

**Down on the farm**

**Or**

**Watching tax dollars at work and play**

**(But mostly at play)**

**By**

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## Chapter 1

I began working for Milwaukee County in the state of Wisconsin, U.S.A. in 1986. I was referred to Milwaukee County by the Department of vocational rehabilitation. I was injured in a car accident several years earlier and had applied for disability through SSA but they denied it and instead referred me to the DVR. The counselor at DVR encouraged me to apply with Milwaukee County which I did. However, in a telephone conversation, the nice man from Milwaukee County told me that I was not eligible for his program if I could take the bus. I didn't try to make sense of what he said; I simply relayed this story back to the counselor at the DVR. He promptly got on the phone and I guess he yelled at the guy from Milwaukee County who called me back and said I guess you do qualify for my program after all. He had me come down for an interview which I attended and he proceeded to ask me questions about my experience and education.

At that time, I was working for the state of Wisconsin Department of revenue. I enjoyed that very much. My supervisors and coworkers seemed to enjoy my company. My supervisors encouraged me to apply to work there through the civil service system but I was a little hesitant. I was cautioned by several people that once hired, a person could get assigned to virtually anywhere in the state. I wasn't sure about following that route so I waited for a notice from Milwaukee County. I received one not long after interviewing with the nice man from Milwaukee County.

I got a letter from a supervisor named Jack who worked for the department of social services on 12th and Vliet St. Jack sent me a letter telling me that my name was sent to him on an eligibility list for position of account clerk I. I was very happy to hear from him as my job with the state of Wisconsin was only temporary part-time. The job with Milwaukee County was full time with benefits. I proceeded to make an appointment with Jack at his office on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet St.

The building on 12th and Vliet was a former department store which was purchased by Milwaukee County some 25 years earlier. No remodeling or updating had ever taken place, the Department of Social Services simply moved in and set up operations. Prior to that, they were located in the Milwaukee County Courthouse. Jack's office was in the basement of the building. The building was in the middle of the ghetto, a high crime area with security guards posted throughout the building and even in the parking lots. The kind of neighborhood where employee's walked no farther than they could see the building from. The kind of neighborhood where someone might push a dead naked woman from a car into the street. This happened right across from the building one day during work hours. The kind of neighborhood where someone might stand outside on his front porch and fire his rifle into the air to scare away pedestrians. That happened one day when I was outside during a smoke break. It did clear out the parking lot pretty quick though. If you did walk more than a block away from the building, you were in a kind of criminal no man's land and anything was possible.

The interview date came and I went and I met with Jack whose last name I will not say. He doesn't work there any longer but other people that I talk about might still work there so I think it's prudent to not use last names. Jack was there with a woman whose name was Vera. I didn't know what she was doing there as she just stared at me blankly and then mumbled a few things to Jack. After a brief interview we were finished and then not long maybe several days after the interview Jack offered me a position. I was so overjoyed I immediately accepted. I went to work at my state job and gleefully told them that I was quitting to go work for Milwaukee County.

Well my supervisors were not happy; they were quite upset that I was leaving because they wanted me to apply to work for the state. I told them this was a for sure opportunity. I couldn't understand why they were so upset that I was leaving. They told me that I was wasting my time to go work for Milwaukee County. In retrospect, I realize they were right. I should have stayed but how could I have known. This was a certain opportunity I thought, and it had good benefits so I gave my two weeks' notice.

Two weeks went by and it came time to report for my new job on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. It was February and it was a cold and dark and cloudy and miserable rainy day. The building was so drab; it looked so depressing especially from a distance. I hadn't noticed before. As I drove up I realized all of the windows were boarded up, probably because of the riots back in the 1960's. The parking lot had a high fence and guard towers. I really wondered if I should just turn around and go back to work for the state. I really thought

about that but in the end I decided I had to go with a sure thing so I parked and went inside.

My office was in the basement as was Jack's office. I reported to the office where I worked to discover that the woman at the interview, Vera was actually the supervisor. The name of the section/department I was to work in was called Financial Resources. Jack was the real supervisor but Jack was getting old and Jack didn't really want to supervise anymore. Jack had worked for Milwaukee County for some 35 years already and was waiting to get out. He was passing on his duties to whoever would take them and Vera was one of those people. So began a quite peculiar relationship as I would find out in the weeks and months ahead. Vera was a fairly miserable, mean, flatulent little woman who just didn't seem to get as much out of life as she had hoped. She was married and had children and she was always willing to engage me in conversations about her family but she would never offer me any advice on how to do my work.

Vera showed me my desk which I sat down at. The first thing I noticed was that there was a pile of paper about 6 inches thick across the top of the desk. I had no idea what to do with it. Vera brought me a stack of manuals and said 'I don't know anything about your job' and walked away. I had no idea what to do so I sat at the desk and smoked cigarettes. Vera's desk was right next to mine so I had to deal with her but she wouldn't actually tell me how to do anything. She was willing to engage in conversation as long as it had nothing to do with work. Her desk also was piled up with paper but even more, she had her paper piled up more like a snowball fort. The paper was piled up in a semi-circle

across her desk. I guess it was a shield for some imaginary enemy. 'Just because your paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you'. Well Vera was paranoid and they were out to get her. Two other women that didn't seem to know any more than I did also worked in the department. Vera didn't seem to like them either.

So the days went by and I drank coffee and smoked cigarettes at my desk as it was allowed at the time. Vera kept complaining to Jack that she was not going to train me even though she was supposed to. As it turned out there was a lot of drama with the previous person who had my position and his name was Roger. Vera loved Roger but he left to get promoted. Vera was so sad that he left but he was gone and she didn't want me, she wanted Roger.

Finally, Jack realized that he would have to get someone to show me what to do so he contacted the training supervisors for welfare caseworkers and decided I should go to training. I would receive training as a caseworker which didn't really have a lot to do with my job but nobody seemed to know what else to do and Vera wasn't going to budge. Over time I began to realize that nobody else really understood what Vera did either. She wouldn't tell anybody anything about anything. She would sit at her desk and work on 'statements of assistance'.

I was sent away for training that went on for several weeks. I was glad to get it but as I was to discover over time, job training was mostly self-taught. All of Milwaukee County operated this way as far as I could tell. There really wasn't much in the way of training;



people were just expected to learn their job as they went along. The positions are usually rather unique in nature so there isn't an equivalent in the private sector or anywhere else. People were just expected to learn their jobs without any assistance whatsoever.

The basement of the 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet building was filled up with caseworkers and office workers and Sheriff's deputies. I discovered eventually that my job was to work on welfare fraud cases. The sheriffs would bring the welfare fraud cases and it was up to me to try to figure out how much money people owed. Vera's job was to get notified by a department called the securities division who would ask her to research old cases. She would check to see if somebody owed money from old welfare programs that were in operation back in the 1920s through the 1930s. She would go through old dusty, musty, paper folders and she would dig out notices and figure out how much money people owed.

After a person had passed away, a worker from the securities division would send that person's name to Vera. Vera would check to see if that person owed any money, then she would write a statement and send it to the securities division. The securities division would send the statement to the person's estate. It often didn't go over very well for families to find out that their parents or relatives were on welfare during the Great Depression but that's what the job entailed. Problem was, there was no adjustment for inflation so if somebody received five dollars' worth of assistance back in 1932 for instance; they were billed for that exact amount even 50 years later. Vera would oftentimes spend a week or more on individual cases, going through old records. She

herself got paid about \$10 an hour plus benefits. Vera might spend a week and Milwaukee County would pay her over \$400 in wages and benefits in order for her to prepare a statement saying someone owed maybe \$25 from 50 years earlier. There wasn't a lot of logic to Vera's job. I think that was the reason why she was so secretive as it gave her job security.

The job that I had entailed going through welfare records and trying to figure out how much money people owed. Most of the cases related to unreported wages. People would not tell their caseworker that they were working and eventually they would get caught, usually, sometimes. Then the cases would find a way to the sheriff's fraud squad and then they would send the case to me and I would try to figure out how much money was owed. Since I was brand-new on the job it was kind of a guess at first to figure out how much money people owed.

Most of the cases that were given to me were cases where the sheriffs claimed that the clients weren't eligible for any assistance anyways. This meant that all the assistance that they received was owed back to the County. But there were people that had to go to court sometimes and sometimes they went to prison for welfare fraud. There were several cases where I had to figure the amount owed in fraud which was used to determine the client's prison sentence by the judge and district attorney. Cases like that made me a bit nervous since I was usually figuring out things as I went along.

The two coworkers I had were in the same situation as me. Carol and Regina were their names and they never seemed to really understand what it was that they were supposed to do. Vera wouldn't tell them any more than me although Vera did complain about both of them to me for some reason. Both Carol and Regina did have colorful histories. Carol was a former suburban mother whose father was involved in some kind of shady dealings which required the family to have an armed body guard at all times when she was a child. Eventually Carol married a man who became very successful in business and then dumped her and the kids. That was how Carol ended up working for Milwaukee County. Regina was also a divorced mother and she had a drug dealing brother nicknamed "king tut" who had a penchant for torturing his rivals.

Across the room from us were a group called the home visitors. They would spend their days driving around the county visiting people who couldn't come in to the office. They were older more experienced workers who put their eccentricities on display for us nearly every day. Behind my desk was a room that had a sink that we used occasionally that would give us a surprise one summer. Most of our work space was filled up with file cabinets that Vera had filled up with useless records that no one looked at. I discovered over time that Vera was a little fountain of knowledge when she was in a good mood.

Vera claimed that the people who were running the department of social services weren't actually using money from title programs for the proper purposes. Title programs refer to things like Medicare, which is title 18 and Medicaid which is title 19. She claimed among other things that items were purchased for the manager's benefit like Milwaukee Buck's

basketball tickets. She even showed me the entries on a computer printout showing the purchases of Bucks basketball tickets. She also made an interesting claim about the general assistance program as it was known at the time which was since abolished. The program required people to work at a recycling company. Vera claimed that the recycling company where clients were forced to work was actually owned by the county executive and at least one county supervisor and I think, one of the county department heads.

She claimed that the general assistance program would force these people to work at the recycling company but then the owners of the company got to keep the money that was generated by the labor from the clients. The money didn't go back to Milwaukee County; it went to the people who owned the company which was the county executive and his friends. She also claimed that they changed the name of the company which was a corporation every year. Vera knew that because she said she went to the library every year to look at the list of corporations in Wisconsin. She had a list of corporation names that were used over the years and even showed me the list. She claimed this was done to throw off anyone that might try to investigate like a newspaper or TV station. She claimed that these guys were getting rich off of that general assistance program because they were getting free labor for recycling and then they got to keep the money.

Vera was filled with all kinds of neat little tidbits like that. Sometimes I wondered if that was the reason why she got stuck in the job she had. Vera was considered a supervisor but she was at the lowest pay range possible. Maybe the reason why she got stuck in the

basement was nobody liked her because she spent her days investigating people for no apparent reason. Hardly anyone seemed to like Vera and it showed.

Adjacent to our workspace separated by a temporary wall was the inactive records department. Whenever Vera or I would request old records from this department, we would have to wait as long as three days to get the record because Vera didn't get along with the supervisor. Vera claimed it had to do with race as at least one of the employees in that department wanted to work in Vera's department but Vera and Jack wouldn't let them. Unqualified Vera claimed.

