

# GONE



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For information address

Mags, Inc.

P.O. Box 5829

Sherman Oaks, CA 91413

USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

[www.magsinc.com](http://www.magsinc.com)

# GONE

By Jeri Ellen

I never knew my father. He took off shortly after I was born. He did provide child support to my mother but he never came back to see us again.

She had finished nursing school after they had been first married and was working the night shift at a local hospital. We managed and were not in desperate straits by any means but mom kept us on a strict budget.

Mom never talked about him except to say that he didn't want to be with us anymore and that I should consider him dead. She never mentioned him again and I didn't bring him up.

My childhood was about as normal as you might expect. I didn't have a lot of "things" that other kids had but there was a roof over my head, a clean bed to sleep in and three healthy meals a day.

We had a computer, printer and internet access which my mother deemed more important than a big screen TV, video games, etc.

Our TV had a 21 inch screen and our cell phones were the plain, ordinary ones not the expensive "smart" ones that some of the kids had.

In the basement of our duplex were a stationary bike and a treadmill. We made good use of both when we were not able to bike or hike outdoors in the many parks that were close by.

We ate a healthy diet and I was not allowed junk food, soft drinks or energy drinks. Except for an occasional glass of wine that my mother enjoyed there was no alcohol in our house either.

At school I earned good grades and I played soccer. I wasn't particularly crazy about sports but I did it because it pleased mom.

Mom seldom dated and most of our free time was spent outdoors. I enjoyed the peace and tranquility of the lakes and parks close to home as opposed to the noise and congestion of the city not far from the small suburb where we lived.

After my junior year mom sat me down and asked me what I wanted to do in life. I really didn't have the slightest idea. With just a year left of school it was the right time to be thinking about a career. I just didn't have an interest in any particular area.

I loved our computer and the access the internet offered but staring at the screen eight to ten hours a day didn't appeal to me much. Digging a fifty grand hole for a college degree with unknown job prospects didn't sound like much fun either.

Her advice was to think about several things and stay abreast of the job market for those things. Sign up just before graduation and if the course isn't what you thought it was going to be change to your second or third choice.

Once you graduate you will probably be in that field for the rest of your life so choose carefully.

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Sometimes at night I would hear her words in my mind. I really was stuck for a career choice. Perhaps I could combine my love of the quiet of the outdoors with an employment choice.

I wasn't a total introvert. I had many friends at school but did enjoy being off by myself. Not many jobs offered solitude as one of the side benefits. I guess I just had to keep looking and weighing the various career options that might be available to me in a year.

My part time job doing stock work in a department store at a nearby mall helped me build up some savings. This was in addition to mowing lawns and shoveling snow for several of the seniors who lived nearby.

I stayed away from the sales floor as I had heard numerous employees talk about the assholes they sometimes run into that would ruin their day at the very beginning or spoil a good day by coming in just as they were about to finish their shift.

This knowledge gave me an extra incentive to find something I could do pretty much by myself thereby avoiding dealing with the sometimes not so friendly general public.

Working for myself sounded like the best option as my neighbors always paid me well but to do it full time and get enough business to support myself was

doubtful. I resigned myself to the fact that I was going to have to work for someone else in some field before striking out on my own.

My senior year went by quickly. I disappointed my counselor and mom by not signing up for a school. I decided that I would work for a year or two and then see where the job markets were the strongest before picking a career.

A week before graduation mom keeled over at work and couldn't be revived. Her death left me alone in the world. From now on I was going to have to face everything by myself.

I notified my dad but now that I was eighteen those child support checks had stopped several months ago. I never did hear from him. Now mom was gone too.

It was several months before the estate was settled. I kept the car and got rid of her things. The duplex seemed very empty without her.

Financially all the funeral expenses were paid and so were the other bills. There was enough cash left over for me to live on for about a year but then I would have to get by on what I was making.

The part time job I had wasn't going to cut it so I intensified my job search for something full time. There was not a lot to pick from and most of those jobs, especially at the temp agencies didn't pay very well plus the fact that the majority of those jobs were industrial and I wasn't crazy about working in that kind of environment.

One of the women I worked with gave me a tip on an opening for a night janitor at a small women's college just west of the Twin Cities.

I checked out the ad for Woodland College on the internet and found they were an all women's liberal arts college. It had been founded almost a hundred years ago by Dorothy Woodland, the wife of a wealthy businessman.

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I sent them an email indicating my interest in the janitorial position.

They replied back right away and invited me to come out and fill out their formal application.

I was very happy to hear from them so quickly.

The next day I put on a suit and tie and drove to the campus. I parked in the visitor lot in front of the admin building.

The campus was beautiful. The lawn, shrubs and trees were well manicured. The buildings were well maintained. It was a picture perfect campus. I walked up the steps and went inside.

The woman at the reception desk handed me an application and a pen. I filled it out and handed it back to her.

"They will call you if they want to interview you," she said with a smile.

I left and went home.

My cell phone rang at four pm just as I was leaving for work. The woman on the phone stated

that I had a nine am interview on Friday with a Ms. Sandra Trowbridge. I thanked her and she hung up.

