



Emily Smith
George's - Waco, TX

* * *

Accession Number: HOS-043

Date: May 2, 2024

Location: Baylor University's Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX

Interviewer: Angelica Mazé

Transcription: Sharp Copy Transcription, LLC

Length: one hour and fifteen minutes

Project: Serving Waco for \$2.13/Hr—Waco Restaurant Servers Who Make the Federal
Subminimum Wage

0:00:00

Angelica Mazè: This is Angelica Mazè. I am recording my Waco Servers Oral History Project for the Southern Foodways Alliance in cooperation with Baylor University's Institute for Oral History. The date is May second, and I am here with narrator Emily. Hi, Emily.

Emily Smith: Hello.

Angelica Mazè: Welcome. Let's start with your full name, if you don't mind.

Emily Smith: My full name is Emily Smith.

Angelica Mazè: Emily Smith, thank you. And what is your date of birth, if you don't mind sharing?

Emily Smith: July 25, 2000.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, cool. You're like the same age as my niece. [Emily laughs] And where were you born?

Emily Smith: I was born in Waco.

Angelica Mazè: Cool. All right, that's a good place to dive in then. Tell me a little bit about your childhood, where you lived in Waco, your family, and then we'll get into all that work stuff.

0:00:57

Emily Smith: So, pretty simple upbringings. I grew up actually in the Hewitt area when I was really young, and then I moved to Waco at about ten years old, went to Waco all of middle school and high school. I did schooling through MCC and Baylor. But not much. My dad: run-of-the-mill guy, manages a factory, has for years. He loves it. He's super cool. And my mom

was technically an English teacher; she would teach English to people—because my mom's from Mexico—getting their citizenship test.

Angelica Mazè: Oh cool. Like, English as a second language type of thing?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Cool. Oh, really cool.

Emily Smith: Just like as practice for it.

Angelica Mazè: Oh that's awesome. Where was she teaching that?

Emily Smith: It was through an ad type of thing.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, cool.

Emily Smith: So, this was privately.

Angelica Mazè: Privately, just a tutoring thing to get people up to snuff for their tests?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: That's really cool, and what kind of factory was your dad working at—or managing, you said?

0:02:01

Emily Smith: He works at an air conditioner factory.

Angelica Mazè: What factory?

Emily Smith: Air conditioner. It's Trane, actually, is the name of it.

Angelica Mazè: Cool. Sorry, what did you say the name was?

Emily Smith: Trane.

Angelica Mazè: Not that it matters, but just so I can make a note. Cool. So, how old were you when you first got into serving in restaurants, front-of-house restaurant work?

Emily Smith: I was fifteen.

Angelica Mazè: Fifteen, OK. How did that come about? Walk me through how you got that first job.

Emily Smith: Just being in high school, you kind of need money. [both laugh] In Waco, there's a whole bunch of kids that have worked at Cafe Cappuccino because it's under the table type of work. This isn't a secret; everybody in Waco knows this, but under the table type of work. And you're young, you don't really know any better, so you're like, "Oh this money is"—

Angelica Mazè: Cash.

Emily Smith: —"good for now." Yeah, cash.

0:02:58

Angelica Mazè: Okay, Cafe Cappuccino. And when you mean under the table, you're not really on the books, but they're happy to get young kids and then they just pay you cash.

Emily Smith: I wasn't on the books until I was seventeen years old and became a waitress.

Angelica Mazè: Gotcha, and did you find out about Cafe Cappuccino from your friends?

Emily Smith: Yes, I had a few friends that worked there.

Angelica Mazè: Cool, so you did you work there for the full two years until you got, like—

Emily Smith: I worked there for three years until I was eighteen.

Angelica Mazè: Oh dang, OK. What were your experiences as a teenager going to high school? What kind of hours were you working back then?

Emily Smith: Not too bad. I was mainly only working, of course, every single weekend. We had breaks off. During the summer I was working a lot of days, but they were only about six-hour shifts. They weren't full time, forty hours; I wasn't doing anything like that.

Angelica Mazè: Because you were in high school full time, so weekends. Do you remember what it was for you to be learning that type of work as a teenager? Or your experiences at Cafe Cappuccino? What was it like?

0:04:04

Emily Smith: We're allowed to talk about bosses and everything, right?

Angelica Mazè: You can talk about whatever you're comfortable with. Yeah, yeah, safe space.

Emily Smith: Excellent. I grew up knowing my mom before she went into her tutoring. My mom had always worked in restaurants just getting us through everything, so she always taught us things like, never show up to work late, never do these things, which still is ingrained in me at this moment as well. But my manager I had was, for lack of a better term, evil. [both laugh]

Angelica Mazè: I can't wait to hear about that.

Emily Smith: She was an older lady. The owner of all of them, it was his mom, so she hired us. That was probably the hardest part about working there, because it wasn't a hard job. I

was a barista, and then I did hosting, and you kind of just move everywhere. I've been a busser, a hostess, I've been in the back-making waffles, because you're kind of a one-trick pony whenever you work there.

0:05:03

Angelica Mazè: One-trick pony, I like that.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: So, that was tricky because... Do you want to elaborate on that at all? Totally up to you.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Things that happened or dynamics that were challenging.

Emily Smith: She was a little gruff, I would say. You can't really read her, and she's very—what's the correct word to say? She's very aggressive. So, it might just be old school mindsets what she would always say.

I do remember a time when I was seventeen, it was the summer before I went to Baylor. So, I had class in the morning; I was scheduled to work. And she came and knocked on my door—yeah!—to get me to go in to work. I didn't go, of course, because I was like, "I don't care. I have to go to be a Baylor. I have to get to class. I have to do stuff." Because I started in the summer. And yeah, she knocked on my door, and she would—yeah!

Angelica Mazè: Wow!

Emily Smith: —she would come and try to and grab us [laughs] to get us to go over there.

0:06:03

Angelica Mazè: I mean, phones? Phones work. [laughs]

Emily Smith: Yeah, well, I wasn't answering because it was 6:00 AM.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh! She knocked down your door at the crack of dawn, wow.

Emily Smith: I moved out when I was seventeen, so I had my own apartment. It was across the street from where Cafe Cappuccino was, and she came and knocked on my door. That was probably the worst thing that she did, so I knew it was time to find another job. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: So, boundaries, maybe, were a bit of a...

Emily Smith: Yeah, there was no such thing as boundaries with her. [Angelica laughs]
There was not.

Angelica Mazè: Gotcha. Wow that's crazy. So, when she was knocking on your door at 5:00 in the morning or whatever, you were already living in your own apartment?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: When did you move out?

Emily Smith: I moved out when I was seventeen, right after I graduated. There were some issues, just personal issues with my family. They've since been solved. It's more of a addiction issue with my mother. Since then, she's sober now, so I don't mind talking about it since she's been sober six months, but at the time it was rough, so I had to move out fast. I had to move in with a boyfriend that was older than me.

0:07:01 He didn't have a job. I had two jobs working here. I was in Cafe Cappuccino and Cathay House, so I was paying for everything, but you have to do what you have to do. I needed the credit to move out, and thankfully that worked for about a year. And then after that, my credit was pretty much settled, and I was able to move out and get out of there.

Angelica Mazè: Okay. So, you had graduated, you got this apartment with this boyfriend, and you also went straight into school at Baylor?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Wow! Okay.

Emily Smith: It was rough. It was a rough summer for me. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: That's a big transition. That's a lot of adult [laughs] stuff all at once. So, you were working two jobs at this point, you had graduated, and you were working at Cafe Cappuccino and Cathay House, you said?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: That restaurant's no longer around, right?

Emily Smith: It still exists.

Angelica Mazè: Is it still around?

Emily Smith: It's pretty close to—the Cathay House is on Richland Drive. I worked those two places because I didn't have a license until last year, and I could walk to work, either of them.

0:08:02

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, that's one thing that's not really come up in any of these interviews, but I'm glad that you brought it up, which is that if you don't have a car in Waco, it's really difficult to get—

Emily Smith: It's not a walkable city at all.

Angelica Mazè: —anywhere. Yeah, it's not walkable, but you managed to find two places to work at within walking distance.

Emily Smith: Yes,

Angelica Mazè: And were you going to school at Baylor full-time or part-time?

Emily Smith: I was going part-time in the summer, and when I got my apartment after I had a good amount of money saved, I quit the Cathay House job just because I couldn't work both and go to school. It was just a lot of stuff.

Angelica Mazè: That's a lot, yeah. I know this is a while ago now, but do you have a guesstimate for, outside of school, how many hours you were working at both of those places when you were in the thick of it?