Another department that caused us problems was a computer department that did all of the data entry. This department provided us with printouts of benefits paid to clients which we needed to prepare our statements. One of those people wanted to work in Vera's department as well but didn't get hired. Not qualified again Vera said. The result was that when we asked for printouts of benefits, we would have to wait up to a week. This was due to the data entry operator not liking us. There was nothing we could do about it. Vera claimed it all had to do with race because the people not hired were minority and were quick to file grievances.

I think the most disgusting part of my job was working on cases from the old-age assistance program. It was a side job that Vera surprised me with. The old-age assistance program was in operation in Milwaukee County up until about the 1950s. By the 1960s there were programs like Social Security and SSI to fill the void. How the old-age

assistance program generally worked was if someone was old or disabled and they could not provide for themselves any longer, they would apply to Milwaukee County. The caseworker would interview the person and figure out how much money they needed but then they would also force the person to give up something of sentimental and real value.

The idea was to force someone to give up some token item to ensure they paid back the assistance they received. Gold watches for instance or a pearl necklace or maybe a diamond wedding ring or ivory comb set or something along those lines. All kinds of really unique family heirloom type items. People were forced to give these up to the caseworker in order to qualify for the program. The caseworker would make note of the item taken from the client and then turn the item over to the securities division. The securities division had a large safe out at the county grounds where they stored all of these items.

The problem that developed over time was no one knew what to do with the items. The old-age assistance clients had long since passed away. Milwaukee County didn't want to broadcast the fact it had forced these people to give up items of value to begin with. It was, by any measure a really tacky thing to do. I do recall one case in particular that Vera stuck me with. The person was born when Abraham Lincoln was president and had died in the 1950's before I was even born. Unfortunately for him, he resided in Milwaukee County in his time of need. His case then sat for more than 30 years after he died before anyone (me) worked on it.

Vera's job and mine sometimes was to go through the old age assistance files and find out how much money was owed to Milwaukee County. That figure was then balanced against the value of the item taken and an entry was made in a county ledger somewhere and the file or account was then closed. Vera claimed that the items from the safe were sold off eventually and the money disappeared. I do wonder from time to time what happened to all of the items in that safe. It was supposedly quite a large safe according to Vera and I'm sure that whatever was in there was worth quite the fortune for someone.

The saddest part about that particular program was that the caseworkers of the day had to come up with a synopsis of the person's life and put it into writing. So much grief and anguish and sorrow condensed onto a county issued index card. The caseworker would write a brief summary of the person's life. Each one would describe in such concise and efficient detail how things had taken such terrible turns for people. How they had lost so much and were ruined by some cruel twist of fate like the economy or ill health.

It was really quite tragic reading through the cards because most of the people were wiped out at the same time by the Great Depression. There were thousands of these summary cards filling up the file cabinets, all containing variations of the same story. People just kept trying to hang on but whatever they did it was never enough.

They weren't able to regain any of their wealth or their bank accounts or their homes and they ended up living in rooming houses and such. It's really quite sad to think of what an emotional toll it was to lose everything and then have to apply for assistance.

In addition to the indignity of applying for welfare, they were forced to give up something of value to the caseworker as a token. Perhaps it was the last thing of value that they had in their possession. They were supposed to get back at some point the item they had given to the caseworker. But, the money was rarely if ever never paid back and eventually the program was phased out as the Social Security and SSI programs took over. There were thousands of these unresolved cases left over from the old-age assistance program. I don't know what became of them.

As the days and weeks went by I began to settle into a routine. I even ventured outside from time to time but I learned not to walk too far away from the building as it was located in the middle of a high crime area. I also had to learn to watch where I walked in the building. I was required to walk around the building to obtain paperwork and documents. However, I discovered through Vera that many minorities in the building were watching me. Many of the minorities that worked in the building did not like me for whatever reason. Vera claimed it had to do with race.

About the time that I was hired another young white guy was hired. He was about my age. His hiring was covered in the local newspaper at the time because it was kind of scandalous. The guy's father was a Milwaukee County supervisor and this county supervisor had approached one of the managers in the department of social services and asked him to get his son a job which the manager did. The county supervisor's son was given a temporary position in the photo ID booth on the first floor of the building.



Unfortunately for him that put him in contact with the public which meant he had to deal with mostly minorities who didn't like white people.

I was cautioned by several white people who came to our department for record's research to watch out. The problem was that the white guy in the photo Id booth and I were getting confused with each other by the minorities in the department. Apparently the minorities couldn't tell the difference between two white guys. When the photo id guy would leave his post to go on break or something, minority workers would see him and complain to some manager that I wasn't at my desk. Conversely, if I left my desk to get a file from another department, minority workers would see me and would complain about the photo id guy leaving the photo id booth.

Vera confirmed this to me since she was considered a supervisor and was privy to such information through Jack. The situation did get rather ugly over time. It got so bad that one of the welfare clients went so far as to wait for the white guy from the photo id booth at the employee entrance so she could hassle him as he left work. The client was allowed onto the employee parking lot by employees so she could wait for the white guy.

Apparently the supervision knew all about this and did absolutely nothing about it. Vera claimed that supervisors, who at the time were generally white males, were afraid to take any action against minorities for fear of lawsuits and bad press. As proof of that, she told me a story about one of the accountants in the building. He came down to our department

on occasion to do research. He had moved to Milwaukee from Africa and gotten a job with Milwaukee County in Vera's department.

Shortly after starting in Vera's department, there was a job announcement for an accountant. What this guy did, was wait until all the other interested people had applied for and took the civil service exam for the job. This was done to create an eligibility list of qualified applicants. While the accounting supervisor was in the middle of the interview process with those on the eligibility list, the black guy from Vera's department filed a union grievance claiming discrimination. Vera said the social service department supervisors were so terrified of getting sued that they threw away the eligibility list and gave the black guy the job. The big problem though, was that since the job was promotional, the applicants were expected to have a certain amount of skill and knowledge which this guy just didn't have and eventually he quit.

Right about the time I started, the county board decided to remodel the building, but they didn't make much in the way of accommodations for the employee's. This meant that the building turned into a construction zone while I worked there. Our office as well as others around the building began to fill up with dust clouds and construction noise so loud that we couldn't hear people who called us on the phone.

At one point there was quite a bit of welding going on in the building which was visible to many welfare clients and their kids. Many of the children would stare intently at the welding light which is akin to looking directly at the sun. I wonder how many of those

kids grew up with bad eye sight without knowing why. Of course the County board and the social service managers made sure that the top boss's got out of the building before any work was done. The administration staff went to Schlitz Park before the dust flew.

While the construction work went on, I had to learn my job. The sheriff's detectives who were investigating welfare fraud cases were frequent visitors and levelheaded for the most part. There were other sheriffs though, that didn't seem to have a temperament for anything and that's why they were in the building. How they got hired was anyone's guess. The sheriffs were the security force for Milwaukee County buildings. They always seemed to enjoy antagonizing the rank and file, almost like a sport. One day during construction, one of the hallways from the employee entrance was scheduled to close in the morning.

After I walked into the employee entrance that morning, I walked all the way down to the end of the hall. There was a sheriff standing there along with a woman from the human resources department. As I approached, the sheriff grabbed the security gate and pushed it as hard as he could across the width of the hallway and slammed it closed right in front of me. He nearly hit me with the gate (seriously) and then he stood there and smiled at me and the woman from human resources burst into laughter and walked away. I had to turn around and walk the length of the building to look for a different way in.

This was my first encounter with one of the psycho sheriff's but it wasn't the last. I heard stories from Vera about other sheriff's deputies that were kicked out of the building by

petition. Employee's had actually come up with petitions and signed them by the hundred to get rid of certain sheriff deputies because they were so crazy and mean. There was one who eventually became a Lieutenant in charge of the fraud squad. His office though was at the county jail blocks away. This wasn't an oversight. He had worked in the welfare office previously but was kicked out of the building by petition.

According to Vera, he had taken someone that he didn't like who was already in handcuffs into the public men's room in the basement. That bathroom was just down the hall from our office. He then proceeded to beat the man with his nightstick while other deputies guarded the door. Vera told me that the bathroom was covered with blood. I told her that statement was a little too dramatic but she swore it was true. Vera said that she and many other staff went into the men's room after the sheriff left and they were horrified by how much blood was splattered all over the walls so they came up with a petition to have that sheriff deputy removed from the building.

I avoided this bathroom whenever possible anyways. It had a huge concrete sink in the corner. The entire edge of the sink against the wall on one side was lined with what looked like groin hairs that were stuck into boogers that were stuck to the sink and to the wall leading up from the sink. They were arranged so neatly that I didn't even notice at first. The building was open to the public so people would come in and use the restrooms. Some people would take off their clothes to bath in the sink which was big enough to sit in. Others apparently needed to get out their artistic urges I guess and arrange boogers on the edge of the sink and stick groin hairs into them. I'm not sure what was more

disgusting, that someone was constructing a booger mural on the bathroom wall or that the janitors never cleaned the bathroom. Needless to say, I soon found it easier to use the employee bathroom instead.

Vera talked about another sheriff deputy who was a landlord on the side. He came up with a trick where he would get notified by caseworkers if one of his tenants who owed him money would show up. The sheriff deputy would then confront the clients while they were trying to get their food stamps and other assistance. He would badger them for money right in the office. Eventually he was kicked out of the building as well.

I'm not sure why but, as time went by, Vera let me know that because I was a white man, my career was basically finished before it even started. I don't know why she took it upon herself to inform me of this. Maybe she was bored or just bitter, who knows. She made sure to explain things to let me know how the system really worked. She pointed out to me on the county job announcements that circulated through the office, a notation at the top of the form. It stated that all hiring was done in accordance with a court decision that was passed some years earlier. I didn't know what it meant but Vera claimed that the human resources department wouldn't hire anyone basically, unless they were minority or female because they just weren't hiring white males anymore. She thought that was funny. She also thought it hilarious that somehow the department was able to say that the workforce was balanced between male and female and white and black and Mexican and Puerto Rican etc. when it really wasn't.

Vera had started with the department back in the 1970's when there were near riots in the building and minorities and women were protesting against the old white guys. Regina had also started about the same time. Regina and Vera told me stories of how there were numerous bomb threats called into the building. Each time that happened, the sheriff deputies would make everyone leave the building for an hour or two while they searched the building. Eventually, employee's started calling in bomb threats, usually on Friday's around 2:00 p.m. which was around break time for many. Employees would then leave for the day because they knew that by the time the sheriff had finished searching the building, it was time to go home.

Anyways, lawsuits were filed all through the 70's until the minority/women groups won. The end result was that Milwaukee County had to hire anyone but white guys to balance out the workforce to correct the perceived injustice. The purpose of the lawsuits overall was to put all of the various groups on equal footing with the evil white men.

Unfortunately, for people like Vera, some groups were made more equal than others by the court decrees and other actions taken by Milwaukee County behind the scenes. For instance, non-whites as well as women were given preference in hiring and promotions but they weren't equal. Blacks but no other groups were given seniority adjustments that had the effect of backdating their seniority; in some cases, to before they even worked for Milwaukee County, even back to when they turned 18 no matter how old they were when they started with Milwaukee County. It had something to do with black people not applying because of perceived racism. As in there aren't any black people working here so why bother applying.

I don't know how the policy worked exactly since there was nothing in writing that anyone could point to. Policies like this were kept under wraps. Else, I'm sure the media would have had a field day with that. Black women were given preference over black men because they were women. Black women were given preference over white women because even though they were both women, black was given preference over white. Blacks were also given preference over other minority groups. It was just something that was done much to the chagrin of people like Vera and other white women that I heard complain.

