

The *Life*  
and **Death**  
of a *Pizza Boy*

By

Nick Simberg



### Writer's Statement

I came to college to be a writer, because, frankly, I'm not bad. Bemidji State was the only college around that even offered a major in writing, and my grandmother lives in town, so it seemed like a no-brainer to come to BSU. My other strong option was math, but it felt like I could do even less in life with a degree in math than I could with a degree in writing. I didn't want to be a math teacher, or an engineer, really, so here I am. An English major. Kind of.

I had enough financial aid to pay for school, but not enough to live. So, I became a pizza boy by night. Surprisingly, I made more money than I had ever had in my life, and, for awhile, I was actually eager to go to work because of the possibilities opened up to me by merely having a lot of money. I could go out to dinner instead of cooking, I could see movies at the theater *and* buy popcorn *and* pop *and* candy. I could live in a nice apartment, and not just a cramped dorm room where I would have to share my living space with another smelly guy.

Unfortunately, my eagerness to work quickly diminished as I saw the realities of both the pizza world and the real world. So many people have mindless jobs such as delivery boys and are satisfied with their lives. I was not. I'm in college right now to get a real job, the kind that I can actually admit having to my girlfriend's parents, and admit to my own parents. Still, Domino's took up five of my nights every week, and it pays much too well to find a different job right now. As a college boy, the amount of money I make is directly tied to how "good" a job is. That would make Domino's, at this point in my life, the best job I could find. Unfortunately, it's hard to get anything done between a full load of college classes and a 45-hour workweek.

My senior project was originally planned to be something completely different. I once wrote a morbid, tongue-in-cheek "How-to" story in my Advanced Writing class that was well received by both the professor and the class as a whole. I wanted to write more of those stories and use a collection of them as my senior project. They would revolve around the kind of menial, mindless jobs people got when they failed to get a college degree – the kind of jobs I've had, and the kind of jobs I hope to never have again. Sadly, class, life, and work cut nearly all of my free writing time out of my life.

In the end, I decided to write about the one thing in life that I'm really an expert on right now – pizza delivery. What's more, I wanted it to rhyme and flow like a Dr. Seuss story, or Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." I had roughly five pages of this fun, novel idea complete before my project advisor shot that idea down. "This is sub-verse, like a limerick," she said, "You will not be taken seriously, although the writing is skilled." Still, she thought the idea of a story about a pizza place was ripe for satire and black humor. "Write it straight," she said. So I did.

It quickly developed into a noir, hard-boiled, sardonic tale of a young man getting caught in a dead-end job and his struggle to escape. As such, I chose the noir-y title, "The Life and Death of a Pizza Boy." Will it be a metaphorical death of character, such as a bright young person having his flame extinguished by a lifetime of menial work? Or will it be a literal death, such as a delivery to a rough neighborhood ending badly, or a freak car accident? These are the kind of things I wanted my readers to think about, for not growing and evolving as a person is as good as dying.

Many of the characters and events are based on actual people and places, although the names have been changed to protect the innocent and the not-so-innocent. Much of



the tale is, of course, fictionalized, warped, and abbreviated to keep the story interesting. In the end, I hope I have displayed an above-average person in a below-average job and nurtured his coming-of-age in a world where growth is squelched to keep good people in bad jobs. It is not pretty. It is not nice. It is the world as I see it, skewed and biased by my young, inexperienced eyes. Pessimistic, rude, and sarcastic. All the same, it is the truth to me, and that's all anyone can ever really write.

This is the life, and the death, of a pizza boy.

-Nick Simberg



May 2006. The money had run out. It was time to get a job.

I scanned the classifieds for something easy, low-responsibility, and high paying. My eyes settled on one ad in particular: "Earn \$12-15 an hour! Deliver for Domino's Pizza!" I had a car, and no speeding tickets. Sounded better than being a burger jockey at Mickey D's or a cart-pusher at Wal-Mart.

I went in and filled out an application. It was pretty standard – name, social, DOB... I didn't make myself sound spectacular, but at least I didn't have any felonies.

Randy, the boss, called me that same week to set up an interview. I wasn't bad. I told him I went to college during the day but I was available pretty much every night. Didn't have much of a social life – I figured I might as well make some money instead of wasting my nights playing video games or looking up useless pick-up lines on the 'Net.

I got a call the next day. I was hired.

I went in for my first shift that same night and wasted two hours watching poorly acted training videos on a computer in the back office. Then Randy the Boss gave me a polo shirt, a faux leather hat, and a number: 2008. I couldn't wear the number, but it would become my Domino's persona. I would use it to clock in, clock out, and assign runs to myself. It was supposedly just a way to simplify the clocking in and out process, but it made me feel like a quantified sub-human product of the Almighty Domino's God Machine. Whatever. It wasn't a choice. My number was 2008.