Emily Smith: Oh, that summer, but right before I graduated, thankfully, at least Waco High, we had our last month off. That month I was probably working almost seventy hours a week.

0:09:01

Angelica Mazè: Holy smokes that's a lot.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: That's a lot. Did you have time during that period for anything else beside school?

Emily Smith: No social life.

Angelica Mazè: No social life.

Emily Smith: No, which was upsetting because all my friends—when you grow up in Waco you want to leave, so you can't blame my friends for wanting to leave and going somewhere else. That was probably the roughest time. I had no friends because I couldn't really do anything; I was always working. Even in high school, I worked from sophomore year to the end, so I was always working on the weekends. You can't really do anything much outside of—you really don't really have a social life. But it's the sacrifice you have to make to, I don't know, just to live.

Angelica Mazè: To live, to pay the bills, to get to school...

Emily Smith: Because he wasn't working; I was the only one working for the first five months.

Angelica Mazè: That's hard. Yeah, it's hard to be on a single income. It sounds difficult. It sounds like it was a lot. [laughs]

Emily Smith: Thankfully—I don't want to say it wasn't that bad—but it wasn't that bad because it was pretty cheap to live back then.

0:09:56

At the time, in 2018, all of my bills were—because I didn't have a car to drive, I didn't have to—all my bills were about \$900 a month, so it wasn't terrible. But if I have to Uber anywhere, like to class, that's where most of my extra money went.

Angelica Mazè: Right, I didn't think about that. You're living close to work, but Baylor is on the other side of the freeway.

Emily Smith: Thankfully my dad loves us a lot, so he gave us many, many rides. [both laugh]

Angelica Mazè: Oh good, that's great.

Emily Smith: He actually lived in Waco too, to give us—because neither of my sisters drive. I'm the youngest one. I just got my license last year.

Angelica Mazè: How many of you are there, siblings?

Emily Smith: Three.

Angelica Mazè: Three siblings. So, he was helping all of y'all get around.

Emily Smith: He still does. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: That's great. That's what family's for. If you're lucky to have a family to do it.

Emily Smith: He's great.

Angelica Mazè: Yes amazing. Okay, so not much of a life at that point, but you were covering all your bills. Do you have any memories from Cathay house? What was it like working there? Were you serving there as well?

Emily Smith: Yes, the entire time I worked there, I served. I started when I was a senior in high school, did that up until I graduated, and then a little bit later I quit because I couldn't handle all of it.

0:11:05 Then I went back for a period because I needed some help for a couple of months. I was thinking about going back to school, so I was like, "Well, it's a perfect time to go back to school. This is a job; it's not"—So, after I got out of the situation with my ex-boyfriend, I moved in with my sister, and we have an apartment. We still live together at the same apartment.

Angelica Mazè: I love that. That's great.

Emily Smith: She already had it. She lived there first, I just moved in. We didn't have to pay for any security deposits or any pet rent. It was all taken care of already because Selena had done it before. That's my sister's name. So, sorry. Selena.

Angelica Mazè: Selena, and you said Sherry? Oh, sharing is what you said. Sharing.

Emily Smith: Sharing everything. So, I was able to go back to school for another semester. My schooling is very complicated because you had to leave and come back and leave and come back. So, I went back, and I was working at Cathay House. They only needed part time help, so it was perfect. I was making just enough money to cover my expenses and everything. It still wasn't crazy expensive to live. It was about 2020.

0:12:10

Angelica Mazè: 2020, OK. And we're edging into the pandemic here, so I'll be curious to hear what that looked like, if you don't mind, if it's relevant. What was your sister doing with herself, with her life?

Emily Smith: She also worked at Cathay House. So, she was like, my sister wants to quit. I was working retail for a couple of years, and I did love it, but I couldn't work full time and go to school because I was really like, "Man, I should just go back and try to fix everything." So, my sister was working at Cathay House, and she was telling me, "Yeah, they need part-time help for certain days of the week, if you can," but they have just five shifts a week. The shifts are only about four hours long, so I was working twenty, twenty-five hours a week. It wasn't bad at all. I was able to still go to school and help her out with the bills, and I did that only for a semester, and then I left again and then started working at George's after that.

0:13:00

Angelica Mazè: Aha! Okay, George's, we'll get to that in a second. Just to backtrack for a second, it sounds two or three semesters, maybe, you were at Baylor, give or take. Is that about right?

Emily Smith: Three semesters.

Angelica Mazè: Three semesters. And what were you studying?

Emily Smith: Secondary education.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, very cool. Did you have a goal? How did you land on that as an area of interest? And where did you want to go with that? Tell me about that.

Emily Smith: I originally wanted to be a high school history teacher, because I loved my high school history teacher. It was like a story time every time. And I did dual credit the entire time I was in high school, so I didn't have to be here for the full four years. Of course I did not graduate, which is fine; I could always go back.

Angelica Mazè: You can always go back. When the interview is over, I can tell you some personal stories about how you can always go back, [both laugh] even if it's 15 years after your freshman year.

0:13:55

Emily Smith: Oh, perfect! I just loved it, however with the pandemic and everything, schooling changed a lot. It is not easy to be a teacher anymore. It was never about the money; no one goes into education for the money. [both laugh]

Angelica Mazè: No, that is true.

Emily Smith: And after that happened I just realized it wasn't—there's been some jobs where I've made more than—my aunt's a teacher, and after taxes, her take-home pay, there's some months it just doesn't make sense. It's so sad to say, because I do respect teachers so much, but it's not very viable.

Angelica Mazè: It's tough. And it sounds like—and we'll get into this—there was a time you have referenced already where things, life felt somewhat affordable.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: And it sounds like we're sort of heading into...

Emily Smith: The rough things.

Angelica Mazè: The rough part: things get more expensive, and then you're looking—so, you had originally thought that you would want to teach high school as well? High school history?

Emily Smith: High school history.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, that's cool.

Emily Smith: That's what I wanted to teach!

0:15:00

Angelica Mazè: So, you got through those three semesters at Baylor, and then this is also coinciding around this time where you were realizing that it would be—so, you said you left after that third semester. Was it just getting to be too much? Or were you already reassessing that career choice?

Emily Smith: It was that and also I just had a lot of mental health issues. I used to never cry or get emotional ever. Of course, I had—mom was an addict, all these things happened a bunch, and you don't really think about until one day they just all seem, I don't know. It's kind of, I don't want to say it's a mental breakdown. That's not necessarily what happened, but kind of—all of a sudden I started feeling emotions, and I would just feel numb to everything. And I don't know what happened, but for some reason I had this really bad panic attack, and ever since then I've just been very emotional, and I just couldn't handle the—it was just a lot to worry about, my schedules were.

0:16:00 And I wasn't driving either, so I was like, "I gotta get an Uber," but sometimes the Ubers are late. And sometimes I'd have to get to work super early because I'd rather be early than super late. And it was just a lot.

Angelica Mazè: That's a lot. It's a lot for a very young person.

Emily Smith: Yes. It gets overwhelming to pay bills for years, and you're just like, "I have to pay them forever." It's a lot. It's hard being an adult.

Angelica Mazè: It's hard being an adult, and you got an early start. [both laugh]

Emily Smith: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: You got an early start on that, certainly. And the mental health thing, I would at some point here like to talk more about that too, because there are a lot of folks in the food industry right now talking about the mental health toll that service work can take out of a person. And most of the folks who work in the service industry don't get health insurance, which in some cases can provide resources for mental health care, which we just we don't offer that. Did you have health insurance at any of these times?

Emily Smith: No, I haven't had health insurance since I was fourteen years old.

0:17:00 I know some jobs offer it, but it's not very affordable when you're already working for such a low wage. I know George's offered it, and it wasn't too, too bad. But you had to work a certain amount of hours, which is fine. I did. I just couldn't—it restarts starts every November, I believe, is when the time it restarts. And I'm just barely—I have to work for a certain amount of time, and then when November comes and they ask, "Do you want health insurance?" You can say yay or nay to it. They kind of go over your options. For a single person, it's kind of a lot of money, and I was just living without it. I didn't really have an opportunity. And I know Magnolia Table, when I worked there very short amount of time, they also offer health insurance for full-time employees.

Angelica Mazè: So, you did have the option, but at George's, for example, it was your contribution, right? They contribute something to it, and you contribute something to it, and it just seemed like...

Emily Smith: It's a lot of money.

Angelica Mazè: It was a lot of money?

Emily Smith: It was a lot, yes.

Angelica Mazè: Do you remember by any chance how much it was?

Emily Smith: My part was like \$200-and-something dollars.