To begin the readjustment, the county stopped hiring white guys. This was never an official policy but it was the way things were done for the most part. Luckily I worked in the basement but whenever I had to go out into the other parts of the building, I felt like a foreigner in a strange land. I think I was the only white guy under 40 in the entire building besides the county supervisor's son. Eventually his appointment came to an end and he was let go. Then it was just me. Most of the other white guys were old and had their own offices. I wasn't so lucky.

Vera let me know in no uncertain terms that the only reason I got hired was because of the Milwaukee County disability program I had applied with. She claimed there were two other applicants that her and Jack interviewed but one was missing an arm and the other one walked with crutches. This meant that neither of them could carry file folders or work around file cabinets so Vera didn't want them. I only used a cane which took one

hand which meant I had free use of the other hand to carry folders and she claimed that was the only reason I got hired. The other two guys interviewed were hired in other departments and then got fired before their probation ended.

I don't know why but Vera signed up for an affirmative action committee and talked me into it as well. The only advantage was that we got to take off of work and go to different departments and attend meetings. The meetings had absolutely no value whatsoever but periodically we were given reports that showed the number of people working in the social services department. These reports always made Vera's day. The reports showed the breakdown by race and by gender and somehow they were able to show that there was an even balance even though there wasn't. Vera commented regularly that there was a kind of paranoia amongst the county managers who were fearful of repercussions if the public found out they had stopped hiring white guys.

Amidst all of this drama another event occurred that seem to put everything in perspective for me. One day in the summer, it was raining. It had rained lightly in the morning but then got heavy and stayed that way for many hours. By about 2:00pm the toilets and sinks and bubblers began overflowing with human waste and toilet paper and anything else that could fit through the pipes. Even the sink behind our office overflowed, yuck. The whole building became an open sewer which seemed appropriate. It did compliment the booger motif thing going on in the bathroom though. Although my career was finished as Vera pointed out, the county did offer good health insurance. I was able to have my hip replaced at almost no cost. After I recovered I signed up for night school



and put in for a transfer with human resources. The rest of the county wasn't this bad was  
it I wondered, well yes it was I discovered but I tried to stay optimistic.

## Chapter 2

I began receiving notices from various departments with openings for account clerk I which was my job title. I was finally able to get a transfer opening at the Milwaukee County mental health complex. The supervisor's name was Jeff. He was a few years older than me and he supervised the accounts receivable office. He had approximately a dozen people working for him. He and the other staff seemed normal enough but eventually I discovered that all I had really done was transfer from one circus to another. There was a whole new carnival of characters that I would encounter and I don't mean patients. At times I was reminded of the Edgar Allen Poe story about the visitor to a mental hospital who discovers that the patients had taken over the hospital and locked up the staff.

My job duties were as ambiguous as my job duties at the department of social services.

Jeff told me that my job was to work with other account clerks and clerk typists.

Outpatient billing was the goal of the section I was in but we never seemed to get much of that done. For no particular reason that anyone knew of, the county grounds including the mental health complex created its own computer network. I had heard about this about a year earlier when I was in a computer training program at the department of social services.

Someone, no one knew who, had decided it was better if the county grounds had their own computer system. There was nothing wrong with the existing system but someone didn't like it. The problem was that the new computer center, located in the medical college, wasn't big or fast enough. When I say it wasn't fast, I mean that when I or

anyone else would press enter on the computer keyboard, the system would lock up for up to 10 minutes or more at a time. This meant that if I was trying to research a patient account, I could easily spend a half day or more waiting for the screen to change after pressing enter each time. Everyone from the clerk typist's to the administrator's had the same problem. This went on from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm five days a week. Staffs all over the county grounds were assigned overtime to compensate for this. I often had to come in early or work late or on weekends just to get work done. Not extra work, just the regular work I couldn't get done during the week because of the slow computer system. Of course I had no idea this problem even existed and Jeff the supervisor neglected to mention it during my interview.

It was against this backdrop, that I began working at the mental health complex. My coworkers were two black women, Alice and Rosemary. It's significant to note their race because they couldn't tell white people apart. I know that because Alice told me so. She and Rosemary were always confusing me with Jeff. Kind of like the situation at the social services building with the county supervisor's son. Alice and Rosemary did agree to help me learn my job or so they told me. Eventually, I realized they just liked jerking me around. They would take turns giving me instructions and then contradict themselves and each other. They really got off on that. After about a week went by, I realized Alice and Rosemary weren't going to show me anything of value.

I was then forced to learn my job from scratch kind of like in the social services department. Jeff the supervisor was also quite useless in providing information I

discovered. He was an account clerk himself at one time and got promoted to supervisor, somehow. His only talent was withholding information from me like Alice and Rosemary did. Maybe he got that from Alice and Rosemary who knows. He definitely was one of the most paranoid people I'd ever met or worked with.

Initially, Jeff worked in the office with all of us account clerks. He wasn't able to give me much help as he had not done that type of work for some time according to Alice and Rosemary. Shortly after he hired me, Jeff got his own office. After that he was mostly unreachable even when I could get into his office. He had a regular desk with chairs for guests but he purposely kept the guest chairs up against his desk. This way no one could sit down and had to stand in front of his desk. Like school children I suppose.

Jeff seemed to get increasingly paranoid after he got his own office. Since he was a supervisor, he was no longer in the union and subject to different rules. Since he had worked his way up from the union he was given credit and some protection for that. However, people that were hired as supervisors or administrators directly from the outside had no protection at all. They were subject to termination at will. They worked on contract, usually six months to two years. This helped to add to the paranoia that seemed to permeate the administrative and supervisory staff.

No one would help anyone because everyone was afraid of getting fired. Many times I would catch one of the bosses staring at the billing staff (us) through the window. The whole billing office that I worked in was enclosed in glass. Around that whole office

were smaller offices separated by a hallway. Occupants of those offices and occasionally others with nothing else to do would stand and stare at us for hours on end through the windows. The patients wandering the mental health complex always seemed so normal in comparison.

Before I left my job at 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet, I was warned to watch out for Eileen. I was even warned by several of my new coworkers to watch out for her. She was off of work my first day but I soon found out she was the war horse of the office and Jeff's alter ego. She kept control of all of the office machines and computer terminals and she did not like to share. Woe to the person who would dare touch one of 'her' terminals. I made the mistake of using a Medicaid terminal my first day to check a patient's eligibility. Alice and Rosemary told me that Eileen would come after me if she caught me using the terminal without her permission. Oops, too late. When Eileen came back to work, she gave me the evil eye to put me on notice I guess.

The computer terminals that she had control over were used for sending bills by computer directly to the insurance companies. They were separate from the county computers that I and the other clerks used. Since we couldn't use Eileen's terminals, all of our work was done manually. The slow computer system I mentioned previously made it impossible to get the work done timely. Between Jeff's paranoia and Eileen's territorial attitude, I and the other clerks did not get much work done at all. It was just the opposite really.

Jeff came up with the goofiest projects for us to work on. One in particular I remember quite well was done on a monthly basis. Stacks of outpatient bills for submission to Medicaid and Medicare and private insurance companies were sent to our office. The bills were printed on multi-layer carbon paper that had perforations (holes) on each side. The bills were created on the premise that someone would feed the stacks of paper into a computer printer. Then the bills were supposed to get fed into another machine that would tear off the perforations and separate the pages. Instead, we had to tear off the perforated edges and separate the pages, for every single bill, by hand. There were tens of thousands of these bills sent to our office each month. A white cloud of paper dust would form overhead in the office each month that would take several days to dissipate.

After the paper was separated and divided up amongst the staff, we would set to work filling in the spaces on the forms. Of course, we could have used computers and printers to automate these tasks to cut down on time but it didn't happen. Jeff's paranoia stopped any progress to that end. Jeff did have a manual on his desk filled up with a wish list of office procedures that were supposed to get automated someday. The problem was that he needed to have control of everything but his understanding of things only went so far. If he didn't understand how it worked, then he would not use it or allow it. This need for control had its price though. A few years after I left the department, I heard that Jeff had a stroke. Jeff was like a real life master control program and it showed.

Although the account clerks and clerk typists were busy all day every day, not much actually got done. A big problem we ran into was that insurance companies usually have

a time limit on how long a provider can wait to submit a bill for services. The time limit varied from 30 days and up. Whatever the time limits were, we usually missed and the bill did not get paid. We would still do the paper work and submit the bills. This made Jeff feel better and look good to his boss but the insurance companies would reject the claims.

Jeff's need for control extended to the breaks and lunches as well. Jeff took exactly 15 minutes for break and exactly 35 minutes for lunch. This by itself isn't unusual but he did that even during the holidays. On occasion we would have a luncheon and order food in. We only did this for special occasions but we still had to eat fast and race back to our desks. No matter the holiday or amount of food, we still had exactly 35 minutes. Jeff even made Eileen and her minions set up the tables and food during their morning breaks.

One of Jeff's favorite things to do I think was to disseminate memo's and bulletins that came through the office nonstop. He would never let anyone look at any memo or insurance bulletin in its entirety. He would go through and take out only the parts he wanted individual staff to see. Depending on the memo or bulletin and who he wanted to send it to, he might only send a page or part of a page. He would copy specific parts and even use a marker to block out what he didn't want someone to see.

Jeff could take 50 page memos or bulletins and reduce them down to one paragraph or even a few lines and then distribute it. By the time he sent them out to us, they were nearly incoherent. I always thought his approach was rather comical since many of the

memo's and bulletins were from Medicaid and Medicare and accessible by the public anyways. But control freaks need their fix and his was to keep his staff close and his paper work closer.

When Jeff finally did send out one of his precious memos, he made sure to attach an employee list if the memo was going to more than one person. This way, as the memo was passed around and read by each person on the list, they would check off their names. After the memo was circulated, it was always returned to Jeff for filing. Yes, he actually kept them to verify that they were read. He was probably the only supervisor in Milwaukee County to do this. This did backfire on him once though. I missed the event since I was off work that day. One of the clerk typists told me when I returned that another of the clerk typists had filed a grievance alleging discrimination.

There were only three clerk typists. Two were on the job for a while and were white and the other clerk typist had just started and she was black. One of Jeff's typically useless, confusing, pointless memos was making its way around the office. One of the white clerk typists was looking at the memo when the black one told her she wanted to see it next. The white clerk typist decided to jerk her around and instead passed the memo to the other white clerk typist. The black clerk typist then filed a discrimination grievance against the white clerk typist's. As one of the white clerk typists was telling me this, the local union steward, and chief union steward and the union president all entered the office together to see Jeff. I was stunned. To get all of these people involved for such a



stupid accusation. Nothing came of it, though it made me wonder about the priorities of the union.

Maybe Vera wasn't too far off after all since all three of the union people were black. In all fairness though, the white clerk typists were very deserving of the grievance. They spent a good deal of their time talking about boyfriends they would never marry and what color underwear they would wear to work the next day. They enjoyed antagonizing the black clerk typist the same way Alice and Rosemary liked to antagonize me. At least the black clerk typist had someone to complain to. All I could do was take it, or quit and I just needed the money too much to quit. But while I was there, Alice and Rosemary and even Jeff at times went out of their way to make as many of my days as miserable as possible.

Alice and Rosemary's favorite thing was to turn up the heat in the office whenever I turned my back. They would turn the heat all the way up. The office would turn into a virtual sauna. The temperature was easily in the 90's most of the time. They finally had to stop after another worker, a woman of course, complained to the office director, another woman. Jeff's favorite thing to do was to give me instructions and then contradict himself. Sometimes he even gave me written instructions for projects and then claim I did it wrong. He was even worse than Alice and Rosemary.