Randy seemed like a nice enough guy. Friendly, personable, self-motivated... those qualities you come to expect in any decent manager. He was top-heavy, with skinny runner's legs, and he had a 1970's porn star/cop mustache. His eyes were a



bright, piercing blue, and he was Canadian ex-military. He lived in a black-and-white world and reminded me of my father.

Randy's assistant manager Tony seemed a lot less friendly. He was only 37 but his hair was already completely gray. He was an assistant manager at McDonald's before he came to Domino's, and he actually took a pay cut to switch jobs. He said it was because he hated the babysitting he had to do over there. I was determined to not need to be babysat. I knew Tony was the kind of guy you really didn't want to anger.

After I finished my computer training I was assigned to Brian. Randy told me to shadow him and learn all I could about the fast-paced world of pizza delivery and minimum wage work. Brian had just gotten married, and he was finishing up with college. He was planning on becoming a mechanic. He showed me the ropes.

"After you take an order, stickers print out here and you put them on the right boxes. 12" is medium; 14" is large. Breadsticks and wings both go in these little boxes here, then you stick the boxes up on this shelf in order. When the pizzas come out of the oven, cut them into 8 slices. Thin crusts, you cut in squares. After all the food is out for an order, you yell, 'Order up,' or you just stick the food in a hot bag with napkins. Then you punch the run out to yourself using the number Randy gave you. Got it?" I did.

After a while, Brian had a delivery up, so I got to ride shotgun in his red Monte Carlo. I held the pizza in my lap while we headed to 1500 Irvine Avenue – right across the street from Dave's Pizza. Hm. On the way, Brian explained some things to me about Domino's. "If you can put up with some crap, this is a decent job," he told me. "You get paid in cash every day, and you really don't work that hard. There're just a few things to keep in mind: you will be scheduled for some shifts that you need off because Randy



doesn't care about his employees. He's the only one that matters in the little world he's constructed for himself in his mind, and he will stab you in the back and poop on your chest if you're not careful. Also, you need to count your tips. Just jot 'em down on your driver's tag, or anywhere. Just keep track. If you don't, the insiders will find out, and they will short you. Even Randy, the King of Charisma, might 'drop' a five occasionally. Into his pocket. Sometimes it's an accident; sometimes not. Oh, and look out for Crystal. I don't have any proof, but I'm sure she's 'lost' my money more than once."

Brian made air quotes with his fingers whenever he said something ironically, so I wouldn't miss it. Thanks for the help there, guy. Never would have picked up on that.

When we reached the house, there was a fat, very hairy, half-naked guy mowing the lawn. Maybe he was trying to get a tan. He needed one. Also, he needed a shirt. His gray, elastic-waist shorts were slipping under the weight of his gut and the top of his butt crack was clearly visible to passing cars. It gleamed, pale and sweaty in the sunlight. I stayed back and watched Brian work.

"Hey, how you doing today, sir? Nice day to mow the lawn." It really was.

"Mowing," the sasquatch replied as he killed the machine to better hear Brian.

"All right," replied Brian, not missing a beat despite the man's random response, "It'll be nineteen ninety-two."

The man reached into his sweaty pocket with his sweaty hand and handed Brian a sweaty twenty-dollar bill. "Keep it," grunted the man-bear.

"Thanks." I heard the disdain, but I'm not sure if Fuzzy did. "Have a nice day."

We left. Brian expressed his eagerness to get back to the store and count his tip. Wanting to be helpful, I offered, "It's eight cents."



"Thanks." There's the disdain again! At least the guy didn't ask for all his change back...

After two deliveries I was able to take them myself, but nothing really changed. Drive to the house, tell them their total, get the money, *ad nauseum*. Most tips were better than Brian's eight cents, but not all of them.

I quickly developed an acute fear of twenty-dollar bills due to the incredibly detrimental impact they would have on my tips. Nearly every time an order totaled between eighteen dollars and \$19.99, I got a twenty. They knew they could have tipped more, but then they'd have to pay with two bills. Oh no. Wouldn't that just be a tragedy.

When I got back to the store after my runs, I punched my number back in then quickly waited for the next delivery. We rotated drivers – first in is first out. Supposed to make you hustle to get more runs and (supposedly) more tips. It worked most of the time, but if you were in the bathroom when your delivery popped up, some other punk driver would take your delivery out from under you. What could you do about that? Nothing. Pay attention next time, or get more trustworthy coworkers. Scratch that. You can't get more trustworthy coworkers. Pay attention.

So it went. I was quiet at first while I got a feel for the kind of place I was in, the kind of stuff I could get away with. Show up on time, at least while still a new guy. Don't let the oven back up. Don't let the phone ring more than twice. Listen to the guys who've been here longer; they know how to get places, and they'll help if you ask nicely. There was some teamwork, but there was more competition between drivers to get more



runs and more tips. What's the point of working if you can't make money? Might as well make more than the next guy, by doing less work, if possible. Isn't that the American way?