Angelica Mazè: A month?

Emily Smith: Yes, which is kind of a lot when you're not used to paying it. I'm also not the most responsible with my money because I'm young, and I like to go out to eat with my friends. And also, at the time I still wasn't driving, so I was Ubering to work back and forth each and every day.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, well it just didn't make sense, and \$200 bucks is a lot. That's a lot.

Emily Smith: It is a lot. But me and my sisters, we never—well, my oldest sister has insurance now, she has kids. However, my other sister, the one I live with still, Selena—she's twenty-five years old—she doesn't. We've never had insurance since we've been working.

Angelica Mazè: Wow. And same thing, presumably? Maybe somebody offered her, but it just financially, mainly, has not felt viable? You don't really have to speak for your sister.

0:19:00

Emily Smith: It just was not viable and I also had a big dental bill. I got \$6,000 worth of dental work done because I had really bad—because I never had dental insurance, so I neglected it for a long time, then I started getting an infection in my jaw bone, I had to get two teeth removed. They're still gone. I couldn't afford to replace them.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh!

Emily Smith: Yeah, they're gone. Because you can't get them—I mean, if I get insurance later in life, then I'll go in and get them, but I was paying for that also. And at the time, I was paying \$300 a month or \$400 a month, and so to pay another \$200 for insurance when I was already paying this bill was a lot of money.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh! And you said \$6,000 to have these teeth removed, basically? Without insurance.

Emily Smith: Removed, and then I had to get cosmetic bonding because they weren't bad enough for me to need braces, but they filled in some spots, and I had a lot of cavities I had to fix.

Angelica Mazè: I know we've started the adulting, and working, and insurance stopped for you at fourteen. Before that, when you were growing up, did you all have health insurance?

0:20:02

Emily Smith: Yes, we did up until my mom became an addict. And also, I will say, because it's a little bit confusing, who I call my dad is not my biological father. He's great. Him and my mom were together. They aren't together anymore. I mean, we're still very close, and we've always called him our dad our whole lives. My mom unfortunately was the one that fell off the wagon and just got injured. Opioids are a thing, which is unfortunate. Yeah but that's when we lost our health insurance and our dental insurance and all those things.

Angelica Mazè: Young, so this was when you were a teenager.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, OK. And then you got cavities and had to shell out a huge chunk of change, and you were paying \$300 a month to pay off that dental debt.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Well, that explains why you didn't want to add another \$200-plus onto that. Thank you for sharing that. So, up to now you've stepped out of school, there was too much going on, and you went to George's, is that right?

0:21:05

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Let's talk about George's. George's has come up in this project before. It's a Waco institution. There's two locations. You tell me about George's.

Emily Smith: Actually, I worked there for three years up until two weeks ago.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow!

Emily Smith: Only because I'm moving pretty soon.

Angelica Mazè: Oh! We'll get to that. [cross-talk]

Emily Smith: Yes, but I did enjoy working there for the most part. The money is—was pretty good. When I first started working there they were very understaffed, but we got bigger sections because of it, so I was more than happy. I liked working there a lot. Of course the job has its issues. There's a joke in George's that there's not an HR because the managers are kind of . . . They're a little scummy, I'm not going to lie. But, you work in the service industry, that's just how it is. And that's horrible to say, but that's just how it is in the service industry.

0:22:02 When I first started working there I was working maybe sixty hours, fifty to sixty hours a week. I wasn't in school, but it was rough for the first time. But at least I finally had an income where I could pay off that dental work, so I just was working a lot. That's whenever the mental health issue started happening at a really rapid rate. It's a very emotionally exhausting job because people get so drunk so often. [both laugh]

Angelica Mazè: Yes. It's not really funny, but—[Angelica laughs]

Emily Smith: It is though. It's bad. And I wish there were protection for—it's hard to cut somebody off. I've since then grew backbone and I'm happy to do it now, but back then. . . I'm just smaller, I hated cutting off drunk people. They get so aggressive about it, and they're just. . . It's something management should deal with. It's not something the server should have to deal with if they're not comfortable with it.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, and you were young. What was the average age of you and your colleagues?

0:23:04

Emily Smith: Oh, we were like twenty-one. Yeah, all of my friends were twenty to twenty-three. We were all college age.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, so not a lot of thirty-year-olds and forty-year-olds working front of house.

Emily Smith: There were a few, but they would work breakfast or lunch. Dinner time was whenever it was pretty much almost all of them, everybody was about college age.

Angelica Mazè: And what was the gender split in terms of men versus women working front of house jobs at George's?

Emily Smith: It was mostly women, and actually this brings me to a comment that one of my managers made. One of my friends wanted to work there, and I asked him, "What do you look for when you hire?" And he said sevens and up.

Angelica Mazè: Oh wow!

Emily Smith: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Wow!

Emily Smith: He was blunt about it. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: And you said "scuzzy" was the term that you used—

Emily Smith: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: —but were these managers all men?

Emily Smith: We had one manager that was a girl at the time. There was four main managers. One of them was a girl, and then three were men.

0:24:01

Angelica Mazè: Was that the attitude of all of the managers there, including the female manager? This kind of like, we need you to be cute, [laughs] basically?

Emily Smith: Yeah, that's kind of what they're looking for when they hire. Even now—this is the George's in Waco.

Angelica Mazè: I was going to ask, thank you.

Emily Smith: All pretty girls. There are some men that work there. Even the men that work there are cute. [Angelica laughs] I don't know where they find these, but even they were all very—and their reasoning behind this was, and they said, "If all the girls are pretty, there's not really drama. Because why be upset? You're pretty." That was the mentality of it, but there wasn't a lot of drama when I worked there, so maybe they had it—I don't know.

Angelica Mazè: Maybe they were right? Is that how that works? [Angelica laughs]

Emily Smith: Maybe they were on to something. I just wouldn't say it out loud. But that's what I was always told. Yeah, it was a lot of... Misogynistic tendencies were definitely a thing.

0:25:00 We had a lot of it, unfortunately.

Angelica Mazè: Obviously these are things that you were noticing. Is this something that your other colleagues were aware of? Your coworkers?

Emily Smith: Oh, yeah.

Angelica Mazè: And you would talk about it?

Emily Smith: Oh yes, all the time.

Angelica Mazè: So, you're dealing with a lot of drunk customers and having to cut them off and whatever. Were they also sexually harassing you?

Emily Smith: Yes, all of the time.

Angelica Mazè: Do you have any memories that you want to share about that? Or incidences that you found challenging? Or something you remember from a coworker?

Emily Smith: Yes. I remember—it is a lot. Probably George's is the restaurant in Waco that has probably the most harassment. Maybe Hooters would have more. But yeah, our uniforms are—for the deck and bar area, we could wear jeans and a T-shirt if we wanted to. Most people wear the tank tops though because they're just cuter.

Angelica Mazè: This is a uniform? Like, they're providing you with a tank top and a...

0:26:02

Emily Smith: Well, we paid for our own uniforms. They provide you with like two shirts when you first start, and that's it. Everything else is you pay for anything extra that you would need. So, the tank tops, there was a girl that worked there for a year, she made them. We would wear them and shorts. It's hot in the summer in the patio area. Short shorts and a tank top were what most girls wore most of the days. I've been grabbed. My butt has been grabbed maybe three times since I worked there.

There were regulars I kind of wish, um—I have a story, actually. There is a man that worked—that would go there almost every day with his wife. There was a week when I was in the hospital. I came back from the hospital—and they're regulars, they would come like every day. He handed me a note with his number. I still have a picture of it. He gave it to me, and his wife was there so I don't think anything weird of it, but it said, Oh, text Hank, and my number, and even the hospital.

0:27:00 I was thinking, "Oh, they're really nice. They know me, they know I was in the hospital. That's nice of them to offer." I sent a message and I said, "Thank you so much, but I have some savings, and I'm going to be fine." So he went on about how beautiful he thought I was and how not to—keep it discreet. And I was like, "What are you talking about?"

Angelica Mazè: So you thought he was offering to help?

Emily Smith: I was really confused, just being nice because they came every day yeah so he hit.

Angelica Mazè: So you have been in the hospital.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Was this for the dental?

Emily Smith: No this is something different.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, we can talk about that or not later. So, they had heard about this guy, this regular. You thought he was offering some help?

Emily Smith: Yeah, he came in with his wife every day. I didn't think that. And I knew he had—because I see him every day—probably had a good amount of income. He offered, but he was saying, I don't know, just asking to send him pictures, which was really strange. I still have the messaging thread, because I want to protect myself, because I don't want to get in trouble for this. And I wasn't the first person he did this too.