Although the behavior of the staff was bizarre at times, that behavior was matched or even surpassed by people calling and visiting the office. People would call the office and

try to get information about patients. People were always trying to assume a patient's identity either in person or over the phone. Friends, neighbors and relatives of patients were forever trying to get information from us. I'm pretty sure that's illegal but no one seemed to care.

An even bigger problem was that the mental health complex and the medical complex up the road shared the same computer system. It wasn't uncommon for patients of the medical complex to have their bill and registration information sent to us by mistake. The admission clerks at the medical complex would enter in the wrong code for instance and suddenly the patient would receive a bill from the mental health complex. Those patients would then call us and complain that they were never at the mental health complex. The problem was that many of the mental health complex patients would also call us and complain that they were never at the mental health complex either.

These episodes made for some pretty strange days and just added to the paranoia. I couldn't even leave anything in my desk when I left work each day. The janitorial staff would rip us off whenever possible. They would go into Jeff's office and take the office and desk keys and go through our office desk by desk. One of the account clerks in the inpatient billing section had \$600.00 and some personal items stolen from her locked desk over a weekend. After about 18 months of this, I put in for a transfer at the human resources department. I wasn't quite sure how to sum up my experience at the mental health complex. But it definitely was an experience I wouldn't want to repeat. There wasn't much fanfare with my departure. I'm not sure that Alice and Rosemary even knew

I was gone since they thought I was Jeff most of the time. My new job was at the courthouse downtown.

## Chapter 3

I was interviewed for my new job in the department of child support enforcement by the supervisor Lois. She then introduced me to Andy, who was the assistant director. Lois was a very pleasant and competent person. I think her in-depth knowledge of the department gave her an advantage that helped to create a low stress environment. She didn't have to hide under piles of paper like Vera or hide memos in her office like Jeff. This was in contrast to the assistant director Andy who also was very pleasant but probably got his demeanor from not doing any work and staying in his office as much as possible. I worked in room G4 but the department itself took up three floors. Like the department of social services and the mental health complex I noticed that most of the employees were women and minorities. I would soon discover that the same attitudes that I had encountered at the other two departments were alive and well at the courthouse as well.

Although Lois was quite civil to deal with, most of the employees in the office were anything but. Despite the animosity, my job at the courthouse was probably the most comical of my experiences working for Milwaukee County. There were approximately 100 people working in the department. Out of those approximate 100 employees, only about five were white guys like me. After I was hired, of course after I was hired, I discovered a little secret. Lois had neglected to tell me that my position was replacing two positions. That meant that I was replacing two people. Their names were Jim and Nona. Jim transferred to another department and Nona got promoted but stayed in child support enforcement.

Jim was black which meant that my hiring had increased the white guy population by 20%. Vera would like that. Nona volunteered to train me which I appreciated.

Unfortunately, training didn't make that much difference. Since I was replacing two people, I had quite a bit of work to do. The job wasn't that difficult, but the sheer volume of work was staggering at times. Whenever a welfare case in Milwaukee County would close, a report was generated which was sent to me. I had to verify child support information and then sign off on the report and send it on to another department. I would receive thousands of these reports each month. However, the main part of the job I discovered, was fielding phone calls from welfare recipients.

Each month I would receive a check register listing thousands of names and check amounts. The recipients would then call me, by the thousand, to find out if they would get a child support check that month. It seemed like a simple idea but it rarely was.

Absent parents would send in their payments for child support to the clerk of court, also in the court house. The clerk of courts was supposed to apply the payments to the proper accounts. This would generate a notice to the main social service office in Madison. They in turn would then notify caseworkers that payments were made. The caseworkers were then supposed to issue payments to the recipients.

These payments were a bonus issued in addition to regular benefits. The idea was to give recipients a kickback from the child support payments made by the absent parents. This gave the welfare recipients an incentive to turn in the absent parent to child support

enforcement. This certainly kept everyone busy. Putting all of these departments and people together into a workable system was a disaster. There were people assigned to locate absent parents who rarely located anyone. When absent parents were located, many times they quit their jobs to avoid making payments. I even heard stories of absent parents that would join a circus. That way they were always on the road and were paid in cash and could avoid making child support payments.

When payments were made, it wasn't guaranteed that the payments would even get credited to the right account. I discovered child support cases where the absent parent had made thousands of dollars in payments to the clerk of courts. The clerk of courts would then apply the payments to the wrong account. Trying to get the clerk of courts to untangle these cases was a nightmare. If and when the proper payments were made and credited properly, that still wasn't enough. The case workers were supposed to change a code on a computer in order to issue the child support payment to their client. Trying to get the caseworkers to even answer their phone was an accomplishment in itself. Then I had to convince them to issue the supplemental child support check. Usually the caseworker just wasn't interested. When that would happen I would always make sure to tell the recipient that there was money on account for them. I would then make sure to tell them their caseworker was the reason they weren't getting it. I heard stories of recipients who would go to the welfare office and literally stamp their feet and jump up and down until their caseworker issued the child support check.

My cubicle was in the back of the office on the ground floor next to the windows. My cubicle was the third from the end. On one side of me was a woman named Mary who seemed to spend most of her time trying to sign on to the computer system. The computer resource person assigned to our department even came down to find out what the problem was. The computer system was keeping track of how many sign on attempts were made. One day Mary had tried to sign onto her computer 50 times without success. At one point Mary even spilled an entire cup of coffee across her keyboard.

Next to her at the end was another worker whose name escapes me. She was laid off from the county laundry which was located at the county grounds at one time. The whole laundry operation was closed down several years earlier and contracted out. The county human resources' department was then tasked with finding work for the laundry employee's. Unfortunately, many of the former laundry employee's were hired for their brawn and not their brains. Somehow, one of them ended up in child support enforcement. She was reclassified from laundry worker to clerk typist. She could barely read or write but was still given the job of sending court summons to absent parents. She would pick people out of the phone book almost at random and send them the court summons. Sometimes she got it right and sometimes not. She was the cause of some fairly angry callers and visitors to our office wondering why they had gotten served with a court summons.

Across the aisle from her was Judy. She was a clerk typist also. I'm not sure what she did, but she had worked there long enough to know some pretty clever tricks. Initially, I

wasn't sure if anyone even worked in her cubicle. Nearly every time I walked past her cubicle, it was empty. I did notice personal items on the desk which indicated someone did work in that cubicle. Finally one day as I was walking past I noticed Judy on the floor crawling under her desk. I asked if she was ok and she replied she was fine. I noticed she had a pillow and blanket on the floor as well. I then realized she was just tucking herself in for a nap under her desk. The cubicles and the desks were designed for use together. The desk in each cubicle took up two walls of that cubicle. This meant there was plenty of space under the desk for nap time. I don't mean to imply that Judy was always sleeping under her desk. Lets just say I knew where to find her if she wasn't seated in her chair.

Next to Judy was Carlos. Carlos was the Latin gay man. The ladies loved Carlos. Carlos was the object of all their deep and dark desires. The ladies just had to have him. Next to my cubicle was Steve. Steve was the office drama queen and he knew it and didn't mind everyone else knowing it as well. Since Steve's cubicle was next to mine, he could stare wistfully at Carlos across the aisle. He stared at Carlos because Carlos was the Latin gay man and Steve just had to have him. But alas Carlos was taken. He was "married" and he even had a wedding picture and a ring on his finger to prove it. Carlos brought his wedding picture and displayed it for all to see. The picture and the ring didn't deter anyone. It made them want him even more, because he was Carlos the Latin gay man.

The women most infatuated with Carlos were the paralegals as they were called. They would come into his cubicle one at a time. It was always on the pretense of work. They



would ease their way into his cubicle while Carlos sat at his computer. They would slowly slip behind his chair and lean back against the desk. This way they could approach Carlos from the side. Then, as they would converse with Carlos, they would slowly begin to touch Carlos and push their body against his shoulder. Eventually they would push their groin against his shoulder and begin to grind away. The paralegals would quickly forget why they were there and their eyes would begin to close. After grinding for several minutes, they would open their eyes and soon leave the cubicle. I'm pretty sure they climaxed most of the time.

Poor Carlos, the ladies just couldn't stay away. Every time the paralegals would start grinding, Carlos would get this "o no, not again" look on his face. He really seemed to hate it but didn't know how to deal with it. I suspect his gayness mindset made it difficult to deal with these advances. But he was Carlos, the Latin gay man and the ladies just had to have him. Before Carlos was assigned to the cubicle across from me by Lois, he sat in another part of the office. Before he moved across from me, some of the paralegals would 'come' into my cubicle. Several of them tried to grind on me but I wouldn't let them. I would change position in my chair or just move around so they couldn't do their thing.

I mean why should I have let them do that when they weren't doing anything for me, especially with all the work I had to do. In between the paralegals orgasms, Carlos told me about his previous job in a bank. He said he had a woman boss who would call Carlos into her office. She would lock the door and then proceed to chase Carlos around her desk. Carlos had left that job to work for Milwaukee County. I'm sure the benefits

offered by Milwaukee County were better than the bank anyways. Carlos was hired by Lois as was I. Luckily for Carlos; Lois was very professional. At least he had that advantage but he probably never expected the paralegals to 'come' after him.

I didn't actually watch the paralegals as they ground on Carlos; my view was always through a reflection. My cubicle had something called a microfiche reader in addition to the county computer. The microfiche reader was larger than the computer monitor so I kept it in the corner of my desk. It was pure coincidence that I was able to watch the paralegals work on Carlos. I just happened to look up one day as I was working and noticed that I could see a good reflection when the microfiche machine was turned off. I was able to see with great clarity, what was going on across the aisle. The first couple of times the paralegals 'came' on Carlos shoulder, I was in too much shock to do anything. I had never seen anything like it. The only way I can describe it was like happening upon two animals having sex. I didn't want to stare but I just couldn't look away. It was weird and different and going on right across the aisle from me.

The novelty quickly wore off. I was swamped with work and never ending phone calls while Carlos and his new friends were having fun. Or at least his new friends were. As time went on I realized that the paralegals wouldn't 'come' on Carlos if I was watching. So whenever I heard any noise across the aisle, I would stop what I was doing and stare at whatever paralegal was humping Carlos. That was usually enough to make them stop but not always. After all Carlos was the Latin gay man and the ladies just had to have him. Poor Steve, he wanted Carlos too but he was outnumbered. The paralegals ran in a

pack and had all graduated from Marquette university. They were in close with the lawyers in the office who also mostly went to Marquette. Steve didn't have a chance.

Although Carlos was popular with the ladies, he wasn't so good at his job. He had as much trouble signing on to his computer as Mary did. One day Lois had a talk with Carlos in his cubicle. Carlos just wasn't keeping up and Lois wanted to know why. I didn't hear the whole conversation, but I did hear Carlos threaten to quit if his work duties didn't change. It wasn't too long after that Carlos got promoted. It was done entirely in secret. No job announcement whatsoever. One day he was just gone and we heard he was working on the mezzanine. The mezzanine is the secret floor between the first and second floor of the court house. The mezzanine was off limits to most of the staff unless they worked on that floor. They didn't want visitors ever. I did manage to visit Carlos one day in his new office. He was having trouble with his computer and had asked for help. He had a secluded office which was difficult to reach. Did the paralegals have something to do with his promotion, hmmmmmmmmmmmm? I'll never know. But they now had Carlos all to themselves whenever they had that 'urge'.

