

Eleven o'clock on a Saturday night. Most people are out having a good time or tucking themselves in with visions of a quiet Sunday morning dancing through their heads. But no the night staff at Uncle Albert's Pancake House #2. At eleven o'clock the night staff is bracing itself for another night of work.

Nestled a few blocks from NAIT and the Plaza Cinema, Uncle Albert's #2 is like all the other Uncle Albert's: it's a small town kind of restaurant. It advertises itself as a family restaurant and delivers just that — unpretentious and plain cooking that no one can really object to — the kind of restaurant you can drag Aunt Bessie and the kids to without worry. The #2 location (like all the others) serves the usual assortment of breakfast dishes and burgers, plus all the varieties of pancakes you'd ever want: buckwheat, dollarcakes, strawberry, blueberry, chocolate chip....

The atmosphere and the clientele are blue-collar, and the customers are usually no-nonsense in their eating



habits as they probably are at work. Lunchtime at the pancake house is hectic — service fast, food simple and consistent and turnover high — a typical lunch will see each table host three or four seatings. But things are different at night — people linger a bit more, they have time to sit around and get to know the staff — after all, most people aren't in that much of a rush at four in the morning. Not to mention that the night-time customers aren't quite as no-nonsense or as "family" as the daytime clientele. But there are customers, more customers than I thought there would be. Myth #1: an all-night restaurant is going to be deserted.

"You'd be surprised at how many people are up and around in the early hours in the morning," says the night supervisor Pat Kelly. She says that on a weekend night the restaurant fills up at two and often stays full until five or six.



Pat, myself, and Gateway photographer Tim Hellum sat down at a table at the back of the restaurant, and over multiple cups of Albert's strong black coffee, talk about working nights. "This is going on my third year on this shift," says Pat. "I like this shift. I've worked the three (in the afternoon) to eleven shift and the morning shift but I still choose to work nights."

Night cook Yvonne Lambert echoed Pat's sentiments as she joined us for a cigarette break. "The graveyard shift's alright," says Yvonne. "It's like working any other shift except it's dark outside."

Yvonne says that working nights hasn't changed her life that much, adding that she gets pretty much the same off-time as people working the dayshift. The only difference is that she sleeps as her neighbours trot off to work, and she's punching in as most of them are unwinding after their day's efforts. "I sleep okay during the days," she says, "as long as the people upstairs don't play their stereo full-blast."

Pat agrees with Yvonne, saying she goes home, reads the paper and sleeps like a baby. "Nothing bothers me," she says.

Both Pat and Yvonne agree the nicest thing about working nights is getting to know the customers. Pat even gets little gifts from regulars who go on vacation.

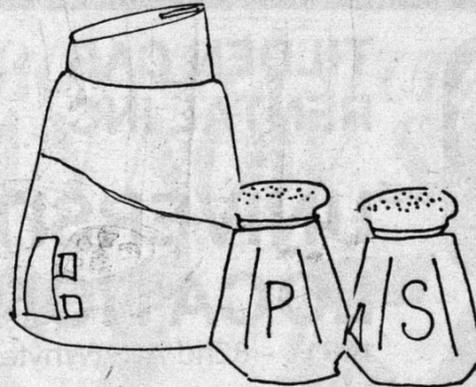
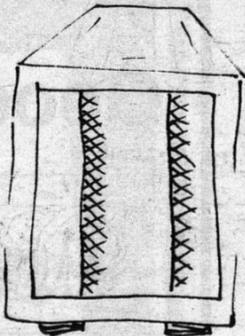
Mind you, not all the customers are gems. Pat explains that most of the customers are couples or groups of friends ("the 'family' part is for the day," says Pat of the restaurant motto), with many of them coming from nearby bars and clubs like the Rodeo Club and Sugar's. Some customers "come in a little hyper and get a bit loud."

Not that Pat puts up with that kind of behaviour. "They know me, and I tell them to keep it down. They have to take into consideration that they're not the only customers in the restaurant."

And just how far will Pat go to maintain order? "The third warning from me means no service next time. I basically get along with them, but I have barred people from here."

As for the work itself, another myth is the image we have of typical night staff sitting around drinking coffee for the majority of their shift. "There's always something to do — sugar containers to fill and wipe down, salts and peppers to fill. We work together as a team here."

On slower nights there's even more work to do. Sundays are "deep cleaning nights" as the staff does all the vacuuming and the heavy clean-up in the kitchen, including cleaning the charbroiler. "Sometimes it isn't that easy," says Pat.



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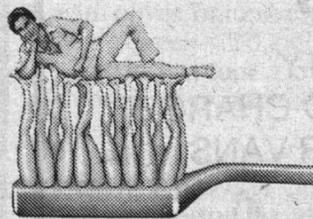
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