0:28:00

Angelica Mazè: Wow.

Emily Smith: And I was not the last while I worked there. And he just recently got banned, and this happened 2021 or 2022.

Angelica Mazè: Wow. And he got banned because somebody, because enough—

Emily Smith: I guess it was the last straw, yeah. My manager asked me, she was like, "Can you pull up the messages again from a couple years ago? Do you have them?" And I was like, "I sure do."

Angelica Mazè: Good for you. [both laugh]

Emily Smith: And I kept them. I showed them when it first happened, and I was just like, "I'm not serving this dude anymore. He's weird."

Angelica Mazè: I was going to ask, OK.

Emily Smith: And then I never had to worry about serving him again, and everything was fine.

Angelica Mazè: So, your managers didn't make you take this guy's table? Because apparently he kept—continued to keep coming.

Emily Smith: No, they thought it was funny though. Because it's so ridiculous. That was so bold to do, especially when his wife is there. And it was his sick wife. And we all knew. So I didn't think anything of it. You don't think people have bad intentions that, but I told one of my friends that worked there, and she was like, "Yeah, I don't serve him either, because he did the same thing to me." And I was like, "Man! Do the managers know?" She goes, "I never told anybody." And I was like, "I told the managers immediately."

0:29:00 The next day I came into work, I was like, "Look at these messages. I'm not serving that man anymore." And he just continued to eat there, and then it happened to another person while I worked there. For a year I just did catering, so I wasn't actually in the restaurant, I

was doing their catering side. Then I went back for a few months, and he got banned in the last few months I worked. It was recently he got banned.

Angelica Mazè: Wow. So, that's a long time that he was allowed to keep—

Emily Smith: I don't know how many girls he tried to—so, the first girl, she quit shortly after and did her professional job, and I told the management immediately. But I think I was the only person to text him, because I told him, "Oh, don't worry about it, I have savings and stuff." And he took it bad after that. Because I think they're just being nice. He was not just being nice.

Angelica Mazè: Oh gosh. Ugh, gosh. And you were 21?

Emily Smith: I was twenty-one.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, and he was...

Emily Smith: Like, sixty.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my God! Oh...

0:30:00 I'm very sorry for you for having to have that experience. Anyway, goodness.

Wow. So these managers, is it fair to say that they were—they let you at least not have to serve this guy anymore, but did you feel they had your back? I guess, is what I'm trying to ask.

Emily Smith: I feel that he should have been banned a lot sooner. I think the third time it happened, the girl was younger than I was. She was 18 or 19, so whenever it happened to her—she was one of the hostesses—they should have been him then. I don't think they should have waited two years to handle that.

Angelica Mazè: And how about generally, just as far as management support goes? Did you feel like you could go to them if you had issues, and that they would hear you out or try to

make your work life better if you were having challenges? Was that a dynamic that you had with your managers?

0:31:00

Emily Smith: I would say I would talk to some of them about certain issues I was having, but it was never full term, like there were never long-term solutions. I was like, "I'm working a lot of stuff, and I'm having a really hard time right now, could I have less hours?" Then for a couple of weeks, they'll give you forty hours instead of the fifty-five hours. Then a couple weeks later, you're going to go right back to fifty-five hours. And they're like, "Oh, it's a break though!" But it's not really a break. I would say it was not long-term support at all.

Angelica Mazè: Okay. Short-term solutions, but nothing that fixes the long term, addresses the bigger issue.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: You just touched on it, but it sounds like while you were there—and we can talk about this as much as little—but it started to wear on you, this—

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: —this life. So, you said you were working fifty to sixty hours a week. Tell me a little bit about what that was like for all the other things that you wanted to do in your life, plus working, or if you could even think. If you even had energy to think about what was going on at that time for you?

0:32:06

Emily Smith: The first year I worked there, it was—well, first having started, it was great, loved it, got used to it. It started becoming a little rough because it was a lot of hours. Me and another girl that worked there named Caitlyn, we would always be there. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, we would double lunch and dinner. So we would always double those three days, and then maybe get off Thursday, then have to work. We probably had one day off, each. We'd have to at least do a shift or something, which is rough.

Angelica Mazè: And a double shift is how long, if you did lunch and dinner?

Emily Smith: 10:30 to—if I worked in the dining room, it would end at 11:00, but if I worked in the deck or bar, you're probably there 'til 12. The latest I've been there was 1:30 or 2:00 AM.

Angelica Mazè: So, 10:30 AM to 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 1:00, or 2:00 in the morning.

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm. And they try to give you breaks in between on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesdays. It's easier to. But if it's a busy day, you just don't get a break.

0:33:00

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, that's a lot. It sounds you came a couple times to managers and said, "Hey, I need a break." And they would cut your hours back? How were you coping? How did you navigate this?

Emily Smith: The first time it was getting too much, and I was like, "I have to hand my two weeks in. I just cannot do all this." And she was like, "Do you have a certain day out of the week you'd want off?" And I was like, "Mondays." Mondays off are great because we were closed Sundays. So I was like, "Monday's off would be great." And I was like, "If I can do

everything Sunday/Monday and then come into work and just work the other five days, and just do doubles and stuff." She was like, "Okay, we'll do that for you." And until I came back, that's exactly how I did everything. It got really, really bad because the problems came back, even though I was only working five days a week, it still was a lot of doubles. When I was there, because we had to roll our own silverware, so we were there till 1:00 AM. You can't have a social life because you're always working.

0:34:02 Can't request certain days off because of course you have Baylor game days and you have to be there, which is nice, so the money is always good those days. It's rough though. It got very, very rough. And I was in the hospitals as a suicide attempt. It was a few years ago. So, I was out for like a week for when that happened. My sister just called them and told them I was in the hospital, she didn't say why, so they had no idea why I was in hospital for that week. And another girl named Skylar, she was also in the hospital the same week so she could get her gallbladder removed, and we were the two main closers. So, she told me when I got out of the hospital, I was like, "Oh my gosh! What happened? Are you OK?" And she was like, "Yeah, I got my gallbladder removed." She was like, "What were you in the hospital for?" And I was like, I don't want to say what I was in the hospital for. And I was like, "Oh, well, I just had some heart issues and stuff." And she was like, "Yeah, they got pretty upset that we were both here at the same time." And I know they didn't know why I was in the hospital, but if I was in there for a week, it was probably something serious. It wasn't like I was in there like—I broke my arm.

0:35:00

Angelica Mazè: They don't just admit people who have whatever, a tummy ache.

Emily Smith: Yeah, and that was the first thing when I thought of it, like “What if I don’t have a job when I go back?”

Angelica Mazè: Yeah so you were worried about that too.

Emily Smith: I was worried.

Angelica Mazè: You had to be gone for a week.

Emily Smith: Because I couldn't talk to my sister. I spoke to her and she said, "He said he cleared your schedule for the week." When I got that confirmation, I was like, "Okay, good I must still have a job at least," which—that’s where my mind was at when I was in the hardest time in my entire life. And when I went back—this is also something I really am not happy with how they treated this—I went back, I have my doctor's notes, and they can see why I was in the hospital. And unfortunately I wasn't going to tell anybody. People kind of knew because I was going through a really hard time, so some people, like my friends expected it. But one of the managers left the doctor's note in the office, and people go in and out of the office all the time, so everyone found out.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Emily Smith: I didn't want to talk about it. Yeah you don't want to say that to your...

0:36:00 Like, in my family, only my sister and dad knew, and nobody else my family knew. My mom found out years later. My other sister found out years later. I just didn't want anybody to know, but they ended up finding out.

Angelica Mazè: That's hard.

Emily Smith: I know, it's really hard. And any time I ever cried or did anything—because you don't just get better just because you get out. You're good for a couple weeks then you're like—and I still had these problems. I had TIA so I was dealing with—

Angelica Mazè: TIA?

Emily Smith: It's like a mini-stroke.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow! Okay.

Emily Smith: And I was dealing with all of that so when I called back to work and I was speaking. . . There's not very many long-term effects. I feel like it did though, because my emotions were just way worse than they used to be before. I just don't like the way the management handled that situation. I kind of wish they had a clause where, like, maybe if I catch anybody talking about it, they're done, or it's a write-up or something. Because people were talking about it, and I just didn't want to overhear anything. I just wanted to put that in the past. I didn't want to keep—which is why I went on the catering side a year later.

0:37:01 Just, I didn't want to keep being reminded of it, and I kept being reminded of it.

Angelica Mazè: Because people were talking about it?