At first I only got the lousy shifts. I'd be at Domino's for three hours in the afternoon for the dinner rush, then I'd get sent home. Or I worked the day shift on the weekend when nobody really orders pizza. The real money-making times were late nights, especially on weekends. Drunks ordered, people in hotels ordered, and parties ordered, and almost all were good tippers. During the day, you'd be lucky to get a dollar a run. At night, you might get five (or more if they're *really* drunk... or none at all if they're passed out and don't answer the door). That made a big difference at the end of your shift. You might've taken home twenty bucks. You might've taken home a hundred. And no matter what anyone said, your tip usually came down to luck. You could smile, and flirt, and be happy and friendly, but, if they already wrote out the check for the exact amount of the pizza, it was wasted effort. Maybe they would tip next time. Probably not. Maybe they would order again. Probably. They still wouldn't tip. Too bad, pizza boy.

Still, pizza delivery was a good chance to meet people, even if it was only for twenty seconds at a time. You might've seen someone you know, and you might have been able to guilt them into tipping. You might've seen someone you hate, and you would have to resist the urge to throw their pizza at them, giving them third-degree pepperoni burns. You were very much in the public eye, and that was both a good and a bad thing. I guess it all depended on whether you wanted to be noticed or not. I did.



I guess here would be a good time to say a little about Domino's supporting cast: Jon, Crystal, Nate, and Skeeter (yeah, that's a real name).

Jon was short, skinny, and had a ponytail. He was slightly older than me, and he ran his own store before he moved here. He hated working inside the store; he just wanted to deliver. Pay was better and so was the work environment. He was close-shift driver five nights a week. That's a lot of driving, and a lot of money. He still couldn't get laid. Maybe it's because he's done nothing with his life besides work for pizza places since he was 17? Maybe. I wouldn't do him.

Crystal had a long ponytail too, but she was a mousy blonde. She thought of herself as God's gift to men. She would lie to your face and steal your tip money if you weren't watching. More on that later.

Here was how Crystal introduced herself to me the first time I started working, no joke: "Hi, I'm Crystal, and I can give a five-minute handjob."

"Really? I've never had one last less than ninety minutes."

"Well, maybe we can change that."

"I hope not." Slut.

Nate was a short hairy German with a drinking problem, or, as he called it, a "drinking solution." He was into homebrewed beer and held a high position in his fraternity. He was older than I was by about three years, and he assumed that he was also three years smarter and more experienced than me. I'd prove him wrong soon enough. I already had one up on him: he accidentally knocked up his girlfriend. Oops. Real life comes at you fast, don't it?



Finally, Skeeter. He started work just a few days before I did. When we weren't making fun of his name, we'd mock his tall, pale body or try to get him to prove that he was a natural redhead. He spent his nights playing Guitar Hero for free at Wal-Mart because he was too cheap to buy it. I heard rumors that he was gay, so I helped spread them. He vehemently denied these, every time.

That was the Domino's family when I started. It would change.

Randy was not really as fun to work with as he let on. He was incredibly anal about every little rule – tuck your shirt in, don't wear holey shoes, shave, don't carry more than twenty dollars on deliveries, wear pants. I could see where he was coming from since he was trying to buy the store from the current owner, but seriously. That didn't make it okay to be a jerk. Within days of me starting, Nate quit to work for Green Mill. He hoped to make more money and have better hours. It wouldn't work. He'd come crawling back to Domino's in a few months.

Another guy that was a lot different than I expected was Tony. I started work in early summer, so I was able to work a lot of 10-6 day shifts since I didn't have school. It was rarely busy, so Tony and I would pretty much just hang out and wax philosophical all day. He'd tell me about his younger years as a pothead. He'd given it up and now was just an alcoholic. Yay for self control. He admitted, however, that he would quit drinking and go back to pot in an instant if it was legalized. He told me about his favorite job ever as a security guy at an airport in Minneapolis. He left because the town was just too big for a small-town guy like him. He told me about his wife. She's a nice lady, but she used to be a bad girl. She had two kids before she married Tony, and they were with Tony's best friend from years back. Now the daddy was in jail. How cliché.



Tony was a fun guy though. He was laid back, liked to drink, and liked to gamble. He wasn't always like this, though. Skeeter worked with him at McDonald's before they both defected to Domino's. "He's the complete opposite of how he used to be," Skeeter told me, "He used to be more uptight and angry than Randy is. One day at McDonald's though, he just snapped. He quit getting mad at the high schoolers he worked with, and he pretty much just quit caring about everything. That was a few weeks before he quit and came over here. It was pretty... disconcerting."

"Disconcerting, huh?" I jibed, "Did you swallow a thesaurus with all that man gravy for breakfast this morning, Skeet?"

"I'm not gay," he hissed before turning red and stomping off to re-sweep the already-clean floors in a vague attempt to look busy for the boss. He was always kind of a suck-up. I'm not sure why I went out of my way to insult him... it was pretty obvious that he was just a lonely guy craving acceptance. Maybe that's it: I've never liked people that lived on the acceptance and praise of others. I don't need other people to validate *my* existence. People that can't be alone are just... weak.

