



# I LEARNED MORE AT MCDONALD'S THAN AT COLLEGE

OLIVIA LEGASPI

Here's what I was told during my freshman orientation at Haverford College.

Ask for help when you need it.

Speak up when you feel uncomfortable.

Place your own well being above all other concerns.

In short, the school was ready to protect me from any personal slights or hurt feelings I might suffer. What counted as a personal slight or similar offense was up to me to define. This surprised me.

It surprised me because at McDonald's, where I worked before I started school, acting in this way would have probably cost me my job, a job I needed in order to go to college.

The most important thing at McDonald's was not how I felt but how my customers felt. It was my job and the job of everyone working there to make others – namely, the customers – happy.

I worked at the front counter. That meant that if there was a problem with an order, I had to deal with it. The issues weren't complicated. It was usually something like a missing piece of cheese from a McDouble, or whipped cream on a milkshake when they hadn't wanted any. Whatever it was, I had to listen patiently and mentally take notes so that I could report the relevant details to someone who could actually correct the problem. Oddly enough, customers were not interested in carefully crafting their complaints in such a way as to spare my feelings. They were in a rush to get back to work, or they were dealing with their screaming kids, or they had calculated the cost of their meal down to the cent out of necessity and could not afford a mistake. And they had a right to have their meal served the way they ordered it. If a mistake was made, we fixed it as quickly as possible and didn't talk back. Even if I believed the customer had misunderstood some aspect of their order and was actually the one at fault, I was instructed to give the person the benefit of the doubt. Their feelings mattered more than mine.

At McDonald's there was no "trigger warning" for when a customer was about to start yelling, no safe spaces to go to when the restaurant would get so busy that I barely had time to breathe between orders. When a group of men in the drive-thru would whistle and catcall me as they pulled away, there was no university administrator for me to run to for soothing and reassurance.

And from these experiences – the good, the bad, and the flat out ugly, I grew. Or, to use a word

one doesn't see much anymore, I matured.

I learned to take care of myself in ways that didn't inconvenience anyone...Or draw unnecessary attention to myself...Or let my personal problems interfere with the work that had to be done.

In short, I had a job to do and people counted on me to do it.

Had I complained to my McDonald's manager that I became anxious when the restaurant was crowded or that hearing complaints from customers made me nervous, he would have politely handed me my paycheck and shown me the door. I would have gone home, and been unable to pay the student contribution from summer work that is built into my financial aid package.

So, I'm grateful to have worked at McDonald's.

It taught me how to better handle my anxiety; how to work with others in pursuit of a common goal. It strengthened my character, my work ethic, and my sense of my own resilience. These are lessons that cannot be learned in the "safe spaces" of the Haverford campus.

Here's one more thing I learned: putting oneself first is the essence of privilege. But putting oneself first does not develop character or lead to personal growth. Putting others first does. McDonald's is a far better teacher of that lesson than college.

I'm Olivia Legaspi of Haverford College for Prager University.