

Just as I had hoped and intuited, my trip to Raleigh yesterday with the trainers from PF Chang's was my moment to shine. I wasn't sure exactly how it was going to happen, but the feeling was so strong that I know that's what was keeping me from sleeping. I didn't figure that I would get to sleep on Wednesday morning because it was already after 5 a.m. and I had my alarm on my phone set to 6:00 a.m. in order to be able to get ready and be to work by 7:15. I lay down in bed listening to WCMS, 100.5, who has changed their format to Classic country, so the songs playing were songs that had all held meaning to me during the 90's. The songs instilled a very nostalgic energy in my body as I began to reminisce about experiences that I had during those times. It seemed the songs on the radio were speaking a different message to me than the music I had been listening to primarily before.

The next thing I knew, the dream I was having (which I don't remember anything about) suddenly woke me and I looked at the clock to see that it was 6:59 a.m. "Shit!" I said as I jumped out of bed trying to figure out what I was going to do. Then came the doubts, "What if I wasn't meant to go to this?" "Why would I have overslept if I wasn't supposed to not be there on time?" Those thoughts lasted a couple of seconds when I quickly reassured myself that I could do this. I maintained my Zen, listening to my favorite music, as I quickly brushed my teeth, shaved, and showered. Then after saying my morning prayers, I gathered my things, amazingly not forgetting anything and was on the road at 7:15 a.m. I called my work to find out if they had left yet, when Ryan, one of the souz chefs

answered the phone. I asked him to make sure they knew I was on my way as I was making the turn onto Holland Rd at the Rosemont intersection. Somehow I was able to make it to work in record time, and even during rush-hour traffic. Luckily, Cathy had already planned that people would be late, so there were still people not there when I got there.

We didn't get on the road until almost 8, and then we stopped at McDonalds and got breakfast. I totally forgot that I only had \$3 in my wallet, so I asked Chris Griffin if he would cover my tax, which he said "no problem" to. Then the real fun began when we got back on the road around 8:30. Cathy was driving and her fiancé, Mark, was in the passenger seat. My server manager, Sonny, was sitting next to me in the first row of seats in the back and we were all talking about how to get to Raleigh. They had directions that Chantel, the Market Training Manager had sent them, but Cathy kept asking Mark and everyone to make sure we had the right directions. I just kept telling her to trust her intuition and the signs would lead us there. We told her to make sure she watched her speed through Emporia on 58, because the cops through there are not very forgiving of people who speed. We got into a big discussion of past tickets and how we got out of them, etc. I kept telling them, just think positive and we won't attract any cops. Well, sure enough, probably 15 minutes later, all of us in the front saw the cop sitting to our right in the distance. Immediately, Cathy realized she was going 70 in a 55 and knew the cop was coming for us. I kept trying to tell them, "Think positive. We're in a line of 4 or 5 cars, and there were 3 vehicles in front of us going well above

our speed." As we drove by the pathway the cop was parked up, we could see that he was turning his vehicle to come onto the highway. Cathy said, "He's coming for me." By now everyone in the van realized what was going on. They were all looking out the back of the van as the cop started coming our way. The cop pulled in between our van and Mike McClland's Jeep, as we all pulled off the road. Mike got out of his Jeep and went to talk to the cop telling him Cathy was a crazy driver, but a great boss, and to go easy on her. We watched as Mike made the cop laugh and then got into the cruiser with him. Then Mike came up to the van and told Cathy that he talked the cop down from speeding to Failure to Obey a Traffic Sign, which reduced the fine from \$100+ to \$50. But because Mike pulled off the road, too, the cop gave him a ticket for the same offense. We got the entire incident on video tape; both from my camera in the van and Aaron filming from Mike's Jeep. I just laughed as I told them, "See! I told you all, we had to be positive or we'd attract a cop, and we did!"

By the time we got to Raleigh around noon, my energy level was lowering because of my sleep-deprived body. My spirits were still high, though, and I was determined to make it through. My irritable bowel was acting up, too, so on top of not getting any sleep, I had incredible stomach cramps to deal with. As I walked into Jillian's conference area, I saw Chantel setting up for the meeting. I whistled "Hey, Good Looking!" whistle until I caught her attention. We talked for a bit until the others started arriving. She had arranged our seats to where we were sitting next to people from the other stores. I sat next to two guys from the

Raleigh store, Alan and Gunner. Our meeting was supposed to start at 12:30, but the Charlotte store didn't show up until almost 1:30. We all just hung out, mostly gravitating towards our own little "clicks" at work until they decided to start the meeting. They had designed the meeting where they'd ask questions and whoever stood up first to answer it got a "WOW" card, and those with the most cards at the end of the meeting won various prizes. At the start, there were only a couple of people bouncing up to answer the questions. I am always very shy at first when I'm around a new group of people, so I wasn't all about jumping up and being thought of as the class "know-it-all." To me, having the knowledge is enough. I didn't need the prizes or want to seem greedy. I also had to contend with my energy level not being high.

