

Did she go here last year?

Mm-hmm. Courtney was here for two years. She's in the fourth grade now.

Everyone that come in food service, only people that are allowed in the kitchen while we are preparing food is the food service workers and that's all. We have to wear hairnets, we have to wear aprons. We have to wash our hands every---for instance if we are preparing pizza we cannot stop---we have to stop doing pizza, go wash our hands and then prepare the fish because it's called cross contamination.

Would it mess up the food?

It wouldn't mess up the food, but by the pizza is not cooked good and the fish is not cooked good, you've heard of Salmonella?

Yes.

It's something like that.

Do you ever have a order of any of your food---do you ever order any of your food or do you make it all?

We have a menu and in a few minutes I'll get the menu out and show you it---what the menu is. Every school system has a menu where the county sends it down every month. So it's a menu that we have to follow and go by.

Did every lunch lady bring their own recipes from their own home?

Of course, when our grandmothers---I'm pretty sure your grandmothers and great grandmothers when they was in the cafeteria those were the homemade recipes. I mean not necessarily saying homemade, but those were where the people ... brought their own recipes from home, but now the recipes are standardized where everybody has to have the same recipe.

Does the county use of those home recipes anymore for the kids at all?

Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge they don't because there is a lot of preparation in those. So now they are trying to go ... and trying to accommodate you all to be more nutritious.

Why do you need hairnets?

Well that's a good question Allen. We wear hairnets because we don't want our hair in the food.

...

It wouldn't be tasty at all matter of fact.

Did we ask all the questions that you would like to have? Do you ever like when you are eating here, do you order food or bring food from home here or do you normally just eat the school food?

Sometimes I do, but the majority of the times I don't. I eat what we have here for you all. Because I feel like if its good enough for you all to eat, it's good enough for me to eat.

A lot of times and if you come in here, like Ms. Kelly is having a baby and a lot of times she has to have ... water so we'll come in and ask for some ice for her and ... will be sitting down eating lunch and it's usually the school lunch. Do you have to pay for the school lunch like the \$1.25 that we pay or does that come out of your salary or what?

Good question Sarah. No, by us working in the cafeteria our lunch is free. Our lunch is free. But if we did pay it would be \$1.85 along with the teachers.

How come the teachers is more money than the students?

Because they get everything where you all have a choice. Where you all have a choice to get like the day that we had fish and hamburgers we had fries...
Yeah. They can get it all. Plus tea. And then a refill.

I have a question, when people used to bring their recipes from home, what kind of recipes were they?

As far as myself back---not when I come to the county, but in other places I had I mostly just---whatever the customer liked. If the customer come up and the majority ... when I used to cook at a Kroger's---when I used to be with Kroger, a lot of the customer's wanted homemade chicken and dumplings, so that was a recipe that I did every Tuesday homemade chicken and dumplings.

All right. Is there anything that you've been asked that you would like to ...

No. That's pretty much it. You all did good. I think the questions was good. The only thing when you come back here and we ask for you all not to come back here when we are preparing food it is real important. Because a lot of times if you come back we never know when the health inspector comes and if the health inspector comes and catches anyone back here other than the food service we are shut down.

Ooh.

Yeah.

The whole school?

The kitchen. The kitchen. We get a big fine. I don't know how many hundreds or thousands of dollars and then the second time it's shut down.

Have you ever been in a school that got shut down?

Not when I was in school, but when I was at Kroger's where some people was back there when they were not supposed to be and the health inspector come and they shut the market down for a whole day. So that was about \$40,000 or \$50,000 that they had lost just in that one day.

What happens what do they eat?

That's a good question. I'm really not sure, because once it is shut down you can't serve.

....

I'm not---to be honest I'm not for sure. I don't know whether they call their parents. I don't know whether they would shut us down the first day. I know once you start touring the school I'm going to show you the score that we get. That's why it is real important for us to keep everything clean, that we wash our hands, wear our hairnets and our aprons, wear our gloves, because we have a score that we have to keep. We have to keep it at a good score. And all of ya'll I'm pretty sure go into restaurants and eat. That's what you look for when you go in a restaurant. Look and see what type of score they have. If it is a high score that means it's a good, nice, clean restaurant. But if you get a low score I wouldn't eat there myself.

.....

The highest score is 100, which is like on your report cards and stuff, it's a 100. A bad score would be anything under 80. Yeah, anything under 80 is a bad score I think. Yes.

What is the highest score you have ever gotten?

100.

What is the score of the school?

Our score now is a 94 and we got a 94 because a couple of things was in our refrigerator that wasn't supposed to be. Mr. Tippins stuff, the teacher's stuff.

What was the lowest score we've ever gotten?

If I can remember right, I think the lowest score we got was a 90.

.....

Uh no, we just get 100 and it would be good if we can get---I think we got a 100 for like three straight years and then we went to a 90 because like I said somebody had stuff in here and then when they come there was somebody back here when they wasn't supposed to be back here and we got docked for that. We get docked for every single thing.

...if you got shut down for some reason, could people from other schools bring in food from there?

That's a good question. Like I said, I'm really not for sure how they does it in the school system because I've never been in a school where the health department had to shut it down.

Has this school ever been shut down?

Not to my knowledge. All I know---I'm going by from when I was at Kroger's because a lot of people was back there when they wasn't supposed to be back there and something was done that they wasn't supposed too. For instance, I think one incident was we didn't have no hot water and you have to have hot water every time you serve food.