Tony's all-gray hair made him look a lot older than he was, and I, in my annoyingly relentless quest for trivial knowledge that I could share with the world, asked him one day, "Does the carpet match the drapes?"

"Shut up," he ordered, but with the thin hint of a smile.

"I bet if you were a porn star, your nickname would be the Silver Fox."

"..."

I later told his wife this story. She thought it was funny. I liked picking on Tony.

Another slow summer day. Girls were roller blading past the front window wearing next to nothing, heading to an afternoon of swimming fun and a night of swimmer's itch. Some of them should have been wearing more. It would have been nice to see some of them wearing less.

It was just Tony and me again. There were so few phone calls, we wondered if our lines had been disconnected. We'd pick up a phone every once in a while just to make sure there was still a dial tone. It would have been nice to get an order just so I could get out of the store. The temperature outside: ninety degrees. Inside: 118. At least if I left I could roll down my window and get a breeze. Stuck in here, I moved as little as possible so I didn't sweat

Randy, in an unexpected spasm of generosity, had invested eighty dollars of store money on an industrial-sized fan from Home Depot. We placed it by the door to bring the ninety-degree, dusty heat into the 118-degree pizza place. It also brought in bugs. I killed one with a dough spatula, and then I washed it. Or did I?

Tony had a brace on his wrist that day. I said, "What'd you do? Fall off your wife?"

"... fell outta bed."

"Oh, so I was right. Can't even beat off anymore, can you?"

"No, I can still do that..."

"Euw. Whoa, Tony, I was just kidding. I didn't think old people actually did that... what with the carpal tunnel and arthritis and all."

"I'm not that old, you punk."

"But your hair's all gray! Silver Fox..."



Yes, the money. That's why we get jobs in the first place, isn't it? To make money, to get a car, and buy gas, so we can get to work to make money, and get a car, and buy gas... Gotta work 'til we die in this vicious cycle. Sometimes it feels like we were living to work instead of working to live. The thing about delivering pizzas though: I made two grand a month. And a lot of it was untaxed, under-the-table *cash*. You didn't even need to graduate high school to do it, and I made more money than many high school teachers.

Did I deserve this money? I wasn't enriching children's lives. I brought fatty, greasy pizza to people's doors so they don't even have to drag their 400-pound self to pick it up. I helped them die by encouraging their sedentary lifestyle of pizza, beer, and video games. But I liked the money. Even when tips were awful, I never averaged less than \$11 an hour. I drove from point A to point B and back for seven hours a night. It didn't even feel like work sometimes. But I was a pizza boy. By the time I headed back to college in the fall, I realized: this is not what I was going to college for. Every month I stayed at Domino's is a month less of real adult life. I had to get out.

But I loved the money.

I'm not the only one that wanted/needed escape. By September, Jon the short guy got his own Domino's in Cloquet, a little nothing town that's still better than here. He wanted to drive instead of manage, but, in his words, "It was time to grow up." He did well at first, but after a few weeks, he was down to 35 hours a week. That's not enough to start a new small business and succeed. His store closed within months. That was the last I heard of Jon.

Eventually, Tony the assistant manager got his own store, too. This one was in Middleton, Wisconsin, a suburb of Madison. Everyone was sad to see Tony go, especially since Randy was getting harder and harder to work with. Randy kept getting closer to owning the store instead of just managing it, and he became more of a jerk with each passing day. Maybe it was the stress. Maybe it was the hundreds of pages of paperwork to fill out and regulations to comply with. I don't know. But that doesn't mean you can use up your employees like Kleenex and just throw them away. It's hard to find good help. It's harder to find a good boss. Still, I stayed.

Tony left, and he wanted me to follow him and become his assistant manager when I was done with college at the end of the year. I felt honored by the special attention. No matter how much I down-talked the place, I was still the best of what was left – the hardest worker, the fastest driver, the most responsible. I told him I'd like to get out of here, but moving up the Domino's corporate ladder was not quite what I wanted to do with my life. I turned him down. I didn't move up. I was still just a driver.

By now, the staff shortage was getting serious, prompting Randy to go on a hiring binge. With Jon, Nate, and Tony gone, that left only four employees to cover twenty-eight shifts a week (one day shift, one night shift, one insider, and one driver, seven days a week). Worse, one of the workers was Skeeter. Randy was working doubles four or five days a week. Everyone was on overtime. I didn't mind. In fact, I'd linger as long as I could after close to maximize my hours and paychecks. There was actually a fine art to dragging your feet without looking like you were dawdling. Scratch that – I could dawdle all I wanted. There were four employees. What was Randy going to do, fire me?



We closed on weeknights at midnight and Fridays and Saturdays at two. We took orders until the clock read 12:01 (or 2:01). There was always a last-minute rush of phone calls, and I'd often be out of the store until half an hour after closing time. When you just wanted to get home fast after a long night of crap tips, that sucks. But when you were getting \$10 an hour overtime to drive around and listen to your radio, it was hard to mind staying a few minutes later.