I finally stood up when they asked if anyone had anything else to say about what it means to be a trainer. I said "To me, being a trainer means so much because trainees look up to you. You may not be around 6 months from now, but what you teach them, how you show them to care for the guests, will last for generations to come. That's what being a trainer means to me." Glen, the Market Partner for the Southeastern region of PF Chang's then spoke and said, "That's exactly what we're talking about. I thank God that I have trainers like him in my stores..." I just kinda grinned inside, knowing that he had seen what I was hoping he'd see. That gave me the confidence to start answering more of the questions, even though I wasn't nearly as fast at standing up as most of the others in the class. Glen even came by and tapped me on the shoulder saying, "I know you've got

ways you Wow guests." I told him, "I know. But I want to give everybody else a chance to stand up and shine." At the end of the meeting, though, they asked again if anyone had anything else to say, so I stood up. I said, "I know this is the Golden Rule and everyone takes it for granted, but we get back whatever we put out, and what goes around does come around. While it's important to Wow your guests and treat them with care, we should do the same for our co-workers. It can be something small like taking their trio or helping them clear a table, but we get what we give in this life, and it doesn't just apply to the restaurant business."

Later, we all broke up into four different groups to create a musical skit. I was in a group of just Virginia Beach people, with creative people like Sonny, Mark, Evan, and Trina Martin. As soon as we broke into groups, they already had an idea in their mind of what they wanted to do. We called ourselves the Mu-Shu Rappers and Sonny, Mark, and Trina rapped to the rest of us creating the rhythm with our bonga sticks. Our group won thanks to Mark finishing our skit by break dancing on the floor, which was a hard act to follow for the next group who played Chopsticks. After they finished, we all voted (by applause) to determine the winner. Chantel then announced that it was time to pass out the prizes. I knew I didn't have enough Wow cards to win any of the bigger prizes, so I handed mine to Mike McClelland, who is also a Virgo, and had been the eager beaver student who "knew-it-all." I love Mike to death. He is a Virgo true to form, whether he sees it or not, and lives and breathes PF Chang's. He's also very inspirational to work

with, and a very hard worker. With my extra cards, he had the most wow cards so he got to pick first of all the prizes. He chose the bundle with a large bottle of Columbia Crest Merlot, and a \$40 Outback Steakhouse gift card, with a whole lot of other smaller prizes, too. Chantel kept passing out prizes for each person who had fewer Wow cards as I sat there and watched everyone go to claim their prizes. It didn't matter to me if I won a Budweiser T-shirt or a bottle of wine. Besides, I was planning on at least getting a glass or two of that wine Mike had.

Finally they released us from the meeting and we were free to play in Jillians, or in my case, hang out in our van for a while with Aaron and Trina, while we got our heads on straight, then went back in and videotaped everyone else playing the games. I did play virtual bowling, which took almost all of my points on my card, so I only had enough for two games. My energy level was depleting even more, only I volunteered to be the Designated Driver on the way home, so I was trying to preserve what energy I had left and tap into more so I could make it home. I went down to the bar after my second game and saw Chantel, Cathy, and Beth all talking. I went up to them and asked Chantel, "So, what are the odds of me becoming a National Trainer." Cathy said, "We were actually just talking about that. I'll talk to you about it all on the way home." Then she said, "Glen was very impressed by you today, and he's not someone who is easily impressed." Chantel then added, "Or tell you about it if he is." That made me feel very good inside that

he had, indeed, seen what I wanted them to. I couldn't wait for Cathy to tell me more on the way home