You couldn't buy anything from the store?

You couldn't buy anything from the deli and the meat department. It had a red tag. You could buy stuff off the shelf in the cans and frozen food, but you couldn't buy nothing from the

I have a couple of questions. What if someone is right in the door and asking you a question about a container of ice?...

No, as long as they come to the door and ask one of us to give you ice that's fine. That's fine. We can give you ice all day.

Is it a surprise like when they come or do you know when they are coming?

That's the bad thing about it we never know. They always just come.

.....

Right. They want to see how clean we keep everything all the time. They want to see---right, right. That's a good thing---

.....

That's right.

... ticket or does anyone like ... like if um, check if everything is you know...

No, only us. Even if the health inspector comes Mr. Tippins is not allowed back there because he is not a food service employee. He can come back here and you know maybe just talk to them and walk back out, but as far as back here doing anything, no. Only the food service personnel only.

Do you get rated once a year or do you get rated every ... months?

We have---the health inspector has come here twice so far. Mostly, if it's a good score they won't just come back. But if you have anything 80 or less they might pop up every month and they might pop up every two months.

.....

No, I haven't been in a school, but I heard of one happening I think it was last year before we got out. I'm not for sure what school, so I'm glad, I don't want to call the name. There was an incident where some workers was outside, they had a bee hive---it was a wasp nest I think outside the kitchen and someone was spraying it down and they put it in a trash bag and the person asked them to throw it away, but they missed interpreted and they put it in the walk in. When they put it in the walk in they had some brownies that they had already cooked and they almost served the brownies, but they didn't serve them. It was contaminated with the spray.

How did they figure out to not ...

One of the workers tasted it and they knew it tasted it like some spray.

A lot of times I buy lunch and when you are sitting at the counter doing cashier you don't have to wear a hair net, so is that just because you don't handle the food? Is that the reason?

Yes. Yes. That's because I don't handle the food, I only just do cashier. But the workers as you can see when you come through, everybody on the line has a hairnet on.

...got to do our tour.

Have you ever had a problem with like cockroaches or ants anywhere?

No, we don't have cockroaches, but ants will be bad during the summer. For instance, like if we started to clean and if we leave some crumbs on the floor that nobody didn't sweep or mop, when we come in that morning you will have ants.

Do you have say no if you don't have money for like more than three days and you have three charges, is that a county thing or is that a school thing?

That's a county thing. That's a county thing. As a matter of fact, the cash register that I be sitting at, it only allows you to take three charges. \$3.75 that's the max and once you reach \$3.75 it won't let you charge anymore.

One more question.

Once you pay back the \$3.75 can you charge again?

Yes, you can. You sure can.

What happens if you don't have your money and you have charged the \$3.75?

You get a peanut butter and honey sandwich. I know because it has happened to me a bunch of times.

We don't like for it to happen. I be trying to tell kids all the time don't let it happen. I remind them. All of you know, you know me and I'll be like please be sure, be sure.

I remember just like three years ago we started having the ... where you have to type in your pin number, why did we start doing that? In first grade we didn't do that, so why did we start doing that?

That's a good question. That's a county thing also. A lot of times---okay now that pin number right there that will take you out till the 12th grade. You will have the same pin number from when you started until when you get out of school. As long as you stay in a Dekalb County School you will have the same pin number. If you switch and go to another county then they will have to give you another county, but as long as you are in Dekalb County you will have the same pin number.

Is there a reason for having them like so nobody can...

Yeah. It's just like you use the same pin number when you got to check books out of the library. Your pin number is the same. So that's so nobody---that they will know...

So they will know who...

Right. So they will know exactly who---just for instance, I'm not for sure, I can't remember the baby's name, when she came in she punched in someone else's number by mistake. I'm like why you don't have no money? She said I'm thinking I punched in somebody else's number and I asked for her name and I said yes, that was the wrong number. So I voided that one out and when she punched in her right number it gave me her name. That's why I know all of ya'll by name because each time you punch your number in your name is going to show up.

...

Some of you not all of you.

... tour...we've got about five minutes.

... pin numbers ... 12th grade, so your same pin number now goes to Shamrock and Lakeside?

Yes, it does. The same pin number.

...

Yes. Yes.

What if ... high school...

If you are Lakeside you have the same number.

Why ...

As soon as you walk in it should be right by the register. Somewhere over on the wall by the register as soon as you walk in. It's going to be up top ... sometimes

....

A lot of people when they do a ... sometimes you

Okay. We---tell us what's what because I think they are going to have to take off. Oh my gosh. Okay guys what did you learn?

(Cross talk)

That's the office.

That's where you have to wash your hands. Those are the freezers.

Okay guys, you know what ... because it's like 4:15 now. Some of your folks might be out there. So let's go. Okay.

(Cross talk)

This is another freezer and right inside there that's an ice machine. ...the noise, the loud noises... hand soap.

....

Yes. Yes.

How old is all this equipment?

.....This equipment is over 15 ... the only thing that is new is the warmer and the refrigerator. This is the oldbiscuits every Friday morning.

Hey guys

(Cross talk)

... when the health inspector comes ... and you start to do something else then you wash your hands. ... wash your hands for 26 seconds. Can you say you're ABC's? Then that's 26 seconds. Sometimes in your mind you'll be saying

Guys I think we are going to have to say thank you. Okay let's go on back. That's for making dough I think.