Emily Smith: Yeah, and there was a difference. It wasn't just asking, but. . . After a year, I would joke about it, and then the other people joke about it, and then I was like, I don't know if I'm ever going to really get better. I don't know, I kept thinking about it.

Angelica Mazè: And you went back to work right after you got out of the hospital?

Emily Smith: Yeah I got out of the hospital Friday and I went back to work that Monday. Or that Saturday. Or no, it wasn't the next day. I think it was that Monday.

Angelica Mazè: Did you have to pay for that hospital visit out of pocket?

Emily Smith: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, OK. And was there follow-up care for you after you left the hospital, in terms of regular mental-health check-ins, or any kind of support? Did you get any kind of support?

Emily Smith: I didn't as soon as I got out because I couldn't afford it with all the bills, which I still haven't paid all my bills off.

0:38:02 Just waiting for that seven years. No, I'm just kidding. [both laugh] It's horrible to say that, but it's what it is because that health care was expensive. I initially started paying it off, but they don't just send you one bill. It's like eighty-five bills they send to you, and they're all different amounts, and I was just like, "Okay, maybe I should just. . ." [sighs]. But I actually went to Waco Family Health Center, and that's how I got—like, later.

Angelica Mazè: How much later?

Emily Smith: Months later, like five months later or something, because I couldn't afford it, because I was trying—I was originally starting to pay off the bills. Not pay them off, but make some dent in them, and then it just kept getting worse and worse and then, I don't know, it was just getting really expensive. So the Mondays I had off, I would go to Waco Family Health Center, and I would talk to a therapist there.

Angelica Mazè: So they had a therapist for you. Do they also offer any financial advice, or is it basically they're just providing healthcare for you?

0:38:58 [cross-talk]

Emily Smith: They offer advice.

Angelica Mazè: I don't really know what they do, is what I'm saying. [laughs]

Emily Smith: It's just a low income—

Angelica Mazè: Okay.

Emily Smith: It's very affordable, or in certain cases they don't charge you—

Angelica Mazè: Free.

Emily Smith: Yes. It's more like mental-health counseling; I wouldn't say it's a therapist.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, mental-health counseling. And they offer other services too, right? I know some of the other services they offer, but I didn't know that they had a mental-health support system there. Was that helpful for you?

Emily Smith: It was, yes.

Angelica Mazè: How long did you see somebody there? Or, how long did you use that support system?

Emily Smith: I used it for about three months, and then I was dealing with other things as well, so I had to see a special therapist for things, which were problems from before I even worked at—it wasn't because of George's; it was a different issue. And then I just started needing more personalized, more frequent care.

Angelica Mazè: Did you feel it was helpful?

0:39:58

Emily Smith: Yes. It's a lot better now. I had an eating disorder, and I just finished my—I went to Center of Discovery in Austin, and I just finished my program a few months ago.

Angelica Mazè: Congratulations. Sorry, you said you went to where in Austin?

Emily Smith: Center of Discovery. They have a few of them. They have them in Houston and Dallas, I believe, as well, but they helped a lot, yes.

Angelica Mazè: Well congratulations. That's great. And are you having to pay for that also?

Emily Smith: I paid out of pocket, yeah. It was like \$7,000.

Angelica Mazè: Snap! The Center for Discovery is—Oh my goodness!—\$7,000 for your whole treatment there?

Emily Smith: Yes. They have payment plans of course. I had a credit card, so most of it on that, paid the rest out of pocket. Every month just paying off of it.

Angelica Mazè: Wow!

Emily Smith: Yeah, it's a lot! It's so much money to live.

Angelica Mazè: It's a lot of responsibility. It is. One of the questions I was going to ask is, while you were busting your buns at George's and working all these hours, were you able to save any money?

Emily Smith: It seems as soon as you save or get a leg up, it all goes away really fast.

0:40:57 Suddenly you have to get dental work done, or my car. When I finally got my license, I had to get a car because I was paying \$400 a month in Ubers.

Angelica Mazè: Oh wow. I was going to ask how much that cost.

Emily Smith: It's a lot of money, which is basically car payment, so I might as well just get that. Then my bumper came off, and then you have to pay for—cars are expensive to have on their own. The bumper was my fault though, because I did hit something on the highway, but it's fine.

Angelica Mazè: But that's life, right? Stuff happens.

Emily Smith: It's life, yeah. And then around that time, what else happened? Oh, for George's, I guess this will be the last thing about it. I guess I really didn't feel supported now that I'm thinking about it. My teeth got taken out, not the first set of dental stuff, but some months later, and I had to go into work that day that my teeth got taken out.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh!

Emily Smith: Yeah, so I had two teeth taken out, and I had to go into work, and they were swollen, and I was just begging them to send me home, and I didn't get sent home until like 9:00 PM. that day. I was the first one to leave.

0:42:00 But they needed me, I guess, so much, that I had to stay there. That was probably the worst thing that happened when I worked there besides the whole mental-health stuff. Yeah my teeth got taken out, my mouth was swollen, and the table was like, "Are you OK?" And I was like, "Yeah, I just had to get some dental surgery done."

Angelica Mazè: Today!

Emily Smith: Yeah, they were like, "When?" I was like, "Oh yeah, today." I had gauze in my mouth still, and I'm confused because I'm medicated, I still had to go in to work. They

were like, "Oh, do you want to say something?" And I was like, "Honestly, yeah. If you want, if you're down to, say something." So, they talked to a manager and they were like, "Yeah, we can't really understand her. Her mouth is swollen. She shouldn't be here." And they felt bad enough to send me home. [laughs] You had to basically shame them.

Angelica Mazè: The customers had to shame them, which is really an extra—

Emily Smith: I know that's so unprofessional, but they could tell I was in a lot of pain.

Angelica Mazè: It's not—well, my opinion doesn't matter here, but it's unprofessional that you were in that situation in the first place. That's not your responsibility.

Emily Smith: I know, they should have just let me have the day off, because it was emergency surgery so I couldn't take the day off.

0:43:02 I was supposed to have surgery a different day, and I was like, "I'm going to be a little bit late," which they were upset about. I was never late in the entire time I ever worked there, but the minute somebody—or if you have other jobs—there was a couple of times I had more than one job.

Angelica Mazè: While you were working fifty to sixty hours at George's, you had other jobs?

Emily Smith: Yeah this is back whenever they got more staff, so it was more like forty hours or forty-five hours. It was more normal.

Angelica Mazè: But still profoundly full time plus, basically.

Emily Smith: It just got harder to live, and inflation happened and everything is a lot more expensive now. So I was working, the past—when I came back from the other shifts where

I was catering, and then I was also having—I had another job. And then me and one of my friends, if you are late, there's a lot of retaliation against you. They're a little gossipy, I would say. You don't want to be—

Angelica Mazè: These are the managers?

Emily Smith: Yes, management. They're a little, uh, it's just hard. They've been there forever. They're probably going to be there until they retire, maybe.

0:44:00 But I had a friend. He worked two jobs. He would work in the morning and at night, and at the hotel I work at now, I would work there at night, so I would have special stuff. I could tell they were getting annoyed that I was—when I originally went to go back to serving, they asked how much I wanted to work, and I was like, "Honestly, two to three days a week is enough, because I'm moving pretty soon," and I'm not someone that's reliable full time. And they would always get upset, like, "Have to be there at 4:00." And they're like, "Yeah, no problem," but then it'd be an issue later. It was rough. My friend—everybody would have certain rooms and they do first cuts—and he would be like, "Hey, I have to be at my other job at 4:30. Can I leave at 3:30?" Everybody else in the room was cool with it; they're going to cut somebody anyways, but they were at the point where they were like, "You can't leave early. You're always leaving early." But they knew he had another job. It wasn't like we were just going home to lollygag; we had another job.

0:44:55

Angelica Mazè: Yeah and this kind of like, you would get permission to come in later or to do whatever it is you needed to do to have this second job. But just to clarify the retribution, the vibe: They would be talking about you? Or how would that play out? You said something, I can't

quite—but it was sort of like it would become a problem later in your shift or something. How would that manifest itself? How would you become aware that they were annoyed that you had come in late or whatever?

Emily Smith: We would just hear them gossiping. They have a manager reading every Thursday, and there were sometimes I would wait, or I would eat in between my two jobs. So I would just sit down—every Thursday they had a manager meeting you would hear it being brought up, especially with him where they message you back or snide remarks. My friend Tony, he was like, "Hey, I might be a couple minutes late." And she called and she was like, "You're always late." He was never late. This boy was never late. It was just very passive aggressive, I guess.