Back in the store, it was closing time. None of the dishes were done. The rugs weren't rolled up for sweeping. The food wasn't even put in the walk-in cooler for the night. I had a lot of cleaning to do. This was not a night to dawdle.

We had three sinks at Domino's – a wash sink, a rinse sink, and a sanitize sink – and you had to use all three for maximum cleanage. The wash sink got three squirts of blue soap. The middle sink was just water. The last sink got three squirts of clear sanitizing... stuff. It was definitely water-based, and it was the last thing to touch the dishes before they dried, so you'd assume that it was nontoxic, right? I don't know about that; I wouldn't drink it.

I cleaned the square, plastic food containers first. One quick dip in each sink and they're clean enough to eat out of. If not, well, the pizza still had to sit for seven minutes in a 485-degree oven, didn't it? I always said that any disease that survived going through that oven deserved to kill me. It's earned it. Maybe super anthrax had a shot.

After the plastic buckets, I cleaned off the utensils with a few deft swipes of a dirty washrag. Next, the grates. Ah, the grates. One of the biggest sources of ridicule in the Domino's world. Anyone who's ever worked in a pizza place other than Domino's has made fun of us for the grates. On the makeline (that would be the line where we

make stuff), the pizzas sat on wire racks while we topped them. Under these racks sat huge gray trays that meant to catch all the excess cheese and toppings that we dropped. You see, instead of teaching new employees how to make pizzas without spilling cheese everywhere, Domino's seemed to encourage sloppiness in favor of speediness. It's okay if you only got half the sausage from your hand onto the pizza. We'll just pick it out of the tray later and stick it back in the bucket with the un-dropped stuff. Maybe.

In reality, the tray was rarely emptied. Instead, at the end of the night, when insiders should have separated the individual toppings from the trays back into their buckets, they usually just tipped the trays into the trash. Food waste. Instant cleanup. Sloppy speediness at its finest. That's Domino's.

And speaking of trash, there was a lot. Wasted food. Expired food. Pizzas that were ordered but never picked up. Packaging materials. Pop bottles. Melted butter. Pizza boxes were shipped in shrink-wrapped packs of fifty. Red wrap means medium; blue wrap means large. No wrap was recyclable. More trash. All five industrial-sized trashcans needed to be emptied daily. That was a lot of garbage for a store that made only about a thousand bucks a day.

There should have been even more food in the garbage than there was. At Domino's, oddly, we had salads. We were trying to tap into the market of healthy people that know better than to order from us. Unfortunately, nobody ordered our salads. They expired. If the lettuce wasn't too brown, we'd sell it, completely ignoring the use-by date. So, the one person a week that actually wanted a salad got soggy lettuce, squishy carrots, and brown tomatoes. Yum.



When we started selling salads, we also got chicken. We didn't sell many salads, so we didn't use much chicken. The chicken expired. Randy peeled off the expiration date sticker and put on a new one, effectively adding a week to the shelf life. Yay for saving money! Randy was a true businessman.

To make us seem more eco-friendly, Randy tried recycling, once. He put a new garbage can in the back just for plastics and aluminum cans, and it filled up fast. It filled up with cheese. And banana peels. And old pizza. And maybe, if he was lucky, a pop bottle or two. There were only a handful of employees. You'd think it wouldn't have been too hard to spread the word around and enforce a recycling policy. Guess it was.

The store wasn't completely packed with selfishness, though. There was one ray of sunshine: Randy's wife, Helen. She worked mornings at McDonald's; and she'd been working there long enough to be making thirty grand a year. You know how long you have to work at McDonald's to make thirty grand a year? Long enough that you can honestly say you've done nothing of value with your entire life. But Helen still had life in her. After work, she'd come to Domino's and help Randy out on his busy insider shifts on Friday and Saturday nights. Best of all, she did it for free. She didn't get paid a single cent, and she worked harder than anyone at the whole store. And she was sweet, and innocent, and always happy, and always weird. She randomly broke out into songs about squirrels or leprechauns, or she'd tell stupid little jokes like, "What do you call a fish with no eyes? Fsh!" Trust me, that was one of the better ones.

Helen did have one little idiosyncrasy though – she wouldn't answer the phone, or help customers at the counter, or even talk to a person that wasn't working at Domino's at that very moment. Randy said that she spent all day dealing with customers at Mickey

D's, and, since this was basically volunteer work, she was allowed to work as much or as little as she wanted. However, there was one thing she did do to help the whole store out: she kept Randy in check. She prevented some of his stupider policies from being enforced, and she made sure that, when Randy was making the schedule, people got the shifts that they deserved. She was the yin to Randy's abusive and irrational yang.