The paralegals had gotten promoted in secret as well. They were hired as legal interns through Marquette. Initially they were paid about seven dollars an hour with no benefits. One day I was browsing through a stack of public notices on a bulletin board in the public hallway on the first floor of the courthouse. Most everything done in the county is public record. Announcements are sent out because it's required although I doubt many people read them. One notice caught my attention. The lawyers in child support

enforcement had recommended to a county personnel committee to have the legal interns reclassified to paralegals. They got it. The committee said sure and the legal interns had their salaries more than doubled overnight plus granted benefits.

Their job duties didn't change. The job that they performed was more than easy. The reason they were hired as legal interns was because the entire job revolved around one form. The low wage was indicative of the job duties. All they had to do was fill out one form! Welfare recipients were called into the office so the legal interns could interview them. The legal interns/paralegals would ask for information about the absent parent and enter it on the form. They would then send the form on to other people in the office which began the child support process. That was their entire job which gave them plenty of time to visit with Carlos before and after they were reclassified. These girls certainly knew how to work their connections. One of them eventually was promoted to director of child support enforcement and then county human services director, and then she got fired. I suppose the luck had to run out sooner or later.

All of the scheming and drama did take its toll. The work that was required to establish paternity was dictated by court rules. The staff was required to adhere to time limits. But just like the mental health complex, it didn't happen. I suppose at the mental health complex the problem had more to do with management and slow computers. At child support enforcement the problems were a bit more complex. If the paralegals didn't get to satisfy their 'urge' or if Mary couldn't sign on to her computer or if Judy didn't wake up in time the work wouldn't get done timely. Then they would have to start all over again.

At the mental health complex, if the bills were sent to insurance companies after the due date, the bill was denied permanently. However, in child support enforcement, if the work wasn't done on time, the staff had to start over. I heard the chief lawyer complain about that. He claimed the staff was working on the same cases over and over again.

It was sometime after Carlos got promoted that Lois decided to retire. After she left, a cloud of weirdness seemed to envelope the office. Lois was replaced by Linda. Linda didn't like me. I never knew why but she just didn't. She was kind of a taller, meaner and more flatulent version of Vera with a shade of Eileen. She liked to stand outside my cubicle in the aisle and tell anyone who would listen that she was trying to eliminate my position. I had decided earlier that I wouldn't transfer no matter what. I had applied for a promotional job and was on the eligibility list so all I could do was wait. In the meantime, the weirdness meter just kept going up. Things seemed so normal when Lois was there. Her presence seemed to keep things from getting too far out of hand.

Once Carlos was promoted, the cubicle across from me was vacant. That was quickly filled by Dana, a blond teenage girl on summer break between high school and college. Suddenly, the male lawyers from the office were in her cubicle all the time. They were almost as bad as the paralegals but at least they weren't humping her. The lawyers were a peculiar breed but one really stood out. I don't recall his name but I do recall his wardrobe. It was unique. He showed up to work every day wearing work clothes. He looked like a plumber or heating technician. He wore the kind of clothes that someone might wear if they were working in a factory for instance. He even had heavy duty work

boots to match. The clothes were made from heavy thick material so as not to tear. I don't mean his clothes were dirty or anything. It's just that he would show up to court looking like he was going to fix the plumbing or something.

One day he even asked to borrow my tie because he said he would get in trouble with a judge if he didn't wear one in court. To look at this guy, you wouldn't think he had ever worn a tie in his life. The welfare recipients that he represented in court could only cringe. The way the system worked was that once someone applied for welfare, they were required to cooperate in establishing paternity for their kid(s). This meant they had to among other things show up to court hearings to testify against the absent parent. Since the recipients had applied for welfare, it was obvious they couldn't afford a real lawyer so they were stuck with the county issue. The recipients would often call me to complain. I have no idea why. I couldn't do anything about it. I guess they just needed to vent their frustration and I was one of the few people in the office that actually answered the phone.

Who was in charge of this circus also known as child support enforcement you might ask. Well besides Andy who seemed to stay in his office as much as possible, there was Arlene. Arlene was the director of child support enforcement and she had a very nice office as well that she rarely left. I heard the story on her from Jim, the guy that held one of the two positions I filled. At one time Arlene was just another office clerk. She got into law school though and asked the then director of the department for a leave of absence which he granted. She went to law school during the year and went back to work at child support enforcement during the summer. The director even gave her full vacation

credit each year. Until her last year of law school things were fine. According to Jim, the director got spooked when he realized that Arlene might finish law school and denied her leave of absence for her last year of school. She appealed and won. She finished law school; the director got fired and then she took his job. The local news even covered parts of the story at the time. If they only knew what else was going on there.

Fortunately, or so I thought at the time, my name came up on an eligibility list. I got a notice from a supervisor named George who worked at the Milwaukee county medical complex in the fiscal department. George invited me out to the hospital for an interview to work in the cash application department and hired me. This was my one and only promotional job in 16 years of service, ouch. It only took Carlos about a year to get promoted but alas he was Carlos the Latin gay man ....

## Chapter 4

Over the years I began to realize that each department was its own slice of hell. I would discover before long that the fiscal department at the medical complex, which cash applications was a part of, was probably worse than most. My time there began uneventfully enough. Most if not all of the county grounds where the medical complex was located was a farm long ago. The land was purchased from a farmer back in the 1800's by Milwaukee County. The county board then went on a building spree that lasted for decades.

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. The buildings housed any number of mentally and physically ill along with elderly, orphans and the poor. There were even mass pauper graves filled up with the unwanted or unneeded from the society of the day. I'm sure the founders of the institution grounds as it was also known meant well.

However, after meeting and talking with many people over the years that lived or worked on the grounds, I never got a good impression. Most of the county operations and buildings are gone now. Maybe it was bad karma for doing things like cutting off people's legs to save on wood for coffins before they went into the pauper's grave.

The building where I would work was called the north annex or laundry building. It still had that laundry atmosphere and not in a good way. The laundry equipment was simply put upstairs. The building wasn't really cleaned out first. Someone put up cubicle walls and put in the desks and called it the fiscal department. On one side of the building was the billing and collections and I worked on the other side. Quite a bit of turmoil would



develop at the hospital in the next few years. For the moment though, things seemed fine.

George was the supervisor and Delores was an account clerk in charge just like Vera was, uh oh. The supervisor over George was Bill and he answered to the controller. The controller was in charge of the fiscal department. The medical complex was in the midst of a rather large transition from one computer system to another. As I was to learn, many of the employees and supervisors were not keeping up very well. Again as I quickly learned, job training was nearly nonexistent. I was expected to learn my job from scratch and hopefully not screw up too much.

My predecessor was still in the unit when I started and he was nice enough to show me a few things about my new job before he left for a promotion. So it wasn't too bad. To my amazement, I discovered that the computers were still slow. The medical complex was using the same system as the mental health complex. The same computer vendor was still providing the same awful service. Things were so bad that the staff from the billing department was forced to come in as early as 4 a.m. to start work.

Luckily the old system along with the vendor was terminated shortly after I started. Why it took so many years was anyone's guess. The amount of money wasted on overtime alone was astronomical I'm sure. The old computer system was based on manual entry using paper and pencil. The completed paperwork was sent to a keypunch department. In addition to the slow computer system, the keypunch department would take weeks or

even months to complete the data input. After the data was inputted to a computer tape, the tape was run on the computer system which would update the patient accounts. The whole process was a slow moving disaster which played out month after month. Some of the drama was even covered by the local media at the time. To make the situation worse, the keypunch department was a private enterprise. This meant they worked under contract with Milwaukee County and were pretty much immune to any pressure to work faster.

The new computer system was based on direct input. This was a vast improvement over the previous system. One big problem that developed right away was that many if not most of the staff were computer illiterate. Of course they knew what computers were; they just didn't like them very much. There was no training offered which meant everyone was expected to just figure out what to do on their own. The computer system operated on the premise that the employees would know how to use it. As the transition from old to new progressed, the problems began to multiply.

The new computer system was a main frame based system that was made up of over 100 programs running at the same time. The computer system offered a feature that many supervisors took advantage of including Bill. They could order parts of the system shut down when they wanted to. It was easier for the supervisors to shut down parts of the system rather than try to figure out how it worked. The problem with shutting down parts of the computer system was that it would corrupt other data. Anytime a program was turned off, it generated an error report. There were two cubicles in the office that were

filled up with error reports. The reports were stacked up to six feet tall and actually took up the entire cubicles. Eventually Bill had the error reporting program turned off as well so we no longer received error reports. This meant we had no way to monitor errors. Out of sight, out of mind I guess.

The computer system itself was quite ingenious. I was able to get a copy of the entire program on paper at one point. I was genuinely amazed at what the system could do. It was an all-inclusive program that potentially could have eliminated virtually every job in the fiscal department. The system was equipped to take in patient registration, perform billing and cash application. After all the information was inputted and processed it would have generated hundreds of reports. All of that automation would have eliminated the need for most of the employees in the building.

Reality was far different however. The computer system allowed a person to work on one account or thousands of accounts at a time. When a patient came in to the hospital, each and every service that was provided to them was classified as a separate account. In theory at least this was a good approach which allowed for account specialization as needed. However, as I noted earlier, the computer system was implemented on the premise that people would know how to use it. One thing that went wrong on a regular basis was that when patient bills were paid by Medicare and Medicaid the patients would get billed for the write off amount. The write off amounts might run into the thousands or tens of thousands of dollars. The write off amount was the amount the hospital was

supposed to write off and not bill the patient for. Sometimes it was done right and other times not so much.

Another fun fact was that some of the patients had two or three separate health insurance policies for whatever reason. The primary insurance would get billed but the second or third policy might not get billed until months or more went by if ever. By then the grace period for submitting claims would pass and the insurance companies would reject the claim and then the patient would get billed. After enough time had passed, the hospital would turn over the unpaid claims to outside collection agencies that would harass patients for money that they didn't owe. For no particular reason, the medical complex had contracted with five separate collection agencies to collect money which made it all the more entertaining.

On the reverse side of not billing and getting paid properly, there was the problem of the "credit account" that was our department's responsibility. There were payments dating back up to 20 years or more that sat on account and unused. No one could figure out where the money came from or where it was supposed to go. Supposedly it was money sent by insurance companies and patients for bills owed. But for some reason, no one in the department knew where the money was supposed to go. A complicating issue was that the medical complex had existed at the county grounds for close to 100 years. Even though most of the records were computerized, we still had to wade through almost 100 years' worth of records to get information. That "credit account" with its hundreds of

thousands of dollars finally disappeared at some point. Who knows where it went, no one knew what to do with it anyways. Vera would appreciate that.

At least those problems were in house and we had some input. Unfortunately, there were other problems we dealt with that we had no control over. For some reason, the computer system we used was maintained by a private vendor who worked out of the medical college basement. One thing that the vendor's computer operators were known for was rerunning computer tapes. The tapes contained patient billing information. Payment information from Medicare would come in on computer tape which the operator was supposed to run on the computer system. This would have the effect of mass posting of data. I don't know why this was allowed remotely but it was.

The problem was that the computer operators would get their instructions crossed and they would run the same payment tapes over and over. This meant that patient accounts would receive payment over and over. This meant that the patients would receive a bill with a credit balance. The more work you do, the more work you get was an unofficial motto throughout Milwaukee County. Once I settled in to my job, I didn't have too much difficulty doing my work. However, when things would go wrong, George would inevitably ask me to take a look and see if I could do anything to help. George had an unlimited supply of temporary workers from employment agencies at his disposal. He would assign them to me as needed and let me know he could always get more. I didn't mind too much since George had hired me. I was an account clerk II now which meant it was a promotional job and I was making like 20 cents an hour more!

