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### Scooping Sweet Folklore

“A Scoopin we will go, a mix-in we will go, hi-ho, the derry-o, we thank you for your dough!” Employees at Cold Stone Creamery<sup>1</sup> sing this to the tune of the well-known nursery rhyme, the Farmer in the Dell, when they are tipped by a customer. There are many songs like this one that employees sing together when they receive a tip in the designated tip jar at the cash register. My first job was at Cold Stone, and I was not prepared for the singing, strenuous ice cream scooping, or lifetime friendships I was about to form. I chose my first job as my occupational folklife case study because it’s my first memory of working a paid job. I was seventeen, working weekends to pay for my car by scooping the highest price ice cream for snott nosed children in strollers, lovebird teenagers, and the massive parties of late night ice cream cravers.

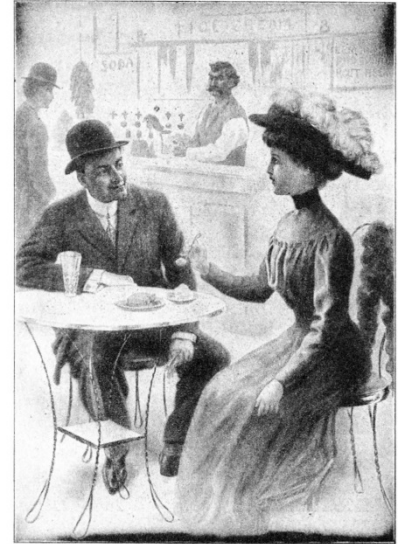
For this study, I will include two of my close friends, Mary Mudd and Will Hall, who both worked with me at Cold Stone. I knew Mary previously from theater, but Mary and I met Will on the job as crew members. Mary was hired first, second was Will, and lastly me. We worked under the management of an Asian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kim. The Kim’s were a huge part of policy procedures, but also considered family to us three. Something did gravitate us three together—perhaps how extroverted we all are, our work ethic, our age, our eccentricities, our love for pop music and singing—all factors contributed to this gravitational pull. But as I studied this under the lenses of folklore I understood there were layers as to why this job mattered and how we became close friends. We followed norms, habits, shared informal work

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<sup>1</sup> Cold Stone Creamery: fancy ice cream parlor shop where a simple ice cream cone is \$6.

techniques, celebrated together, started jokes and nicknames. In this study I will evaluate elements of occupational culture and how they apply.

Cold Stone is not your average ice cream parlor due to its enthusiastic singing employees, prices, style and how ice cream is made. However, in 1910 when ice cream parlors were on the rise there was a legend that circulated, “The "parlor," in short, was an emic term for a kind of cultural warehouse, where unmarried women could meet potential husbands in a socially acceptable fashion (Ellis 67). Ice cream parlors were used as “safe havens” where young females could meet men or go on dates. There were legends surrounding ice cream parlors that women would be



**THE FIRST STEP**  
Ice cream parlors of the city and fruit stores combined, largely run by foreigners, are the places where scores of girls have taken their first step downward. Does her mother know the character of the place and the man she is with?

kidnapped there. Culinary legends exist everywhere today, for example, the legend of Chinese restaurants having horror stories because of questionable ingredients—or most recent, Taco Bell’s “mystery meat” (Ellis 57). These are all examples of culinary legends, and once upon a time, ice cream parlors were a huge part of it.

Today, ice cream parlor’s like Cold Stone are very popular for date night, celebrations, late night craving runs or going after dinner with family and friends. C.A. Mace discusses three levels of skill that provide a way of identifying an employees work techniques, “These physical, social, and intellectual skills are affected by stimuli from the physical, social, and intellectual environments, which demand responses on any one or all three levels simultaneously” (McCarl 160). Cold Stone was a heavily physical job, demanding a worker to be on their feet for a shift, typically five to eight hours. But there was the influence of social and intellectual skills that improved work techniques.