After two or three 80-hour workweeks in a row, Randy finally got off his lazy Canadian butt and started hiring again. He picked up one insider, Paulie, a cute little eighteen-year-old brunette with a checkered history of drugs and alcohol, and one driver, Will, a tall, quiet, ex-high school football player. You know the kind. He was a nice guy, but get on his bad side and he will crush you.

Paulie, Randy learned quickly, was a bad hire. Any guy working with her would spend more time flirting than working, because she would do it right back. She would fill the sinks with much too much soap and say things like, "I like it sudsy!" Or, another example: the makeline would be low on cheese, so she would announce to the store at large that she required someone to fill her box with cheese. It was cute.

But... productivity went down the tubes. So did profits and out-the-door times. So did food costs – Paulie was sloppy even by Domino's low standards. Plus, she had a boyfriend we all loved to hate. Abusive, poor, cruel, and a straight up wigger. He was as white as the next guy (if the next guy happened to be white), but he sagged his pants, wore sweatshirts three sizes too big, and wore a ton of bling that he probably bought at the Piercing Pagoda in the mall. He used to sell coke when he lived in the Cities. Now, in Northern Minnesota, it looked like he was having trouble finding the hookup. He



resorted to working next door at Subway so he could keep an eye on his woman to make sure she wasn't cheating on him like his last girl did. He thought he had a kid for two years before it turned out that it wasn't his. Sucks for him. I still didn't like the guy.

Didn't know what to make of Will at first. He had fuzzy sideburns and this cheap-looking chain that he always wore around his neck. I didn't much care for him. Eventually, he quit being a shy guy and opened up about his past. He used to be a bad boy construction worker but now he had an illegitimate family that forced him to settle down. He had one-and-a-half kids and a girlfriend/fiancée that worked with the mentally handicapped for thirteen bucks an hour. Will would become my best friend at Domino's.

I'm not sure how it happened. Will and I would work together some afternoons and talk about topics that would warrant a sexual harassment lawsuit if we had been in mixed company. To us, it was funny. Will had the same twisted sense of humor that I had. Dead baby jokes, pedophilia, bestiality, no topic was off-limits (at least when there weren't any girls around). We got along. I only had a few classes at college, so I spent most of my nights at work. Domino's quickly became the single biggest time suck in my life, so it seemed only natural that my social relationships would shift from school friends to work friends. Still, Will was the only one worth talking to outside of work. We'd play video games before our shifts, and he took me to the bars on my twenty-first birthday. His girlfriend merely tolerated me, but I was leaps and bounds better than his other friends from his rough childhood.

Will had lived in this town his whole life. Every job he'd ever had, every girl he'd ever dated, every thing he'd ever done had been here. He knew a lot of people. Not

all of them were worth knowing. But now he knew me. I'm not too bad, for a delivery boy.

"You know, Will," I said on one slow afternoon, "People don't really respect us pizza boys. I know it's not a real job, but it pays the bills easy, with enough left over to get anything I want."

"Yeah," Will replied, "like, just the other day, I wanted a new exhaust for my truck, so I just went out and bought one. I've never had a job that pays this well. It's nice being able to afford to eat out every day if I want. We make a Northern Minnesota fortune."

"It's just too bad we don't have insurance, or benefits, or a 401k, or job security. Even though we're the best of what's left and Randy wouldn't dare fire us. He needs us. The sad thing is, though, we kind of need this job too. Can you imagine having to go back to when you only got money once every two weeks? That would suck, and I don't know if I could ever have a regular job again. Domino's has ruined me."

"True dat. We make more money than Randy in tips alone. Kinda makes you want to just stay a driver forever."

"But I don't want to be a driver forever," I spat, gathering steam, "I want to be a magazine editor. That's why I'm going to college. A few more months and I'm done. I gotta get out of here. My legs just kill every time I get home. If I get in a car crash, I can't even go to the hospital 'cause I don't have insurance. I want a real job that I can admit I have in public without feeling like a loser. Domino's isn't a career except for tards like Randy who think it's the only thing he'll ever be able to make money at. The



thing is, if I get into magazines, or newspapers, or anything, I'm gonna take a pay cut! I need all this money. I don't have self control! I can't budget! I gotta get out of here, but I'm stuck. I'm stuck, and every time I come to work I die a little inside."

"Hey, relax, guy... it's just a job we've got until we finish school," he said.

"Is it? People don't have jobs that they went to school for. Real life sucks. People, especially around here, just have jobs. They don't have careers. They do the same crap they did when they were in high school, except now they're older. They've had the same job so long that it's become their career. It's become their life. Look at Helen! She's a nice girl, but she's a dead end. She works at McDonald's, and she married Randy. Two strikes right there. I don't want to be like Helen. I need to get out of here man, I'm going nuts."

"But I'll miss you," he said, in a thoroughly faux-gay way.

"I can't be a pizza boy forever. I just can't."