We left Jillians around 9 p.m. and then drove to the P.F. Chang's in Raleigh not far from where we were. We hung out at their bar for awhile when I had to go to the restroom. I was trying to get away from everyone to rebuild my energy level for the ride home. When I came out of the bathroom, everyone was gone, so I figured they went to the van looking for me. Because Cathy thought our van was over 7' tall, we had to park a good ways from Chang's. I got to the van and no one was there, so I just got in and started listening to the radio. About 10 minutes later, Sonny, Trina, and Evan came to the van to let me know that everyone was inside Ruby Tuesday's. Even though I didn't want to go, I walked all the way back. Cathy and Mark were sitting outside when we got back up there. I explained that I was in the restroom and came out and everyone was gone, so I went looking for them at the van. It was now after 10 p.m. and I was exhausted. I told Cathy that I guess impressing Glen was what I came for, because my energy was gone now. She agreed that she was ready to go, too. We said we could just stop at a fast food place on the way home. Not two minutes later, Glen, Chantel, and Niko showed up. Glen asked in a sarcastic tone, "You drove to Raleigh to go to Ruby Tuesday?" Cathy said, "No. We're not eating here." I laughed and said, "No. We're gonna go to McDonald's." Everyone laughed. After they talked a few minutes, Cathy was beginning to get irritated that some of the trainers were still inside Ruby Tuesday.

I went in and told them we weren't eating there and were ready to go, but apparently they were too busy drinking to care. One of them came out and said there was some problem because we decided not to eat there. Cathy jumped up saying, "We didn't even sit down, what's the problem?!?" After she walked away, I said, "Well, it won't be long now. Cathy's emotions are stirring, and everybody fears the sting of a Scorpio." When she came back, I told her I was going to go to the van and bring it closer to the stairs so everybody didn't have to walk so far. Because I just had to know, I drove up to the entrance of the parking garage to see if the van would fit. We had a good 10" above the van that we could've made the clearance. As I was backing up to drive even closer to where they were, they began coming down the stairs. It was now about 10:30 p.m. and we were finally on the road. It has begun raining pretty steady now, but at least we were on the road home. I didn't know how to get home, but Cathy's fiancé Mark used to live in Raleigh, so I was using him to guide me where I needed to go.

We stopped at a gas station not far from the Crabtree mall so they could get beer for the way home. I told everyone, "You've got 10 minutes (if that) to get in and out, otherwise we won't have time to stop and get something to eat. After I pumped the gas, I went in to get me something to drink. By the coolers in one of the corners of the store, I saw Katie Z crying her eyes out to Sonny, whining like a little child about no one loving her, and blah blah blah. I just chuckled inside and picked out what I wanted to drink. I didn't want to stare too long otherwise I

would've broken into a heavy laugh, and that would've been mean. As I was checking out, I noticed this cool little lighter with a religious symbol on it and immediately I picked it up to look at it. It lit up with red and blue lights with little tubes of water and glitter to sparkle. I just had to have it, even though it was \$4.99. As the attendant was ringing up my order, he said, "Hey man, let me show you my DVD's over here." I opened the box and saw all these naked women and said, "Thanks, but I'll pass." Then he told me that my friend tried to take one. I asked, "Which friend?" He pointed to Chris Griffin. I just shook my head and chuckled as I told him "I'm sorry that he did that, but I'm not interested in buying any videos tonight." When we got back in the van, Chris even admitted that he had put one in his pants to see if he could get out with it.

A few miles down the road, we stopped at Wendy's and ordered 20 Junior Bacon Cheeseburgers, 10 Biggie Fries, and a chicken sandwich for me (since red meat now tears my stomach up). We got back on the road a little after 11 p.m. and were homeward bound, no more stops (or so we thought). Having a van full of drunk restaurant workers, nothing is a given. We finally all settled on a radio station as they goofed around in the back with the video camera. Then they all started rapping. Some of them were actually quite funny, even Cyril's "white-boy" rap, which hardly ever rhymed or had much impact; but they were having fun, which was all that mattered. We were about an hour from home when Evan asked if we could pull over so he could pee. I pulled off to this one road and into a vacant

parking lot where another vehicle was parked. I drove past him and over next to the warehouse building. When I saw that there was someone in the truck near the entrance, I said, "He's waiting for drugs." I didn't know why I had that thought, but I did. As Evan and now two others got out to pee, I drove off to turn the van around in the parking lot. We all laughed that I drove off to leave them exposed to the public peeing ... but they didn't care. When I got back to where they were, there was another car that drove up to the Bronco near the entrance, and then both of them drove off. I said, "See! I knew that's what he was waiting for." We finally got back to PF Chang's in Virginia Beach around 2 a.m. Everyone climbed out of the van, and we all went our separate ways. Cathy hadn't talked to me about what Glen had said, but I was actually glad. There were too many jealous people, namely Katie Z, who would have hated to hear that Glen noticed my talent. I figured that the next time we both worked, she would either bring it up or I would ask her again. "Everything in its own time," I kept reminding myself.