Physically, the carpal tunnel is inevitable. Employees are holding what are called spades<sup>2</sup> (refer to Figure 1) to scoop the ice cream out of the ghea<sup>3</sup>. It was policy to hold the spades with fingers tucked back—god forbid if Mr. Kim caught you holding them improperly. If you were caught, Mr. Kim would sternly look at you; lecture you for about 20 minutes on how to hold the spades correctly (even if there were customers present). The issue with holding the spades the correct way is that it exhausts a crew members forearms by the first hour and pain would radiate to their back. I watched how Mary and Will held the spades—fingers tightly together, digging the spades into the ice cream, pulling forward and back to form a snowball of ice cream. This technique went unspoken, but was noticeably something that would help my ice cream scooping technique. McCarl points out, “Work techniques lie at the heart of occupational culture because the formally and informally shared knowledge of what to do and how to do it is the common goal of all the participants (McCarl 170).” Spades are your main tool as an ice cream scooper. They are your weapon or your best friend during the weekend rushes, so getting comfortable with the physical part of the job is important.



**FIGURE 1**

<sup>2</sup> Spades: Essentially big spoons, a versatile tool for a crew member.

<sup>3</sup> Ghea: The glass display where the ice cream is kept cold and crew members scoop the ice cream out for customers. FYI children love pressing their faces against the glass and making funny faces—just make faces back and smile. Also, the ghea has really cheap plastic sliding doors, so the doors broke at least once during a shift.

We all assumed certain physical roles according to our skills, “The execution of these three levels of skill to meet the complex demands of the job must be continually reinforced through critical appraisals (McCarl 163).” Physically, Mary



**FIGURE 2**

was fantastic at creating the waffle bowls and cones<sup>4</sup> (refer to Figure 2), so she was always making them on the weekends. You would prepare the batter and pour the batter on these hot waffle makers, doubling up on latex gloves is wise. When the waffle batter is poured, and need to be taken off the burner, it becomes a choice of burning the waffle or burning your fingertips. Mary’s technique is still unknown how she would make the perfect golden crisp waffles. She will probably take that technique to her grave.

Will was one of the only males who worked at Cold Stone, so naturally Mr. Kim trusted him faster. But Will’s physical role was also his favorite responsibility: making the ice cream. It required hours of work, precise measurements and procedural steps for pouring the ice cream and clean up. Will has a knack for precision and making the ice cream and inventory was solely his job at one point. We would sneak tastes of the fresh ice cream from the ice cream machine<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Waffle bowls and cones: Made during the morning shift. Also, you MUST ask every customer, “Would you like your ice cream in a waffle bowl or cone?” before putting the ice cream in a cup. If you are caught not asking, this results in another lecture from Mr. Kim. Upsell!

<sup>5</sup> Ice cream machine: located in the back of the store, out of sight of customers. Cotton candy ice cream is the best fresh don’t let anyone sway you.

My physical job was helping Mrs. Kim make cakes. Cakes needed to be made in a timely fashion so they had time to be in the blast freezer, and then later decorated by Mrs. Kim. After I learned the technique of holding my spades and scooping, I was able to handle large amounts of ice cream at a time and mold cakes into a metal shaped plate. Cakes include two



**FIGURE 3**

layers of ice cream and yellow, red or chocolate cake (refer to Figure 3). Making cakes didn't have a designated time like making waffle bowls or cones or making ice cream, but rather, I had to make cakes and serve customers simultaneously.

An important element of Cold Stone that sets them apart from other ice cream parlors is that when the workers are tipped they must sing. As I mentioned in the beginning, the songs are family friendly parodies of nursery rhymes. At the end of the night the tips are split between the workers. Often, we would find dollar bills written on that had fun messages, like "This dollar is from Las Vegas, NV pass it on!" These currency chains are explained as, "Chain messages-and in particular their expression in chain letters-have long interested folklorists" (Olbrys 293). Not much has been studied on examining the tradition of chain messages on money, but "The appearance of a closed text underscores the performer's anonymity, and thereby reduces opportunities to struggle over the performance's meaning in its emergent context" (Olbrys 293). The anonymity of the author of the chain message somehow was exciting for us.