In the spring, I didn't graduate like planned. I missed a required class and had to take it in the fall. It was a good thing that I hadn't gone to Middleton with Tony. Turns out he'd been gambling away company money at the casino. His store closed. The thing is, it was going to close at the end of the year anyway; it just wasn't making any money. Tony was all set to move back up to Northern Minnesota and take back his old job as a 38-year-old assistant manager at Domino's. His wife and kids came back in late summer for school, leaving Tony all alone in Wisconsin. He didn't have much else to do, so he gambled. Too much. The funny thing was: if he had been a better gambler, he wouldn't have lost \$2,700 of store money. Domino's would've been fine, Tony would've been

The rising cost of cheese forced Randy to take away our crew chew. We could still eat Domino's, but we now had to pay our employee half-price discount, even when working. That came to about six bucks for a medium one top. If I was going to spend six bucks on dinner, I was going to get something I actually want to eat, not something that I was surrounded by everyday. Something my clothes smelled like, and my car smelled like. Something that soaked into my pores. Now I ate McDonald's, or Hardees, or Taco Bell, or sometimes, when Randy was gone, Pizza Hut. Mmmmm... stuffed crust. More likely though, when Randy was gone, we had a crew chew. Pizza that was once free was now stolen. It was free for us. We just didn't tell the boss.

The funny thing is that, back when crew chews were allowed, we'd adhere to the two-topping limit. After Domino's martial law was enacted, however, there were no limits. We made Philly cheese steak pizzas, or five-meat Meatzza feasts, or chicken wings... One time I even tried making a stuffed crust like Pizza Hut's. Will liked it. I thought it was a bit doughy, but it was free. Thus, awesome.

Randy was still treating his employees like one-use Kleenex. He would blame his high turnover rate on Will and me, claiming our dirty jokes scared everyone off. I think it was just because Randy treated everyone like dirt. These people lasted less than a month: Erik, Steven, Ian, Shaun, Danny, Sheryl, two Shannons (one guy and one girl), two Tims, and Jonah. On second thought, I may have helped scare off Jonah. He was this quiet fat guy and I tried to get him to open up with some humor, "Can I call you Jonah the Hutt? Can you do that rumbling *heh heh heh* laugh for me?" He laughed a little bit, but I guess he also died a bit inside.



Paulie didn't help either. She kept trying to grab his butt. Also, she called him Jonah the Whale. At least I asked if I could call him a Hutt... Paulie just came out and said it. She also asked Jonah if he would have a three-way with Randy and his wife Helen. He quit after two days. Well, his wife quit for him. She came in, slammed a folded up letter on the front counter, and said, "Jonah's quitting," before storming out. This letter was hilarious. It went something like this:

"Dear Domino's, I've never felt so harassed in my life at any job I've ever had. Will is a drunk. Nick [that's me] is a pothead. Paulie keeps sexually harassing me. Randy does, as well. I'm sending a copy of this letter to Domino's Corporate. I hope you all die. Love, Jonah." It was longer and more pointless, but that's the gist of it. Will drinks, but never at or before work. I wouldn't consider him a drunk. Everyone at the store knows that I've never even seen drugs, let alone taken them. I'm a good boy.

Still, since the letter mentioned drugs and alcohol, Domino's Corporate was required to investigate Jonah's claims. We all had a good laugh when they turned up nothing. A funny postscript to that story: once Jonah was back on the job hunt, he started including a copy of this letter with every application he submitted, virtually guaranteeing that he wouldn't get hired because everyone could see his backstabbing ways. Jonah dug himself a six-foot hole in the local job market. I don't care if he ever crawls back out.

Speaking of six-foot holes, if I stood on my tiptoes, I could've just barely seen out of mine. I had one class at college before graduation, and it was winter again. The snow was here, the roads were bad, and people still didn't think they had to tip the delivery boy. Will and I were best buddies now. I didn't even talk to my school friends anymore. They were never really that close anyway. I kept telling myself, "It's just a few more

weeks, then I can graduate and I'll be out of here," but in truth I had no idea where I'd go.

On my nights off, I sat at home, restless, yearning to deliver pizzas, or drive, or... something. When I went shopping on my days off, I'd sometimes forget where I was going. I'd instinctively look down at my steering wheel for an address, because that's where I kept my delivery tags that told me where my pizza went. I had dreams about the ovens backing up and pizzas falling on the floor. Meanwhile, the phones rang off the hook and the lobby was packed to capacity. I needed an escape from my own pizza-soaked mind. Still, the money was good. And I needed it. One day, though, it wasn't all there.

One winter night, just before Christmas, Will and I were drivers, and Crystal – the handjob queen – was the insider. As insider, she was the only one with access to the keys to the boxes. The boxes were where we dropped our money after every delivery. They were nailed to a wall just inside the door, and they were meant to keep us from carrying around a thousand dollars on deliveries. Supposed to carry no more than twenty. Less likely to get shot for twenty bucks than a thousand. At the end of the night, the insider unlocked our box so we could sort our money into neat little piles for the insider to count. Theoretically, the tips that I wrote on my driver tags will add up to the number that the insider got. They usually did.

