

Take this job and shove it

While some students work at summer dream jobs, others aren't as lucky

By Carrie Pierce
THE BATTALION

One night while working at a pool company in Houston, Kat Sjurseth, a junior international studies major, was told by her supervisor that there were lots of leaves in a pool that needed to be removed immediately due to a swim meet the next day. Sjurseth, unaware of the meet, decided to begin immediately, only to find that the team was there practicing, requiring her to wait until 8 p.m. before cleaning. Sjurseth ended up staying at the pool until 1 a.m.

"It was in the dark and in the back of a neighborhood in a bad area," Sjurseth said. "It was awkward for me being a 20-year-old girl to be out there alone."

As summer school begins and students set their alarm clocks and purchase books once more, others add valuable work experience like Sjurseth's to their resumes through jobs and internships. While there is always the fairy tale story of the perfect internship that helped one land a dream job or the job that paid twice minimum wage and didn't require working weekends, there are always horror stories of employment gone bad.

For the past five summers, Sjurseth has been employed by a Houston pool company that requires lifeguarding during the day and cleaning the pool when it closes. Sjurseth found her actual experience to be completely different than her job description.

"I had to deal with all of the problems," Sjurseth said. "I managed four pools when the supervisor should have."

Sjurseth said she was given complete control and was required to clean, lifeguard, do maintenance, make schedules, train, attend in services and train other employees. Sjurseth also had to deal with lots of paperwork.

"I was always the one who got the blame for everything," Sjurseth said. "I was overworked, underpaid and treated bad."

After working for the company for five years, she was hardly given the raise she expected.

"They told me they would give me a certain amount of money, then they paid me \$3 an hour less than what they said," she said.

Two summers ago, Charles Glover, a senior sociology major, spent his summer working from 7:30 a.m. to sundown on roofs in temperatures that exceeded 125 degrees.

"I stripped tiles off of the top of roofs in the middle of the day," Glover said. "I was also the new guy, so I had to carry shingles."

Glover carried approximately 50 to 85 pounds of shingles as the older guys badgered him and his friend.

A month into working, Glover's friend was dragged across the roof to its edge by the older employees with no apparent motive.

"He bled everywhere," Glover said. "They told me I was next."

The last day of work, a worker tried to throw Glover off the roof.

"I threw him off," Glover said.

Glover said he barely made it to work each day. On a typical day he would get off work, shower and melt into his bed and then slide out in the morning to start again.

"It was the worst job ever, and I dreaded each day," Glover said. "It showed me the importance of going to get an education so I wouldn't be roofing my entire life."

Brian Clancy, a senior petroleum engineering major, secured an internship overseas. Clancy, whose family resides in Venezuela, stayed at home for the summer working at a heavy crude oil drilling company alongside his father.

Aside from being the company's "gopher boy," Clancy also had to translate papers and pose as a security guard when they went out to the docks. He described the job as "busy-work with internship wages."

However, he said, internship wages in Venezuela are not high.

"I worked seven days a week and barely made \$120 a month," Clancy said. "My dad thought it was the funniest thing."

Clancy's father's amusement at the situation did not help. One day Clancy's father decided to play a practical joke on him, where Clancy's co-worker told Clancy he was going to go get lunch, and he left Clancy outside for seven hours dressed in a suit.

Clancy said his father played the joke on him so he could get real-world experience.

"I go to learn how people really get started," Clancy said. "You really start at the bottom."

Elizabeth Jones, a senior communication major, spent a summer working odd jobs around the house for her father. Jones began by starching and ironing all of his work shirts but, after complaining, was taken to the yard to have a taste of working outdoors.

"I mowed the lawn front and back, and halfway through, my dad said the lawn couldn't look any worse," Jones said.

Jones' father then made her wash the cars.

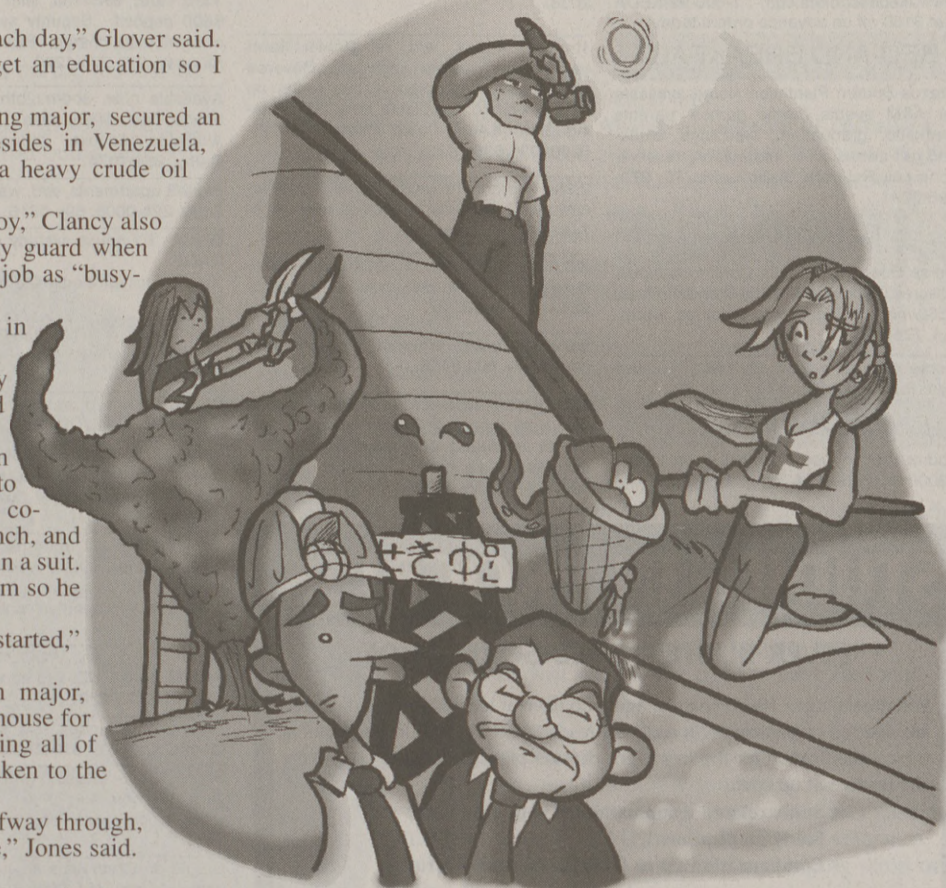
"I received \$1 for waxing, \$1 for washing and \$1 for vacuuming," Jones said. "I had to do all three in order to get paid anything."

Jones said she never saw the little money she earned, because that same summer she lost her house keys and had to pay for the house locks to be changed.

"This taught me that I shouldn't complain," Jones said. "I learned the value of a dollar."

Nora Cargo, assistant director for student financial aid, said there is a way to prevent getting stuck with a bad work experience. The student financial aid center provides Jobs for Aggies, a database that helps students find part-time employment, Cargo said.

"Jobs for Aggies is a free service for employees on and off campus," Cargo said.



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Jobs listed range from office assistants to lab assistants to individual child care, Cargo said. Other listings are for one-time immediate assistance, like helping students move.

Jobs for Aggies also hosts student development workshops which provide formal instructions to students on general office procedures.

"It helps students succeed in the jobs that they do and be more integrated into what the office does," Cargo said.

Cargo said that it isn't just what you contribute to a job that matters, but what you can take away from it.

"Students need to feel that they aren't just a worker, but a contributor," Cargo said.

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