McCarl mentions, "Work technique, then, is the core element of occupational culture because all work involves the accomplishment of tasks, and techniques are the culturally

sanctioned ways in which those tasks are accomplished (McCarl 166).” This is valid at Cold Stone, because as physically demanding as the job was at times; we all individually had our duties and had to complete our tasks to fulfill the job. If Mary didn’t make waffles, we wouldn’t have anything to entice or upsell the customers. If Will didn’t make the ice cream, we wouldn’t have our major product. If I didn’t make cakes, we didn’t have anything in our store display for customers to buy or order. All our physical parts of the job interweaved together.

Moving into unofficial and official customs in the workplace, “Ferdinand Tönnies divides customs or social codes into several, increasingly complex categories: habits, norms, and those ceremonies that in some way dramatize the collective will of the group” (McCarl 173). Breaking down the three at Cold Stone is doable, and are almost closely related to the fire fighters situation. At the official level, it was mandatory to wear the Cold Stone hat, apron, T-shirt, black pants or khakis with running shoes. McCarl mentions, “Habits in the work place range from the wearing of certain types of clothing, to taking a work break at a certain time with a particular type of food” (McCarl 173). The shoes are the most important part of the uniform, considering you will be on your feet for hours. That being said, a good pair of running shoes with grips is essential. The floor gets sticky with ice cream, water and other unknown liquids all the time, so it’s a good investment to wear shoes with good soles and bottom grips. It is habit and policy to wear this attire all the time—matter of fact, you will get sick of smelling like ice cream by the first month. However, one time Will wore his grandmother’s bright red crocs to work (refer to Figure 4). He was slipping, falling and struggling throughout his entire shift, and Mary and I kept teasing him. This is a good example of a breaking a habitual policy that usually employees don’t test.



**FIGURE 4**

We have all broken rules like Will has with appropriate attire, but McCarl mentions norms are, “Customary norms in the work place represent a more elaborate form of social control based on shared cultural rules of such significance that their violation affects the entire group” (McCarl 174). At the end of the night for closing, the waffle bowls are one of the most tedious jobs because they have been on display all day, but need to be put away. They crack like eggshells, so it’s important to handle them with care when placing them in the bins overnight. If I am responsible for clearing the waffle bowls out of the display, then Will is responsible for clearing the mix-in’s<sup>6</sup>, and Mary must clean the stone<sup>7</sup> of all the residue and ice buildup. If I fail to communicate to collect the waffle bowls, then we become behind of closing.

McCarl goes in depth when he mentions ceremonies within fire fighters, after they have worked twelve months at the station. The fire fighter who was once a “rookie” is now considered officially part of the station. It’s understood, “A rookie is "on probation" until he can absorb the formal, memorized knowledge and basic techniques of the job, perform the requisite skills, and demonstrate these at the end of twelve months” (McCarl 179). After his twelve months are up, the fire fighter coordinates his own dinner or outing with the whole station, “The former rookie buys the food and either prepares it himself or gets one of the better cooks in the company to do the cooking (McCarl 178). At Cold Stone, after a crew member’s 90 days, they officially get their pay for training hours they originally did. At the unofficial level, they are given a second working T-shirt to indicate they are part of the team. Again, the Kim’s were not easy people to work for, but you were considered a “keeper” if you made it past the 90 days.

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<sup>6</sup> Mix-in: Toppings to be put in ice cream, they vary from candy to fruit. Don’t get fruit—it’s frozen and rarely goes well with ice cream, just trust me.

<sup>7</sup> The Stone: Made of marble stone, after ice cream is scooped out of the ghea, it’s put on the stone surface to “mix” the ice cream.

The store followed its official rules according to the Kim's, but the unofficial rules were created by the workers. Cold Stone was a place for Mary, Will and I to learn about the responsibilities of work, but also learn what it means to be a good coworker and friend. The informally learned work techniques were overlooked when I was employed there; however, the unofficial and official knowledge from the job are recognizable with the influenced readings of McCarl. The position of a crew member at Cold Stone gave me the initial start to noticing behaviors, procedures and rules at a job. Like another teenager working, I was happy to be making money and being in the company of friends. Analyzing the job using folklore has enriched my understanding of detailed parts in a job that often go unnoticed.



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