I wasn't scheduled for work that Friday. The night before my interview I didn't sleep well. I guess I was a bit apprehensive. I was financially secure for awhile but I really needed this job to keep me going.

Arriving on time Friday morning I was directed to an office down the hall from the reception desk. When I entered the office a woman got up and smiled at me.

"Hi, I am Bobby Dunn. I have a nine am appointment with Ms. Trowbridge,"

"Please sit down Bobby she will be with you shortly,"

I took a seat and waited.

In a few minutes a well dressed woman came out of the inner office. Like the receptionist her hair and make up was perfect. She stood before me and held out her hand.

"I am Ms. Sandra Trowbridge. Please come with me,"

I stood up, shook her hand, and followed her back to her office.

Inside I took a seat opposite her as she sat down at her desk.

"The position you are applying for is on our night cleaning staff. You will be responsible for the overall cleanliness of the interior of all of the buildings on campus. Your shift is ten pm to six am Monday through Friday,"

"Each night the trash will be emptied, liners replaced, the windows cleaned, the floors swept, the

restrooms and locker rooms will also be cleaned. In addition there may be other duties as assigned by your supervisor,”

“You will be required to wear a uniform and shoes which we will provide. In addition our founder firmly believed that cleanliness is next to Godliness. You will always have a clean, presentable appearance,”

“All of our employees must maintain a strict health regime. Failure to do so will result in your discharge. Do you understand all of our requirements and if you are hired do you agree to follow all of them Mr. Dunn?”

“Yes I do,” I answered.

“Good. Now other than your self employment doing lawn care and snow removal the only job you have had is at the department store correct?”

“Yes Ma’m that is correct,”

“Very well, that will be all. We will contact you if we decide to hire you. You will then receive information about wages and benefits as well as further pre employment instructions. Thank you for coming in,”

She stood up and extended her hand. I took it in mine and she gave me a firm handshake.

“Thank you for the interview Ms. Trowbridge,” I said and left the building.

A week went by. I wondered if I was going to hear from them. I had not pursued any other job possibilities. This college seemed like a decent place to work.

The night shift would leave my days free to do as I pleased. There would be little traffic going to work at night as well as leaving work early in the morning as most people wouldn't be on the road yet.

I received a phone call from Ms. Trowbridge on a Monday morning notifying me that I was hired. She stated I would receive a confirming letter of my hiring with wage and benefit information as well as more pre employment instructions.

I thanked her and hung up. Okay well now I had a full time job making my financial situation a little easier. My future was still a bit uncertain but I felt that I was young and able enough to carve something out for myself even if it was at a later date.

That afternoon I received her letter confirming my hire and starting wages of eleven fifty per hour and a fifty cent increase in ninety days upon completion of my probationary period. I was to wear an athletic support under my clothes when I reported to the clinic for a pre employment physical in two days. Following that I would begin work on the first of the month and report to a Louise Mendoza at the physical plant behind the admin building.

I turned in my two weeks notice to my supervisor at the department store when I reported for work that day. It felt good to be out of there though it hadn't been a bad place to work. At least now I would be making more money and would have my days free to sort out my future and what I was going to do.

When I reported to the clinic a nurse took me down the hall to an exam room. I undressed to my athletic support. A female doctor came in and gave me my physical. There was no conversation as she proceeded to do her job.

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As part of the exam she drew blood and collected a urine specimen. When I turned my head to the left and coughed she uttered “hmm” but said nothing. Usually when a doctor says something like that there might be a problem but she had made no comment so I didn’t ask any questions.

Next the nurse took measurements of the circumference of my head, neck, chest, waist, hips, wrist, hand and upper thighs, and finally my sleeve length as well as noting my shoe size.

I presumed this had something to do with my uniform but didn’t ask. I was prepared to give them whatever they needed to get the job. Finishing up the doctor gave me a shot in my buttocks from a very large needle and handed me a prescription.

“It’s part of your health regime,” she explained.  
“The pharmacy is in the basement,”

Next I was told to get dressed and report to another room in the basement. When I arrived at the suite it turned out to be a hair removal clinic. I was a bit taken aback as that was something more for women but I went inside anyway and checked in at the desk.

The woman smiled at me and escorted me to another room.

"Undress and lay on the table. Someone will be with you shortly,"

She left the room. I undressed and got on the table.

This seemed to be a bit odd but I was in no position to question the procedures I was going to have to undergo what ever they wanted me to in order to get the job so there was no point in wasting time asking a lot of questions.

Shortly two women in white came in the room. They stood on either side of the table.

"Just relax Bobby. This won't take long. Hair is dirty and so long as you work at Woodland you must keep yourself smooth and hair free,"

The girls turned on some equipment. With one on each side of the table I was lying on they moved a wand over my arms, legs and chest. After rolling me over they did my back side and then my underarms.

It was a pleasant experience. I felt none the worst for wear and tear as the girls finished and turned off their equipment.

"Stand up spread eagle please," said one of them.

I did so. Both women donned latex gloves and began smoothing my whole body with a white cream. I noticed that my skin had a tingling sensation and a slight reddish color almost like sunburn. The cream they applied felt good and the tingling sensation abated but I noted that I now had a slight feminine scent.