0:46:02 I would get that a lot as well, and they would act like they're doing me a favor when I worked there. Like I said, I agreed to work two to three days a week, and they were scheduling me thirty-seven hours, and I had a full time, because at the hotel I was working there forty hours, and I just could not work it. I just could not do it.

Angelica Mazè: I was going to ask , what were the other jobs that you were working while you were working more or less full time at George's? You were working at a hotel?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm, I work there now too. This is when I came back. When I was catering I started working at the hotel that year, and then I also worked at DiamondBack's and catered the whole time. Even though I quit serving at George's, I would do catering a couple times a week or once a week if I was really busy at DiamondBack's, and then I started working at the hotel recently.

Angelica Mazè: And what hotel are you working at?

Emily Smith: Hotel Herringbone.

Angelica Mazè: Oh nice.

Emily Smith: They just opened.

Angelica Mazè: So, new hotel. I haven't been yet. Yeah, you said they just opened. So, you've been working there for how long, now?

0:47:02

Emily Smith: I got hired in January. We did a lot of training and stuff. And that's about the time I went back to serving at George's.

Angelica Mazè: So, before January, just so I get the timeline right, you were still working at George's?

Emily Smith: Yeah, I was doing caterings that year, and I was working DiamondBack's that year as well.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, catering and DiamondBack's for like a year. And you had transitioned into catering to get out of the craziness that was the restaurant.

Emily Smith: Yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Was the catering better?

Emily Smith: Yes, and I still would pick up for them if they ever needed a bartender or something. I still would do it today even though I officially do not work there. But catering, if they ever need help, they know they can call me and I will. If I can do it, I will do it. I liked

catering; it's a different clientele, so was DiamondBack's. George's is just hard to be there long term because of the clientele we get. It's hard to work with drunk people all the time.

Angelica Mazè: Hard to work with drunk people all the time, amen.

0:48:00 So, how did you find the hotel? How did that come about that you were able to transition out of catering and DiamondBack's and into the hotel?

Emily Smith: So, I was thinking about leaving DiamondBack's just because. . . Most restaurants you work at—not all of them, the hotel's not like this—but you will get paid your money that night.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, right. In cash.

Emily Smith: In cash, yeah, so you claim your tips and stuff, and they pay you that night. DiamondBack's was doing a lot of big parties at the time so they would do half your shifts on big parties, half your shifts on serving, so you were making good money for a good amount of time. But if you were doing the big parties that were over \$5,000, which a lot of them are because DiamondBack's is not cheap, they would go on your check, so your taxes would get taken out. A lot of your taxes get taken out, so you wouldn't get a lot of money back. So our checks would be like—we'd work maybe three days and then serve three days, maybe you make \$300 serving that week, and then your check is maybe \$100, which is not sustainable.

0:49:08

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, and I've heard this from other folks I've been interviewing. One of the good things about the serving and the tips is that you get the cash at the end of the night. If it goes on your check, then with the taxes it greatly diminishes your income.

Emily Smith: That's the hotel.

Angelica Mazè: So, if you're working a huge party at DiamondBack's—and I'm assuming they have to add a gratuity that they are getting the customer, the event client to pay for, or something, so that goes on your paycheck, so you see a lot less than you would if it was just a table you were waiting.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, so that was primarily why you left?

Emily Smith: Yes, because it was just too much. It was great at first, but then it just wasn't really worth the money after because we were doing so many big parties, and the big parties are a lot more work.

0:49:59 You're there really late to clean up and set up, or you have to go in early to set up and clean up everything. At night you have to clean up and take everything down, put all the tables back. It was just way too much. They were asking a lot, I'll say that.

Angelica Mazè: Were they also paying \$2.13 an hour and then you were getting tips?

Emily Smith: Yes, but here's the thing about that which really frustrates me about restaurants. Every restaurant I worked at except for Cathay House does this. There's tip share. I don't mind even the \$2.13 an hour plus tips, I just hate that we have to pay tip share, because our tip share at DiamondBack's is so high. It's 4 percent, so our tip share would be like \$75 some nights. And everybody tips 20 percent; it's an expensive restaurant so people are a little less likely to, just because it does cost a lot of money.

Angelica Mazè: You think people—customers are tipping less because it's a pricey restaurant?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm, it's a little bit more pricey. If you get a \$10 tip at George's, it's almost always over 20 percent because everything is so cheap. But if you get that at DiamondBack's, it really brings down your average, so that does suck.

0:51:02

Angelica Mazè: And you are tip sharing with all the folks in back of house? Who does the tip share go to?

Emily Smith: I know it's different for every restaurant, but I know for George's it was hostess, bartenders, and food runners.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, wow. So none of the cooks, none of the dishwashers, nobody in the back of house?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, interesting. So the tip share just really impacted your take home?

Emily Smith: Yes. It's bad. There were days. I know some restaurants cap it. So when we were talking about the hotels, at our hotel it's 5 percent, so 5 percent of our total sales, not our tips. So if a table does not tip, you still have to pay the 5 percent, so you could lose money on tables which is what I don't like. I don't think that's OK.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, that's tough. So, you switched. Did you just see an ad for it? Or did you see somebody you knew about the hotel? How'd you find out about the hotel?

0:52:02

Emily Smith: My best friend works at Milo, and I would go there all the time, and I was like, "Yeah, I don't really want to work at DiamondBack's anymore." It's just very—I was telling him about the issues, and he was like, "Oh, there's an opening at a new hotel. There's a new restaurant there, and there's a bar as well, you should. . ." And Andy, I don't know if he's the GM or if he has ownership in Milo, I don't know. His stepson was the GM at Hotel Herringbone—or, not Hotel Herringbone, but all of the food and beverage, I guess, for the hotel. So, he came and talked to me, and he was like, "You should work with us." I was like, "Okay," and I got an application in, got hired, started training early. Unfortunately the hotel opening was pushed back just because of occupation issues, and just it's hard to open a new business. But eventually that's how I found out about the job. He came and talked to me personally after I was over there and I was like, "I'm thinking about leaving." And I was like, "Are you guys hiring over here?" And he was like, "They're hiring at a new hotel. I like it. Do you have any fine-dining experience? I think you'd like it."

0:53:02

Angelica Mazè: Awesome. And do you like it?

Emily Smith: I do for the most part. [laughs] I'm kidding.

Angelica Mazè: Well, no. Tell me, what's the clientele like? So, I guess you started training for the hotel to work in the restaurant which is called...

Emily Smith: Red Herring.

Angelica Mazè: Red Herring, thank you. And in January. And it actually opened fairly recently, right? When did it open?

Emily Smith: In the weeks March 20 or the 27th was when it actually opened. It was supposed to open originally March 4th, like their soft opening. The grand opening was Saturday.

Angelica Mazè: I've been seeing things, but it's hard for me to keep track. So, you've been open since. . .

Emily Smith: March 27, late March, about then.

Angelica Mazè: Were you working there full time being trained? Or were you working there part time and then also you went back to George's? Walk me through what's been going on the past few months. [laughter]

Emily Smith: I was working at George's in the morning then going to the hotel to train at night.

0:53:59 And then the training would be maybe four to five hours, so I'd work a lunch shift, or breakfast and lunch sometimes at George's, and I would go straight to the hotel.

Angelica Mazè: And they were paying you for the training?

Emily Smith: Minimum wage.

Angelica Mazè: Minimum wage, OK. \$7.25 an hour?

Emily Smith: Yes. It was a lot of manual labor for \$7.25; I'm not going to lie to you right now. [laughs]

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, what did the training look like?

Emily Smith: It was mostly just setting up the restaurant, so we were Bob the Builder in there. We were building a lot of stuff, a lot of sweeping, a lot of unboxing, taking off stickers. So

it wasn't like we were really "training" the entire time until the last couple weeks. Even the last week, they were like, "We're probably going to open the week of the 15th," it was I think Saturday or Friday. They were like, "We might open this week." And I was like, "I do not feel prepared, honestly." None of us did. Because at that time we didn't go through training of our menu. We went to the menu once, and that was it, but we were still there four or five days a week, building.

0:54:59

Angelica Mazè: Building the inside of the restaurant.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, OK. Like, assembling chairs and tables and—

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, OK, interesting. And was this just the front-of-house staff that was doing this? Or were cooks there too? Or who all was there putting the restaurant together?

Emily Smith: Cooks were setting up the kitchen aspect of it. There's lots to do there too, unfortunately for them. And we also have an upstairs bar called Lucky Bucks, I worked there as well.

Angelica Mazè: What's it called?

Emily Smith: Lucky Bucks.

