

Every meeting Is an Interview

Contributed by Joan Eison

You only get one chance to make a first impression. No doubt, you have heard that phrase hundreds of times. Think for a minute about people you have recently met. Where did you meet them? Did you have a positive, or less than positive impression? The next time you see them will you welcome the opportunity, or be braced for the cold wind of their remarks?

A simple lunch with a friend could result in a job offer, a future contact or a closed door. As you read the lunch time conversation below about Sadie and Deloris, what do you think Carolyn's impressions were?

Deloris shuffled into the restaurant, searching diners' faces for her friend, Sadie. The hostess, seeing her furtively glance around the room, smiled and offered, "Are you joining someone?"

"Why, yes." Deloris responded. "My friend is tall with curly red hair. Have you seen her?"

"She's here already, seated on the porch," the hostess answered waving her hand in the direction of the French doors at the far end of the room.

Deloris wound her way between the cloth covered tables of the trendy, downtown restaurant and easily spotted her friend's bright red/orange curls.

"Oh, Deloris, I'm so glad that you could make it today," smiled Sadie as Deloris approached the table dropping her purse on the floor. She tugged on the chair back as she said, "It's a miracle that I got here. Regina, that anal retentive, walking problem, kept asking me questions and stacking forms on my desk."

Sadie smiled uncomfortably at Deloris cutting her eyes and shaking her head to the right bending in the direction of the other woman sitting in the chair next to her. "Deloris, Deloris, I want to introduce you to my new boss, Carolyn Washington," Sadie said rather

hurriedly. "Carolyn is our new director of marketing and she was formerly with Go, Forth and Prosper, our biggest competitor.

"Well, I am very glad to meet you, Carolyn," Deloris said somewhat distracted, while she eyed the lunch menu on the table top.

A waiter appeared with water glasses and asked if the ladies were ready to order.

Deloris looked at Sadie and said, "You and Carolyn go first. I never know what I want," and then she whispered, "The food here is over-priced."

Carolyn looked up at the waiter and began speaking, "I will have the salad with salmon and vinaigrette dressing on the side, please."

The waiter shifted his gaze to Sadie and she began, "And, I'll have the pasta with shrimp and coffee to drink. Cream, no sugar."

While recording Sadie's entrée, the waiter pivoted so that he was facing Deloris, pen poised and ready to write. Deloris flipped back and forth in the menu pages letting out a deep sigh each time. Finally, she felt the watchful eyes of the waiter and said, "I guess that I'll have a cup of soup and the crab cake appetizer. By the way, what is the soup-of-the-day?"

"Our soup today," the waiter replied, "Is French onion with parmesan cheese melted on top."

"Well, leave the cheese off. I don't like the way parmesan tastes," snapped Deloris.

Order taking completed, the waiter left the ladies to chat until he returned with their food.

"Carolyn is new to Columbia," Sadie began. "So, I'm trying to introduce her to my favorite restaurants and stores."

"It's just lucky that you moved here in the spring, Carolyn. Because, if you had gotten a load of the 100 degree August weather, you would never have taken the job." Deloris said as she unfolded her napkin and rearranged silverware on the table top.

Carolyn's eyebrows arched up as Deloris spoke and she responded, "I moved here from Arkansas and I'm rather used to hot summers. Air conditioning is essential, though."

"You have the right idea, Carolyn," Sadie said as she smiled at her guest.

"Deloris, I have been telling Carolyn how talented you are with computer graphics, and she has plans to create an electronic customer newsletter and increase our creative staff." Sadie's eyes looked bright and hopeful as she moved her gaze back and forth making eye contact between her two lunch partners. "Why don't you tell Carolyn about some of the website development you have done?"

"What a pain that was." Deloris responded. "I put it together on specs my manager provided and then he had the nerve to come back with huge changes. Said he didn't know how to describe what he wanted until he saw the demo. And, I had rushed it through short-changing other projects to meet his deadline!"

The waiter's arrival with their lunches halted Deloris's remarks.

"Mmm, Sadie. Your pasta looks so good," Carolyn said admiringly.

"Well, you are welcome to have a taste," Sadie smiled. "My sisters and I used to drive our mother crazy eating off of each others' plates. But, we always thought it was fun."

Carolyn sipped her tea and then glanced across the table. "So, Deloris, how did you get interested in computer graphics?"

Fork in mid air, Deloris looked at the adjacent table and then back at Carolyn. "I didn't like it to begin with; but, the girl who was responsible had a difficult pregnancy and had to quit work. Then, my supervisor gave me her work. I learn quickly with the computer, so it wasn't so bad. I have an associates degree in business which they are not even letting me use since there are so many graphics projects. And, I don't know if the other girl is coming back, or if they're going to fill her position."

Deloris stopped long enough to eat two bites of crab cake and then continued talking, "Most of what I know about Adobe and Quark, I learned on my own. It's been trial and error. If they had offered me a chance to take a class at Tech, I would have improved faster."

"Well, Deloris, I think that you have done so much on your own," Sadie responded to her friend. "It's terrific and I admire your initiative."

"I sure wish you could tell that to my boss," Deloris said as she laid her napkin on the table ending her meal.

The waiter returned. "How was everything, ladies?" he said as he distributed the checks. "Come back on Thursday nights when we have jazz piano on the patio."

"That sounds wonderful," Carolyn responded. "Have either of you ever come for jazz night? I think that my husband would really enjoy it."

"That does sound nice," Sadie responded. "I wonder if my boyfriend would come. We could meet you here."

Deloris rolled her eyes at her friend and said, "Good luck with that. I'm heading back to the pile of stuff on my desk. Thank goodness it's Friday and I won't have to see it for two whole days."

"It was nice to meet you, Deloris," Carolyn said as she stretched her hand forward to shake Deloris's hand. Deloris returned Carolyn's handshake limply and said, "Sure, me, too. Welcome to town. And, Sadie, I'll call you about the movies on Saturday."

Sadie and Carolyn made their way to the exit and the sidewalk leading back to their office building. "Carolyn, Deloris really is very talented. And, if there are future plans to add a computer graphics person, I would love to submit her resume for consideration," Sadie said.

"The plans are incomplete right now; but, I'll let you know," Carolyn looked away as she responded to Sadie's words. "Thank you for inviting me to lunch. The food was really good and I loved sitting out on the porch."