Crystal: "Ninety-eight dollars. There you go, Nick."

"That's twenty bucks short... can you count it again?" I said.

She did. "Nope, still the same. You sure there's none left in your pockets?" I was sure. "I can count it one more time if you want."



"Please."

"No, looks like that's all there is. That's not too bad though, right?"

"It's not great."

It was Will's turn next. I skulked off to do dishes with my ninety-eight dollars.

"Ninety-seven dollars, Will, how's that sound?"

"Very, very wrong," Will said, "I had four twenty-dollar tips tonight. That doesn't make any sense. Count it again."

She did. "Sorry, still only have ninety-seven..."

"Fine. Thanks."

Will came back to the dish area to see me. "I'm really short. If I'm generous, I'd say I'm only missing thirty bucks."

"Me too, but only twenty. I think Crystal shorted us. When I got ninety-eight dollars, she was saying things like, 'Must be nice.' And she told me about a time when she got shorted by an insider at the end of the night, a long time ago, and how there's no proof. We don't have any proof that she stole our money. But we know. Randy was also telling me that we were \$150 short last month. Now we know where it went. Crystal."

"I'm really freakin' mad right now. I'm gonna call Randy on my way home; I don't care if I wake him up."

"I know she said she'd count it again to look innocent. But I've been an insider. I know that you just open the boxes while the drivers are on deliveries and take it when nobody can see you. That way, the money really isn't there at the end of the night. Again, no proof. Easy."

Will called Randy later, and Randy said that Will probably dropped the money on the ground somewhere. He couldn't believe that Crystal stole the money. He wouldn't believe she took it from the store either. We had no proof. There was "nothing he could do." Wrong. He could have fired her.

But he didn't. And, even with money missing, I still made almost \$16 an hour that night, after tips, after taxes. Twenty bucks was next to nothing. But it still made me mad that she thought she could get away with that.

After that, I put my own lock on my own box. And I sat in the back room with the insider while they counted my money. I haven't been short since. I don't drop money. It's sad to work in a place where nobody trusted each other.

In a week, school would be over. Only six months late – not bad. It was almost Christmas, and I was going to go home and see my family. They would ask how much longer I would stay at Domino's, and how long it would be until I got a real job. "I don't know" and "I'm trying" is all that I'd say. I was trying, a little. I sent out some résumés, but nobody wanted me. Maybe it's because I've been at Domino's for a year and a half. That takes real... motivation and initiative. Eugh.

I was scheduled to work New Year's Eve. Again. Last year, it was incredibly busy, and tips were great, but I didn't get to celebrate another year gone, and another year come. I rang in the New Year on a Highway 2 off-ramp on my way back from a delivery, listening to Garrison Keillor's soothing voice announce another year gone, and another year come. Randy wasn't at work last New Year's. He went to a party. Looks like he'd have to work this one.



At Domino's, Randy was the day shift with Crystal. Will had both the day and the night off; he had made reservations two years ago to stay at a party hotel/casino in Mahanomen. He made the reservations before he even started working at Domino's. It was obvious which came first.

The night shift was supposed to be Paulie and me. Paulie called in sick with pregnancy. Lame excuse. Crystal was going to work open to close so Randy could go be with his wife. What a money-grubbing sweetheart.

At 5:30 on New Year's Eve, when I was supposed to be at work, I was getting a haircut. Randy called my cell phone. "Are you coming to work? It's getting crazy and I could use you."

"Yeah, I'll be there in twenty minutes. Sorry, Randy, something came up and I'm really busy," I said, then hung up.

At 5:50 on New Year's Eve, when I said I'd be at work, I was shaving. Randy called: "Are you almost here? It's nuts and I could use you!"

"Yeah, I'm almost there Randy, hold on! Just a few more minutes."

Then I jumped in the shower and washed off all the loose hair. I put on a nice shirt and pants, and I took my girlfriend out to dinner and a New Year's party. I was celebrating. Randy wouldn't use me this New Year's.

Randy called again: "Nick, where the crap are you?!"

"I'll be right there, hold on! My car wouldn't start, but it's almost fixed!" Then I hung up, and put my phone on silent. Happy New Year's, Randy.

That night was a great time, and I slept in the next morning. At about noon, I was cruising down the highway on my way to Minneapolis, midwinter with the windows down. I had the address to Game Informer Magazine in my pocket and my portfolio of college newspaper-worthy articles in the back seat. My girlfriend sat next to me, as eager as I was to start the next chapter of life. The sky was blue and the sun was shining. I was going to become an unpaid intern and work my way to the top; I'd never been so sure about anything in my whole life. I wasn't worried about money yet – I had four grand in the bank and a \$3,000 credit limit. I was going to take a huge pay cut and live off Ramen for awhile, but life will be great soon. In the words of Jon the former Domino's driver, "It was time to grow up." I was.