Angelica Mazè: Lucky Bucks, I didn't know that.

Emily Smith: It's a rooftop bar, super cute, you should go. I worked there as well, and I still work there as well. So, most people that work at Lucky Bucks, we have training for both.

Angelica Mazè: Is it the same company, basically?

Emily Smith: Yeah. Jeremy, he's the manager. He oversees both of them, and we're just back and forth. They're just different menus, but you're still employees at both.

Angelica Mazè: And they're scheduling you to work in both places?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm. Which I actually honestly enjoy, because then you don't get burnt out.

0:56:00 Sometimes you want fast-paced bartending, and just in and out, you want to leave. And that's what I like about it.

Angelica Mazè: So, the upstairs is less of a time commitment with a single customer or table, because it's more of a bar, and then downstairs it's more of a fine dining vibe? Is that right?

Emily Smith: Yes. I do like doing both, but sometimes I just want to calm. Sometimes I'm really tired because I worked in the morning, I just want to go upstairs and just stay awake.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Okay, so in mid-March when everything opened, did you continue to work at George's and also at Herringbone?

Emily Smith: I did for a couple of weeks just until—or I did for about a month until George's were scheduling me way too much. And they would say, "Oh, we had no idea you worked another job." But they definitely knew because I was going there every day after work. "Oh, we didn't know you were full time over there." And I was like, "No, you do though, because I'm here every day. I'm leaving every day after work." [laughs]

0:57:00 And the hotel job, they knew I was moving in August and they still were very nice. Also, I invested a lot of time into building that place myself. Of course I invested a lot of time at George's as well, but I feel I paid my dues there. [both laugh] And the hotel just seemed more of an environment where I was—even still now, the clientele is just so different.

Angelica Mazè: In a good way? An improvement?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Let's talk about this move that you have coming up. Where, why, how did it come about? Tell me about it.

Emily Smith: I have a couple of friends in Austin. They have a YouTube channel. So, I was always going to move out of Waco eventually, but I never knew. So I became good friends with one of them, started going to Austin more and more. I loved it, and I was like, "Well, I want to move here, I just don't even know where to start." My other friend, the one that works at Milo, he was like, "I want to go. I thought about moving to Austin."

0:58:00 I was like, "It's crazy, I was saying the same thing!" We're looking at apartments now, and yeah, we're going to move to Austin.

Angelica Mazè: Amazing. So, he's working at Milo, you're at Herringbone, and you said, I think, that you are done with George's now?

Emily Smith: Yes, I'm all done with it unless there are odd caterings every once in a while.

Angelica Mazè: And then you have another friend who's already in Austin?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm.

Angelica Mazè: And you and your friend are going to go live with them?

Emily Smith: No, we're just moving in, the two of us.

Angelica Mazè: Very cool. So, what kind of plans are you making? You've been working nonstop for a really long time, what are you dreaming about for this next adventure? Tell me.

Emily Smith: I just think it'll be so much newer. I do think I'm just burned out from being here so often. Also with everything that happened a couple years ago, I just need a fresh start. I really need a fresh start. And then I finally started paying off all those medical, credit cards.

Angelica Mazè: Congratulations.

Emily Smith: Yeah, besides the odd event bills. Yeah but I paid off the Center of Discovery, paid off the dental stuff.

0:59:01 I can finally start saving. I haven't saved until literally this year and became serious about it. And then we were talking about it, and it's viable; we have already started interviewing for restaurants. Because it's a bigger city, you make more money while you're there. We're going to live in Cedar Park, not necessarily Austin-Austin, because it's one of the more affordable neighborhoods to live in. I like the suburb of it, so that's what we're going to. We just talked about it, and we're going, actually, on May 14th we're going to go. We both have interviews with two restaurants, and we have an apartment tour.

Angelica Mazè: Very cool. And how are rents looking for the wages that restaurants are offering you as a server? How is that all looking to shake out in terms of what you can afford?

Cedar Park you said looks pretty affordable. I'm not super familiar with Austin either, so thank you for telling me where that is. How's it all looking in terms of making it happen? Doable?

0:59:55

Emily Smith: Waco rent has increased so much, it's not that far off from it, but you make more because you're in Austin. So, that's kind of why it's like the perfect opportunity. Waco rent, like I said, I used to live when my bills were \$900 a month, and I was able to take care of it, it was not a big deal, just my basic bills.

Now my rent, our two-bedroom for my sister and I, we pay about \$1,400. I know my friend Jackson, he has two roommates, they all pay \$750 in rent. Yeah, so let's just say for two people, \$1,500. Let's just say that \$1,400 or \$1,500 is average in Waco right now, and I don't live downtown, it's kind of annoying. [both laugh] And I opted for student living, which he does student living. But in Cedar Park, we got an estimate of the rent and our utilities for one of the places, and it was in \$1,900. It's a much bigger place, as well, than what we're living in in Waco.

Angelica Mazè: Wow, really? So, bigger place, maybe \$400 more than what everybody's paying now.

1:01:04

Emily Smith: Yes, and the estimate was with utilities.

Angelica Mazè: So that includes water, gas, all that stuff?

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: And then you're looking at these wages at these fine-dining restaurants, mainly?

Emily Smith: Fine dining and even bartending. I went on Glassdoor and I looked. Also I have some friends that worked and she's like, "Oh yeah." Thankfully everyone's very—what's the word? They're very transparent about it. They're like, "Oh yeah, usually I walk out with maybe \$200 a night." With \$200 a night, five days a week, \$1,000 a week, it's seeming affordable. That's not really how it is in Waco, especially with the hotel. I love working there, but it goes on a check, so your taxes, you get wiped out.

Angelica Mazè: Sorry, you said you're going to be moving when?

Emily Smith: End of July to first of August. His lease ends July 20th, so we're going to move July 15th to get all of his stuff there, but I'm going to be working until July 28th.

1:01:57 **So,** I will be slowly moving until that last two days. Because my lease ends August 1st, I'm just going to wipe in there and I'm just going to try to get everything in it as fast as I can.

Angelica Mazè: Heck yeah! Wow, I'm excited for you.

Emily Smith: Enoch's helping me move.

Angelica Mazè: Is he really?

Emily Smith: Because he has a truck, yeah.

Angelica Mazè: Good old Enoch. That's great.

Emily Smith: He's such a sweetie pie.

Angelica Mazè: He is. That's good people. I really just only met both of them through this project and through some mutual friends, and yeah, I'm really grateful to know good peeps. I'm

excited for you. That sounds like a really good and way well-deserved opportunity to do something different for you.

Emily Smith: I just need for not everybody to know your business. Everyone knows your business in Waco because it's not a small—well, all the bartenders know each other, all the servers know each other because you all go to the same places. Have a drink at Hemmingway's after work.

Angelica Mazè: Hemmingway's. [both laugh]

Emily Smith: It's always Hemmingway's. I love Hemmingway's. But we all know each other. It's just nice that I can go somewhere and only a couple people that live there know the actuality I've been through. Because maybe I don't want to be. . .

1:03:00 I just want to get over it. I can't get over it if I keep being reminded of it.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, you've got to look to the future.

Emily Smith: Exactly.

Angelica Mazè: For what it's worth, I feel Waco feels small, and I've only lived here for eleven years, so I'm not running into high-school or elementary people, but I have similar moments where I'm like, "These are the same people who were here the last time I was here."

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: Even if they were nice, sometimes change can be really good.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: We'll wrap it up here pretty soon; I don't want to keep you too much longer. And I think in many ways you've already touched on this, but I was reviewing some things before we sat down today, and one of the things that I was reminded of is that this \$2.13 an hour wage has not been raised since 1991, so well before you were even born, [laughs] which is amazing. What are your thoughts about that in terms of how you can make a living in this type of work?

1:03:58

Emily Smith: From what I remember is, you have some good days. But most days aren't; you're not bringing in big bucks at all. And we pay that tip share as well. I would be fine, honestly, with the \$2.13 if we did not have to pay tip share. Because I understand the restaurants, I know the profit margins, I completely understand, I get it. Because people are used to tipping. Most of the most people do tip, thankfully. But what I do not like is that we're paying for the wages of others as well, just so that they can pay hostesses and bussers and them less. Because they don't get minimum wage either. That's what I just don't like.

Angelica Mazè: So, they're paying all of these other front-of-house folks the same subminimum wage, the same \$2.13 an hour?

Emily Smith: I think usually it's about \$5 or \$6 an hour, so they get a little bit more.
[cross-talk]

Angelica Mazè: So, they get a little closer to minimum wage, but not much. And then for you—I'm just going to recap this because I think it's interesting—for you, the customers are basically paying to get you up to minimum wage, and then you—

1:04:59

Emily Smith: Have to pay.