I did enjoy the challenge and it was an interesting experience at times to coordinate the activities of so many people. The computer errors that would come through the department were colossal and it would take up to a dozen of us to fix things. Going through thousands and tens of thousands of accounts to make corrections took an enormous amount of overtime but there was no choice. No matter how many problems we fixed, there was always another one on the way.

Most of the problems weren't caused by us but we had to correct them none the less. At least I got to interact with more people this way. We had so much work to do that people from other departments even helped us out. They wanted the overtime and we had to get the work done. Unfortunately, the people that showed up to work with us weren't always the brightest. They just wanted the overtime money mostly I think. There was so much work piled up that George and Bill were willing to take any warm body just to move the paper around. At least it kept people busy and it looked good. Kind of like the mental health complex at times I'm afraid.

There was a woman named Dorothy that worked with us quite a bit. She started at 5:00am and worked to 7:00pm Monday thru Friday. She was at the hospital 14 hours a day five days a week. She didn't actually do 14 hours of work every day. I don't think she did even 8 hours of work every day. Most of the time she sat at her desk with a blank look on her face and stared into space. Other times she would disappear for hours on end. She always had a stack of paper on her desk and a pen in her hand but the paper never

seemed to move. I always made sure to dumb down the work as much as possible that I gave people to do. This helped to keep errors to a minimum. This way if Dorothy fell asleep while working, it wouldn't cause too much trouble.

The temporary workers that George hired from temp agencies were a mixed breed. One in particular was Debra. She hated living in Milwaukee. She would refer to it as Milwaukee, Mississippi. She was forever making some crass remark about why she hated white people. She seemed to enjoy directing her remarks at me for some reason. She claimed to have lived all over the country but stayed in Milwaukee for some reason.

Judy, not the same Judy from the courthouse, was a regular employee who just didn't like men for some reason. I know this because she told me that often. Her favorite remark was "it's nothing personal but I hate men and you're here". There were only a handful of people like Judy who had worked in cash application for any length of time. I guess time took its toll. Delores, the account clerk in charge had job skills that would have fit in perfectly anywhere in the 1950's. She was able to complete one transaction at a time, never faster, never slower. She always seemed clearly annoyed at any form of technology and anyone like me that used it.

Eventually, George had to start hiring regular employees. That's how Allen got hired. Allen was a rather mean, miserable, flatulent little man. He was kind of like a male version of Vera but much more bitter. He had previously worked at the court house for five years. Before that he was laid off from Allis Chalmers after many years of service.

Poor Allen, he was an angry white man nearly 50 years old and just couldn't get the "big" promotion even though he had a bachelor's degree in accounting from Marquette.

Marquette grads are easy to spot in the county system because they tend to tell everyone where they went to school and Allen was no exception. I guess he hoped it would pave the way for something better. Marquette grads did seem to do well in the county. In Allen's case however, nothing he did seemed to work so he complained. He started complaining almost as soon as he started working with us. Allen refused to attempt any task unless he was "trained". Allen seemed rather annoyed at the prospect of having to do any work at all. He was on the short side so maybe he had something of a napoleon complex. He was very aggressive physically and would often try to stare people down. That didn't work out so well since Allen was so short all he could do was face people eyeball to chin.

One day the computer system went down unexpectedly and Bill came through the office. He wanted everyone to stay busy. Allen had a pile of paper reports on the floor next to his desk. Bill told Allen to put the reports in a box. Allen looked Bill in the chin said he wasn't able to do that because he was never trained! Bill was visibly startled and repeated the instruction at which point Allen realized what an idiot he looked like and proceeded to find a box. When he wasn't complaining, Allen was bothering just about everyone in the building. Allen was like a fidgety grade school kid who just couldn't sit still. He was like the kid that the teacher would have to watch except of course we had no one to watch Allen.



Allen went from one department to another bothering people. Allen got inside just about every cubicle and office in the building. He would always ask questions that were vaguely work related. He would wander into someone's cubicle or office and ask how long they worked there for instance. Allen had a whole range of questions to bother people with. Who's your supervisor, do like that person, what work do you do and how you do like it? These were some of Allen's favorite questions. Eventually, people complained, a lot. Supervisors around the building began ordering Allen out of their departments one by one. Why Bill and George didn't get involved was a mystery.

One day I was near the accounts payable department. That department was right next to ours. I just happened to see Allen as he walked into accounts payable. He walked up to the supervisor's desk and tried to engage him in conversation. I couldn't hear what Allen was saying exactly but I did hear the supervisor. He told Allen he had to leave. Allen just stood there and kept talking to the supervisor. The supervisor threatened to call the sheriff security to have him removed. Allen just stood there and kept talking. The supervisor picked up the phone and began dialing the sheriff security. At that point, Allen finally got the hint and left, rather briskly. It was probably the fastest Allen had ever walked while working at the medical complex. Now there was nowhere left for Allen to go so he had to stay in cash applications every day.

By the time Allen's rear end hit the chair each morning, his mouth was open. Allen would then proceed to tell anyone who would listen or even if no one was listening everything that happened to him between the time he left the day before and the time he

arrived that morning plus everything he thought about during that time. He would talk about the traffic or his wife or kids or neighbors or in-laws or future plans or past experiences or when he was born or what was happening in the world when he born. It was near endless. However, when Allen did run out of things to talk about, he would then go from desk to desk asking moronic questions just to elicit a response. Anything to avoid working I suppose.

Eventually I guess Allen started running out of material because he began to woo the ladies with stories about his exploits on the front lines in Vietnam. Allen was filled up with stories of heroics and life and death drama in the combat zone. After some probing questions from people in the office, however, Allen finally admitted that he was a payroll clerk on a supply base in Vietnam far removed from the front lines. All the stories he had told were told to him by others and Allen was simply repeating the stories except in the first person. Apparently the only action that Allen got was dodging paper clips and exploding pens. I didn't care to ask but it sounded like Allen never got promoted while in service. After his discharge he went to work for Allis Chalmers for about 20 years. The skills he developed while in Vietnam processing payroll under fire weren't enough to get promoted there either before getting laid off. Eventually he began working at the courthouse for a supervisor who made him buy her coffee and donuts every day. I never could figure out why George hired Allen. George didn't seem to know why either.

One day Sandy started in the department. She just showed up and started mumbling "all's fair in love and work". I didn't know what she meant by that but her desk was directly

across from Allen. This gave Allen someone to bother which was a great relief to the rest of us. Sandy didn't actually engage Allen in conversation. She mostly just nodded her head unless I was around then she would nod her head and mumble "all's fair in love and work". Judy, the angry white woman, had also started saying "what comes around goes around" to me whenever I would pass her desk. This was in addition to the usual "it's nothing personal but I hate men and you're here" routine. Even Debra the creepy temp was giving me the evil eye. I knew something was going on but I just wasn't sure what.

One day Elaine showed up. I had never seen her before. She was lauded as a specialist in everything related to hospital operations. She previously had worked at the eye clinic and was put on loan to us. Elaine only liked to converse with the women in cash application including Delores. Delores by this time had taken to staring at me like I just ran over her dog with my car or something. I knew something big was going on but no one would say what. Another day Roger showed up. This was a different Roger than in chapter 1. This Roger had worked at the hospital for quite a while I was told. Roger just showed up one day and plopped down at an empty desk. He was just there and no one knew why. Still no one would say what was going on until finally one day the axe fell so to speak.

Along the front wall of this enormous building we worked in were various analysts and supervisors. I didn't pay much heed to them except to talk with Bill on occasion who had his office along this wall as well. Perhaps I should have paid more attention to the people in the wall. Apparently the controller of the fiscal department had hired one of her girlfriends to work in the office. Big mistake! I don't recall the controllers name but the

name of the girlfriend that she hired was Rachel. This event happened about a year after I started. I never could have imagined so many things going wrong so quickly. The coup was over before I even knew it started. Somehow Rachel had gotten her friend/boss fired and took her job and her office. The revolution was over and the women were in charge.

The previous controller was content to let the supervisors (mostly old white guys) run their sections. However, things were now set to change quickly. The re-education could now begin. Now I understood why Sandy kept saying “all’s fair in love and work”. The weirdness would now begin in earnest. At least I was able to get some information now. I never found out who hired who or decided what. No one wanted to put anything in writing for some reason. Most of the information I got was second hand but anyways, Roger was our new supervisor. The reason for his placement in our department was so that Elaine could watch him. The hospital administration wanted to fire Roger but needed a good reason. Elaine was brought in to document Roger’s mistakes and ultimately help terminate Roger and then take his job as our supervisor. Supposedly Roger knew this although I never asked him about it directly. I couldn’t talk to Roger about much of anything anyways as he didn’t know how to do anything. He was a manager at large in the hospital complex but he had no expertise in anything that I knew of.

Elaine on the other hand was supposedly the expert on everything. She was supposed to study our department and make changes as necessary. One change she made right away was to assign special duties to Sandy. Sandy was suddenly Elaine’s go to girl now. Ultimately Sandy was supposed to assume the role of supervisor. Elaine could then go

back and do whatever it was she did where ever she did it before. Unfortunately, Sandy didn't know how to do much of anything but no one cared. As part of her enhanced job duties, Sandy came up with a new idea for our file rack. The cash application section had a wall filled up with files which contained financial information on patients. We would access the files as needed to do our work. Each patient had a medical record number but the files were kept in name order from A to Z. This filing system was probably in place for decades at least. Like most of the fiscal department it was a little creaky but it worked. Well Sandy didn't like it. Sandy decided that instead of alphabetical order, we should keep the files in medical record number order. The girls in the office were elated. Sandy had an idea and they were going to roll with it. Rachel and Elaine were so pleased with Sandy's idea that a special project with overtime was created. The files were rearranged on a Saturday when most of the other staff was gone. The following Monday when I came back, the project was complete. All of the files were now in medical record number supposedly. All of the women in the office congratulated Sandy on a job well done. Sandy was on her way it seemed.

Eventually I and the other staff had to retrieve files from Sandy's new file system. A little problem developed. Many of the files were misfiled. I and others couldn't find files suddenly. The files weren't in alphabetical or numerical order. The files weren't in any discernable order at all. With the previous alpha based system, it was usually easy to spot files that were out of place. With Sandy's new numeric system, the files just seemed to disappear. Of course the files were there somewhere we just couldn't find them. When confronted with this problem she had created, Sandy replied that it was "just an idea".

Since we couldn't find the files anymore, we had to guess a lot. Years later Sandy was promoted to supervisor at the courthouse downtown. No, really. NO, REALLY!

Bill and George were now just office clerks. Their job duties were suddenly scaled back and passed on to anyone wearing makeup. Bill and George were stuck. They were caught off guard. They couldn't go anywhere. They couldn't retire yet. They couldn't transfer since they were both accountants and there weren't many openings for accountants. Our introduction to Rachel's management style came quickly. I was at my desk working one day and suddenly I heard a blood curdling scream thunder across the office. I'm sure everyone else in the building heard it as well. I jumped up from my desk and looked towards the front door where Rachel's office was located. I knew the scream came from Rachel. I thought she was in distress. I was ready to rush over to her office. I had never heard anyone scream like that before. It was like a horror movie scream you might hear if someone was disemboweled or having their limbs chopped off one by one. Then silence.

