

The Adventures of Carolyn McHugh "The Traveling Apprentice" Spotlight on Garner & Duff Flower Shop

What woman hasn't thought it would be fun to work in a florist shop? After all, how stressful would it be to clock in hours in a pristine show room that's always filled with colorful, exquisitely arranged floral bouquets?

Sorry to wilt your fantasy, but working in a florist shop isn't a bed of roses, as I quickly learned when I reported for my Traveling Apprentice assignment at Garner and Duff Flower Shop in Prince Frederick. Appearances can be deceiving and the tranquility of the showroom is a flower of a different color from what goes on in the workroom.

The workroom can be a hectic, dirty place- - no place for a shrinking violet, or expensive clothes, high heels, manicures, or egos. Florists have to be quick and work under stress in order to juggle priorities and work with live products with a short life span. They often work at a blistering pace to prepare huge orders of wreaths, corsages, boutonnieres, and floral arrangements for simultaneously occurring weddings, proms, funerals, and holidays. And when their masterpieces are done they have to ensure that the final products are delivered- -on time and in pristine condition- -to their intended destination.

Every budding florist begins with prep work assignments before they move on to floral arranging and design work. I was no exception. Flowers had to be processed when they arrived from the suppliers so I cleaned and sorted flowers, trimmed stems, and removed extra leaves and thorns from roses. And I swept- -constantly swept- -up massive messes of leaves and other debris from the floor. It wasn't a glamorous job, but it was a great opportunity to observe the floral designers as they worked.

Gail Gibson, the owner, and her main designer, Pat, spent most of the day creating the arrangements. At one point they let me assist by instructing me in the art of stretching and wrapping floral tape around the stems of greenery and small flowers for corsages and boutonnieres destined for a special recognition event. Afterwards I sat as a silent onlooker while Gail patiently consulted with a bride's mother and walked the apprehensive woman through numerous details about flowers for the church, flowers for the bride and wedding party, and floral arrangements for the reception tables.

Gail later explained to me that the consultation I observed had been a simple one, but many were not. She indicated there have been times when she's met four and five times with a frantic bride before the betrothed woman settled on her final choices. Images of Bridezilla came to mind and I had instant admiration for Gail's patience and soothing demeanor.

I counted this Traveling Apprentice experience as successful: I'd gained a deeper appreciation of the floral business and- - since both Pat and Gail both invited me back any time to help out during a busy period- -I felt I'd been productive.

But. . .would I be as productive when I apprenticed next month at another local business?



Look for next month's issue to find out about Carolyn's next assignment.