Angelica Mazè: —the servers are paying. I didn't realize that was—yeah, that's interesting. I didn't realize that's. . .

Emily Smith: I hate it.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, that's tough. And of course like you said, inflation, the cost of living, you have felt that increasing; but your wage, the federal wages have not gone up since before you were born. Wow, OK. Well, that's interesting. Oh gosh, what was I going to ask you? Before I end, I wanted to ask you. . . And now the just question just fell right out of my head. Oh yeah, so you're going to continue with serving work for now, and you said you had kind of abandoned your plans for being an educator just because financially that doesn't feel viable. You're also, what, twenty-five now?

1:06:00

Emily Smith: I'm almost twenty-four. I'll be twenty-four in July.

Angelica Mazè: Oh my gosh! Happy early birthday!

Emily Smith: Thank you.

Angelica Mazè: So, I'm going to ask about what are you planning or dreaming of? Do you have plans beyond serving right now when you get to Austin? Or right now are you just super focused on getting the heck out of Waco? What kind of plans do you make for yourself?

Emily Smith: We were talking about this; so, one of my friends is a teacher in Cedar Park, for Cedar Park ISD. I know every district is different but I would sub at Waco ISD every once in a while, because before, you had to have a certain amount of credit hours and you're able

to sub. But then they changed it, and it was basically equivalent to a bachelor's degree is what they wanted you to have. But then when it went back down because it's hard to find—everyone needs teachers, so Cedar Park, I actually do want to start subbing. I want to see if it's what I really want to do.

Angelica Mazè: Subbing, and you said Cedar Park ISD?

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm.

Angelica Mazè: And would that be for history or would that be for whatever you could—

1:07:02

Emily Smith: Kind of whatever they have.

Angelica Mazè: —whatever they need, English, or just one of the basic math.

Emily Smith: Yes.

Angelica Mazè: So you might see how that feels. And what is your friend teaching there?

Emily Smith: She teaches third-grade English, so she teaches younger kids. I think I want to teach more older kids, but who knows? I might love it. I might just—I keep my options open. So, thankfully it's K through 12. Whatever is open, I can just test the waters, and the thing I like about it is if I have a bad day, it's a new day next day, new school and you can forget about it. I don't know if I want to do that full time. I want to see if it inspires me to go back to school, apply for the Pell Grant maybe. Maybe we'll see if I get it, or maybe just seeing those options, like getting my bachelors, rather than just doing the odd subbing, or I'll do tutoring sometimes, but it's not in that way.

Angelica Mazè: Well, you can get your feet wet, right?

Emily Smith: Exactly!

Angelica Mazè: I feel like maybe you're about to have some opportunities to explore that you have not had because you've been working all the time. [laughs]

1:08:03 Well, I'm really excited for you. I remember the other thing I was going to ask, which it may not be relevant, but I'm curious just because it hasn't come up, and it had come up for pretty much everyone else I talked to, which is: Did the pandemic affect you in your serving work at all? Because you had, it sounds like, plenty of other things that you were dealing with all throughout the past several years. But the pandemic, what was that like for you? Was that a big change from your work life before? What was it like?

Emily Smith: I would definitely say, "For sure." I worked at Target up until 2020, 2021, so for the first year of the pandemic, I worked—My job was never in jeopardy because I was an essential worker. I know a lot of restaurants closed down. I wasn't serving at that time, so it didn't really affect me in that way.

1:08:58 That was the last year I did retail, but I did retail for two and a half years at that time. After Cathay I went straight to retail and they did it for two and a half years, and then I went back to serving. So, it didn't really affect me that much, I would say, or not directly. However, I know a lot of people left George's because of the pandemic. Because a lot of them, they could do—I would not say they rely on Baylor students, but a lot of workers are Baylor students, so that's why we were so understaffed. So it affected me indirectly.

Angelica Mazè: That makes a lot of sense. So, the Baylor students were going to school remotely or whatever they were doing, so you...

Emily Smith: A lot of them were going back home, so they were very understaffed, yes. Because you can't really afford to stay there when the restaurant's not open. I mean, I worked through college; I know a lot of other people do as well, they just couldn't afford it.

Angelica Mazè: Yeah. Wow, that's interesting. And Baylor is a private school, so not everybody is paying for that out of their own pocket. Or not everybody has that paid for them, is what I'm trying to say.

Emily Smith: Oh, yes. Most of—all of my friends, even the ones that worked the entire time, we all got some kind of scholarship.

1:10:01

Angelica Mazè: Gotcha. I meant to ask that too, if you had some financial assistance for going to Baylor, and I forgot, so thank you.

Emily Smith: I had scholarships when I went Baylor. I would not have went to—I love Baylor.

Angelica Mazè: Do they have debt? Do you have any student debt?

Emily Smith: I do not.

Angelica Mazè: Okay, good.

Emily Smith: Thankfully my grades were kept up at the time. I know there are some clauses where if you don't graduate or if you don't—in this period of time, then you have to pay out of pocket. Thankfully, I read that fine print carefully.

Angelica Mazè: [laughs] Good for you.

Emily Smith: And because of the hospital stay, I had certain—it was admissible in some ways. So, thankfully I didn't have to worry about that. But I was paying for rent and food out of pocket, and for my bills, so I don't know what I would have done. I don't know if I would have been able to handle it, not going to lie.

Angelica Mazè: That would have been a lot. A lot a lot on top of the already a lot.

Emily Smith: And with a pandemic I know that was considered a clause as well, for national disasters. It was declared a national disaster, so that's about the time a lot of people quit school.

1:11:02

Angelica Mazè: Yeah, that makes sense. And they temporarily paused payments on certain types of things, but it's all kicking back in now, speaking from experience on my end. Well, I'm excited for your new chapter, and I'm so grateful that you were able to come here and share all these stories. It's really important. I think it's just really important [laughs] to give people a picture of what it's like to do this kind of work. It ain't easy. Is there anything that you want to add that I haven't asked you? Or anything that you've thought of while we were talking that we haven't covered? Anything that you think is relevant?

Emily Smith: Let me think. Is there anything else...

Angelica Mazè: It's sort of a pressureful question, but just...

Emily Smith: I'm remembering. Oh! What I was saying before. So, you know how we're talking about the \$2.13 an hour, and I was like, "Honestly, I don't mind if I didn't pay tip share, then it would seem more fair to me."

1:11:58 However, something I do know is that it's over a pay period. So, if you make over minimum wage during the pay period, the company doesn't pay for it. So, some people say, "If you don't make this much a day then. . ." There was a day I worked breakfast and I walked out with \$19. It was a bad—

Angelica Mazè: \$19 in tips?

Emily Smith: Yes, that was my take-home after tip share.

Angelica Mazè: Oh, that's right, after the tip. Thank you.

Emily Smith: Unfortunately, yes, because it was just so slow. But then they say the company's responsible for paying you minimum wage after that, but it's in a pay period. So, they were not responsible, so that day I just made \$19, because in the full two weeks, you do make minimum wage. So I wish it was by day, not by pay period.

Angelica Mazè: And you feel that financially, I'm assuming, right? If your take-home, your cash take-home is \$19, even though in two weeks when you get your paycheck, that difference between \$2.13 and \$7.25 will have been made up by the employer.

Emily Smith: Mm-hmm.

1:13:00

Angelica Mazè: The amount of money, generally, that you've got means that you feel that pinch on that day.

Emily Smith: Yes, because you don't really see a check, ever. Even when I bartended at George's, and I bartended at other places as well, the subwage goes on a check, and then your tips, you just take those home. When I was a bartender and I had a good tip share, I still never

saw it, because I was serving as well. So, it gets taken out of—so, I like never saw a check. Yeah, you make tips as a bartender, but that sucked though, because you just never—you just don't see any extra money. You're getting paid less doing a whole lot more work. At least for George's that's how it went.

Angelica Mazè: Well, I'm glad you added that, because that's really helpful. And I'm learning about some of these things, because that's new to me, so thank you for that, for clarifying that. That is tough.

Well, I think that's all I've got for you. I'm just so grateful that you took the time to chat with me today and were so open about all of these things, and I wish you the absolute best in your next venture.

1:14:00 I'm excited for you.

Emily Smith: Thank you so much!

Angelica Mazè: And I hope that Austin gives you this fresh start that you're looking for because it sounds promising.

Emily Smith: We need it. Yes, definitely. Well, Emily, thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

Emily Smith: Of course. Thank you so much.

[End]