I didn't know what to make of it. When I first heard the scream I expected to see Rachel running bloody across the office with someone chasing her with a butcher knife in their hand. It was that kind of a scream. I went back to work, not sure what to think. About a week or so later I was in the billing area on the opposite side of the building. This time I was only about 20 feet from Rachel's office. Suddenly she started screaming. I was stunned. It was even worse than the first time since I was so close to her office this time. It was unnerving to hear someone scream like that. I slowly made my way to the front of the building. I half expected to see Rachel lying dead on the floor. It was that intense of a

scream. As I gingerly made my way I looked around at other people whose offices were close by and the people looked shell shocked. You'd think a plane had crashed into the building or something equally terrifying. As I got closer to Rachel's office I noticed one of Rachel's secretaries with tears in her eyes. I was completely dumbfounded. I had no idea what to say or do except go back to my desk.

Sometime later I discovered that Bill was the recipient of Rachel's outburst. The reason for her tantrum was Bill had transposed a number on an excel spread sheet. You know like entering "6" instead of "9", that kind of thing. Rachel had taken the spread sheet to a meeting downtown at the courthouse. It was during this meeting that she discovered Bill's error. She came back to work and let him have it. That was it, one number transposed and she turned into a psycho. Bill disappeared after that scream. He was sent to counseling offered by Milwaukee County. I know he was sent to counseling because someone (Rachel?) had written that on a location board that everyone could see. The board was used to let staff know where the managers were day to day. So embarrassing, and so mean, times had changed quickly; apparently Bill needed help adjusting to the ravings of a lunatic.

Bill came back after a week. He had dyed his hair and appeared very calm. I guess he had gotten fixed. That wasn't the end of Rachel's tirades though. She was just getting started. As time went on I noticed that whenever Rachel would scream at Bill or any of the other white guys, there were peals of laughter from women across the office. Rachel never so much as raised her voice to the women or minorities in the office. She only screamed at

the white (mostly old) guys. She never screamed at anyone outside of her or their office. She usually stayed in her office but when she did come out to converse with anyone, she stuck with a pattern. As she made her way, Rachel would talk to women in a whisper and to any men she encountered, she would yell. Rachel wouldn't scream at men out in the office, just yell really loud. George and I noticed that trait right away. If Rachel walked up to Sandy for instance, she would whisper so soft no one could hear. If she then talked to me she would yell. The yelling didn't mean she was mad, that was just her normal conversation voice with men.

George and I picked up on a curious habit Rachel had. On occasion, she would wear a small skull cap on her head. We assumed it had religious connotations. It was just barely noticeable but whenever she did wear it, she was completely civil. She wouldn't even raise her voice and would even say "hello" to me. George and I would make it a point to see if Rachel was wearing the cap from day to day. If she was, we knew we were in the clear for that day at least. She would make up for the civility on other days though.

One day Rachel was in the office of one of the analyst's and called me in to ask me if I had a report. I told her no such report existed and she blew up at me. Rachel started screaming at me like she did at Bill. Unfortunately for her I wasn't Bill and I screamed back. I honestly didn't know I had it in me. I don't know where it came from but I matched her decibel for decibel. I'm surprised the office ceiling didn't cave in by the both of us screaming at each other. Rachel finally gave up and as I turned to leave the analyst's office I realized that Rachel's boss was standing right behind me. He had



listened to the conversation yet made no effort to muzzle Rachel. He was an old white guy like Bill and George. Rachel's boss was married to the analyst whose office we had just argued in. Rachel's boss was, how the ladies might say, a well-trained man.

Nearly no one was safe from Rachel's tantrums it seemed. There was a white guy about Bill's age who was an accountant. He had suffered a stroke some years before and lost some use of his voice. As a result, he talked quite slowly. One day Rachel went into his office and proceeded to scream at him in her usual psycho rage. The guy just couldn't talk back due to his disability. He couldn't keep up with Rachel verbally so he had to just sit and take it. There was no code of decency immune from Rachel's outburst but even this was a new low.

The laughing continued though, the louder the screams, the louder the laughter. I couldn't figure out what was so amusing to the women in the office. This group of white mostly older women would laugh after every one of Rachel's tantrums. It was such a consistent theme. I would hear Rachel screaming in her office and immediately, there were cackles of laughter across the room. It was like a blood lust I guess. Rachel never screamed more than once a day so when I heard it I knew she had claimed her victim for the day. The laughter afterwards really puzzled me and I didn't know who to ask about it.

One day when I was outside the building on a smoke break, I was called over by one of the women from the collections unit. I had just finished a cigarette and was on my way back into the building. She called me over to the picnic table where she was sitting and

motioned for me to sit down and then told me a story. She wanted me to know that what was going on in the office was nothing personal against me. She said that when she and the other older women had started working at the medical complex back in the 1970's, things were different. This woman claimed that she and the other women were subject to constant crude remarks and harassment by the white males of the day years earlier. The way she and the other women looked at the current situation, Rachel's outbursts were satisfying a need for revenge and evidently any white guys would do. Rachel was, in their eyes, their avenger hence the laughter. This conversation really did take place. As strange as the story sounded, at least I now had an explanation for the laughing.

Rachel had just started working there but she was an accountant with credentials. She decided that she knew better than anyone else. She also decided that the structure of the cash application department had to change. Up until then, there were account clerks like me who were assisted by clerk typists. Rachel didn't like that for some reason. She decided that anyone off the street could do the work that the account clerks did. By this time Allen and I were the only white guy account clerks left. Allen was by then however, Elaine and Sandy's office pet. I suspected that the new work rules coming from Rachel were directed at least partly at me. It would explain Judy's outburst.

After Rachel took over, Judy did stop saying "what comes around goes around" but she did keep up with the "it's nothing personal but I hate men and you're here" routine. Sandy never stopped saying "all's fair in love and work". It was kind of like the little kid in the movie who kept saying redrum. Rachel proceeded to reclassify the clerk typists to

account clerks. There was even one person who was recently hired as a clerk typist. Between the time she was hired for the job and the time she started, the job was reclassified to account clerk. This meant she had gotten an instant promotion without even trying. Rachel sidestepped the whole promotional and hiring process to prove her point that any moron could do the work that we the cash applications staff did.

Suddenly the office was filled up with account clerks, many of whom had no idea what to do. These were normally promotional jobs that people like me waited years to get but Rachel thought she knew better. Rachel put Elaine in charge of this mess. Remember Elaine was the expert or so we were told. Elaine didn't think much of our job skills either except for Sandy's. Elaine was a lot like Rachel but older and creepier. Elaine's wardrobe accentuated her attitude. She would often times wear a black nurse uniform to work. We were working in a hospital of course but Elaine was not a nurse. I don't know where she got the uniforms from or why she wore them but she did.

Elaine's view was similar to Rachel's in that she figured that the women in the office could overcome any problem. I guess that all sounds noble but the reality was that the department had a tremendous amount of paper coming through. Disrupting the paper flow could lead to a disaster and guess what, it did. Needless to say Elaine was quickly overwhelmed. She just didn't know what to do. The more frustrated she got, the meaner she got. At one point I heard Delores ask Elaine about her general attitude and demeanor. Elaine replied that she wasn't concerned about the morality of her conduct. Elaine stated quite emphatically that she knew she was going to hell when she died so nothing really

mattered. She really seemed to want everyone to think she was tough. I heard her tell Allan that her father wanted a son so he raised Elaine like a man. What that was supposed to mean I have no idea.

Roger was still there but he was mostly just taking up space. He was supposedly the supervisor but in name only I discovered. Since Roger didn't know how to do anything, everyone was waiting on Elaine to come up with some new trick to make everything work. One big problem that Elaine faced was that she was a very naughty girl and needed lots of discipline. I know this because Elaine's boyfriend would show up from time to time at the end of the day. He would sit in Elaine's cubicle with her and tell her what a naughty girl she was. Her boyfriend was a, wait for it, Milwaukee County sheriff deputy. Apparently, Elaine's boyfriend/master had a private "jail" and he would take her there along with the other naughty girls. I even heard one of the other account clerks, Jeanette; go into Elaine's cubicle from time to time for some chastisement. I don't know where this naughty girls 'jail' was located but the medical complex was a huge place. By this time, I had cut back on overtime so I was thankfully able to leave before the discipline sessions started.

You would think that the union would take notice of all the drama going on. Rachel had violated just about every union, civil service and rule of decency there was but nothing happened. A big problem with the union was that it was run mostly by women and minorities. I think the reason the union backed off was that the women and minority

employees were reaping the benefit of Rachel's actions. Rachel was only going after the evil white men anyways so nobody cared.

There was one union steward that tried to stand up to the new management. He was a former out door park laborer who had gotten laid off. He ended up as a file clerk in the fiscal department. He looked like a biker and had the attitude to match. This was probably a good thing considering the circumstances. He supplemented his income by volunteering for experiments at the medical college. One in particular involved blood pressure medication. After taking the medication, he was required to urinate into a plastic jug and then save the jug and turn it over to the medical college. He kept the jug at his desk and carried it in a paper bag back and forth to the bathroom. Everyone could hear him walking by even with the cubicle walls because of the whooshing sound the urine in the jug made. As comical as this was, he was the last great white hope. That didn't last for long though as he "raised" his voice to a woman billing supervisor and Rachel suspended him for three days. So much for that idea, well at least he tried I guess. Several years later he retired on disability. The story I heard was that one day he lay down on the floor of the file room and started yelling for help. The paramedics were called and took him away and he never came back. Bad back supposedly.

Needless to say things got worse before they got even worse. Elaine just couldn't come up with any ideas unfortunately. Elaine had committed her soul to an eternity of damnation as she had told Delores but all she could come up with was an excel pie chart. All the pie chart showed was how much work wasn't getting done. As it turned out she

didn't know a thing about the new computer system nor did Allen the combat payroll clerk or Roger or Sandy or Rachel or anyone else. After hearing Rachel's screaming a few times I put in for a transfer. I hadn't planned on leaving but things were just getting too weird for me. A hiring freeze across the county was announced right about the time I put in for a transfer. This meant I was stuck and all I could do was tough it out.

Amidst all of this turmoil there was a character named Luis who was the hospital security director. He made it his mission to stop everyone from smoking or at least try. Funny how the whole department was disintegrating and all this guy could think about was smoking. He even tried to ban smoking in the morgue. Luis told the doctor in charge of the morgue he had to stop smoking because it would bother non-smokers. The morgue doctor pointed out that all the nonsmokers in the morgue were dead anyways. Luis told him he would still have to create a nonsmoking section. The doctor created a sign to designate a no smoking area. He attached it to a pillar and drew an arrow pointing down and wrote Luis's name under the arrow. This way the spot was then reserved for Luis whenever he came in. The sign was visible from the hallway too.

As Rachel's work rule changes were put in effect, the flow of paper work slowly ground to a near halt. The cash application department was now filled up with people like Elaine who had no idea what to do. Actually the whole fiscal department across the entire building was descending into a maze of strangeness. One of the supervisors of the billing department came up with a wardrobe policy. This was the same one that the union steward "raised his voice" to. She and the other supervisors came up with a list of items

that employees could wear or not. One item she insisted on was that all clothing had to contain at least 50% cotton. She would even walk into her worker's cubicles and feel their clothing to make sure it complied. Another rule that was strictly enforced was that employees could not wear blue jeans at work. Women were allowed to wear blue jean skirts though which was a point of contention for one of the male employees. As a sign of protest he shaved his legs and wore a blue jean skirt to work. He got a warning from his boss not to do that again but the wardrobe policy never changed. That episode was covered by the local media as well.

I applied for a promotional job about this time. The application was 12 pages long. I was then directed to the human resources department at the courthouse where I was interviewed by a panel of three people. Afterwards they sent me a letter to inform me that I ranked number one on the eligibility list. The pay range was only one step higher but I didn't care. I received another letter from the department where the job was located. I was so excited to interview. I was greeted by two people, the supervisor of the position and his assistant. The supervisor was a black man and his assistant was a white woman married to another black man. I will explain the relevance for that shortly. At the time I was finishing up my third college degree. When I informed my prospective supervisor of this and my other accomplishments, he turned about ten shades whiter. His white female assistant looked shell shocked but she wouldn't look at me directly. Since I was number one on the list, I should have gotten hired but I didn't. After the interview I received a thanks but no thanks letter from the supervisor. Now if a woman or minority would have ranked number one and got denied, you already know the answer I'm sure. Years later

the white female assistant was in the news. She lived on the north side with her husband and stopped one night at a restaurant. She was robbed while in the parking lot. The robber made her get on her knees and then blew her head off with a blast of his shot gun. He later told police he didn't like the way she was looking at him. She wouldn't look at me at all but looked the robber in the eye!

Thankfully I had also applied for a job as a caseworker. After testing and interviews I ranked number three on the eligibility list. I heard from many sources that more than a thousand people had applied. Only 20 people were hired to begin training. Luckily I was one of the 20 so I was able to give notice to Roger the make believe supervisor we had. I'm sure Roger was happy to see me go. I'm pretty sure he was trying to get me fired. Several times he called me into his office and asked me odd questions. I think he was trying to get me to say something incriminating. I say that because each time I saw him fumble with a tape recorder under his desk. He kept trying to hide it and push buttons and record at the same time. Tape recorders were bigger then and harder to hide and Roger was just too dumb.

My departure meant that Allen was the lone white guy account clerk left in cash applications. My replacement was also a white guy but he had a sex change not long after he started so I suppose "he" really didn't count. I guess Rachel and the girls must have got to him. Allen was just too dense to cause any problem so Elaine and Rachel had their own little work utopia. I overheard Elaine in her cubicle that she had attended meetings of the top hospital management. The hospital was run by a woman at the time. Elaine



kept bragging that the top hospital management wanted to “weed out the Neanderthals” from the hospital staff. I guess she and Rachel were getting their way little by little. I don’t mean to imply that Rachel and Elaine and Sandy and the other women hated men by any means, except for Judy anyways. I’m sure that anyone of them could have sucked the chrome off a tailpipe. But as Sandy liked to say, ‘all’s fair in love and work’.

Things should have worked perfectly after I left or so they must have hoped. But, GASP, the hospital closed. The job of the fiscal department was to bring in money to the hospital. Under Rachel’s guidance the revenue all but dried up. It lost so much money that the county board was forced to close it down only about two years after I transferred. Rachel and her underlings had accomplished a task in just a couple of years what no man could do in the previous hundred years. They ran the hospital out of business, right into the ground. This was the haven for people who had no insurance and needed medical care and/or medication. The hospital had survived through wars and depressions and recessions but it was no match for Rachel.

In retrospect, the level of incompetence I encountered there was so staggering that I wondered at times if it was intentional. In the years since, I have pondered from time to time if people like Rachel and Sandy and Roger and Elaine were placed there to hasten the hospitals closure. After I left I complained to the EEOC about what went on at the medical complex. An investigator from EEOC phoned me at home one day and laughed when I told her of the goings on there. After she stopped laughing, she said yes I had a valid complaint but I had waited too long to file, I bet.

At any rate the girl's night out was over. At least the employees were dressed appropriately when they got laid off. Many of the hospital staff were scattered throughout the county system. People like Elaine and Sandy and Allen were now able to take their expertise to other county departments. The fiscal building/former laundry was demolished and the space it occupied is part of the medical college now. I was sure glad to get out of there when I did. Honestly, I would have taken a job sweeping cages at the zoo just to get out of that nut house. I had no idea what to expect in my new job. I had to attend job training for about six weeks on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. So now I would try again to find a somewhat normal place to spend my career. I always tried to stay optimistic.

## Chapter 5

Seven years into my time with Milwaukee County and I was right back on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet where I started. Vera would think that was funny. She had retired a few years earlier and much to her disappointment I'm sure, the building didn't fall down when she left. I don't know what happened to Vera's work load. I'm not sure that she was even replaced since no one knew what she was doing there to begin with. Carol had taken a regular retirement and Regina had retired on disability and then passed away, sad.

The remodeling that was going on when I left years earlier was now complete. The training room was on the third floor and could accommodate about 15 people comfortably. Of course the training staff had crammed all 20 of us in there. I was now a caseworker. I was back in the same building that I started in but the name of the department was always changing. Human Services or Social Services or welfare central or some other name but it was all the same. The position of caseworker had many names over the years, some not fit to print. It was now known as economic support specialist or usually just 'worker'. Along with the new position name came a pay reclassification eventually. That was much appreciated and of course better than nothing. Out of the 20 people to start, there was only one other white guy in the room. He decided to go back to his old job though soon after the training began. He said it was just too complicated for him or something like that.

Then it was just me, 17 women and a Puerto Rican guy that had worked as a janitor at the court house. Somehow he had passed the test and interviews, how I have no idea. I must

mention his hair though. His girlfriend had shaved a circle into the top of his head and then made him grow his hair really, really long. All the way down his back. He was always coming in late so everyone in the room could see his hair when he came and went. His girlfriend must have had some specialized skill in order to get him to wear his hair that way. I don't know how he even managed to keep his original job at the courthouse. He actually got fired though. Mary, the manager of the training supervisors fired him on the second last day of training. All that time and effort for nothing, plus he couldn't go back to his old job at the courthouse because too much time had passed.

The training went eight hours a day, five days a week for about six weeks. We were supposed to have more training but they needed the caseworkers right away. We each received training manuals that totaled some 2000 pages in length. The training manuals were the basis for the job that we had. The training manuals were written mostly using something called pseudo code. Pseudo code was a throwback to a programming language that was used long ago. There was a definite skill level required in order to decipher the pseudo code. As I soon discovered, most people didn't have it.

As with the hospital, the human services department where I now worked was converting to a new computer system. That in itself didn't matter since most of the employees didn't know how to use the old computer system anyways. The department was made up of caseworkers and supervisors and section supervisors and assistant directors and a director. There were also the clerical support workers who were supposed to help make the department work. The new computer system was supposed to help streamline the

whole department. The state human services department in Madison wanted all of the counties in Wisconsin to have all of the welfare cases uploaded as soon as possible.

This new computer system was also in use in several other states including Florida. Something went wrong in Florida which caused the whole system to freeze up. There were lines of people blocks long at various agencies in Florida trying to get food stamps and such. That was in the news at the time. According to our training supervisors, Florida welfare administrators were indicted and sent to prison because of the computer problems. This scared the administrators in Madison so they authorized much overtime in the hope that we would get all the work done and hopefully keep them out of jail.

I was surprised at how much work the caseworkers were expected to do. Of course most of the caseworkers didn't actually do that much work, but they were expected to. I had to learn how to use the old computer system which was getting phased out anyways. I was then expected to learn an entirely new computer system once on the job. Most of the training was uneventful. I was surprised by the background of some of my coworkers. The Puerto Rican guy was one. His hiring didn't make any sense although his firing seemed quite logical.

There was a black woman who I swear just didn't like white people; especially white women who tried to tell her what to do like Mary. Mary, the parade lady, as she was called because she liked to stand at a distance and wave at everyone, told us to come to training on time. The black trainee seemed more than a little bit insulted. Whatever time

we were expected back; she would come in last. If we were expected back at 2:15pm she would come in at 2:15 and 55 seconds just to annoy Mary. Mary never hesitated to get in her face though to express her displeasure. Mary was petite while the trainee was tall and fat so it was quite entertaining to watch. There were other black women in the training room but this one just seemed to have a chip on her shoulder.

Another new trainee was Sara who came from the medical complex like me. Sara had worked as a registration clerk for five years and was now a caseworker trainee just like me. Sara claimed the only reason she was hired was because she spoke Spanish. I'm sure that was very possible but I suspect that there was a better reason. Sara's aunt was a well-known supervisor in the social service department years earlier. Good to see how those affirmative action lawsuits really put a damper on all that nepotism practiced by the evil white men.

One story I heard while in training still makes me chuckle. A training supervisor said that when she was a worker she happened upon a young boy in the waiting room on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. The boy was barefoot and it was fall outside and getting colder by the day. When she and her fellow caseworkers saw this kid they felt sorry for him and his mother and expedited the case so the mother could go out and buy the kid shoes. Several days later the same boy was back in the waiting room still barefoot but with a different mother. The caseworkers discovered the people were traveling gypsies and they were just trading the kids back and forth to collect money. I think the supervisor told the story to make us realize that things were not always what they seemed.

Finally, with the training ended, we were all completely overwhelmed with information. All I could do was take my manuals which, when stacked up were more than a foot thick and go find a zone to work in. As the training wound down all of us trainees were given a list of open zones. Each of us new caseworkers would get a zone and each zone had about 400 welfare cases that we were supposed to maintain. We were then allowed to pick which zone we wanted and hopefully we would get it. I almost got stuck working on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet but luckily I was able to get a zone on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell on the south side. Things weren't that much different at the south side office though. All I really did was go from the north side ghetto to the south side ghetto. At least I was able to escape Vera's omen plus anything was better than working at the medical complex.

I was closer to home now and there were more restaurants on the south side. I was assigned to work at 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell or what we called the "Hills" building. It was called that because it was a department store at one time. That the neighborhood had seen better days was an understatement. The county human services occupied two floors of the building. There were other people in the building who worked there for other agencies. For some reason, the county caseworkers just weren't well liked, by anyone it seemed.

The only reason I wanted the zone that I got was I realized it was half way between the smoke break room and the bathroom. It was perfect I thought. By this point I was more interested in comfort over career as I finally began to realize that Vera's statements weren't far off the mark. I didn't meet the supervisor until after I started. Her name was

Peggy and I discovered she was quite knowledgeable about the work and she also knew where all the good restaurants were. Peggy was the unit supervisor and each unit contained ten zones. All of the unit supervisors answered to Norma who was the section supervisor. Norma in turn answered to Eva, the assistant director. Eva spent most of her time on the slot machines at Potawatomi or so went the rumor. Other than that, no one seemed to know what Eva did.

All of the caseworkers had their own cubicle which did nothing to block the noise. I had what was called an ongoing zone which only contained regular cases. Adjacent to my cubicle was Leann's cubicle. Leann was an intake worker who interviewed clients and processed applications. Leann's husband also worked for Milwaukee County at the Schlitz brewery. Next to her cubicle was Tom. He claimed Native American heritage but as far as I could tell, the only reservation he ever set foot on was the Potawatomi casino. I suspected he had used that as a way into the county service. Whatever works I guess. Tom's mother worked in the department as well. Tom was a specialist worker who was supposed to help monitor reports and help Peggy run the unit, or something like that.

Tom also provided coverage for Leann's zone when she called in sick. Unfortunately for Tom, Leann called in sick two or three times a week and sometimes more. This made for one angry Indian. Where Peggy was level headed and calm, Tom and Leann were more like brother and sister constantly fighting. A big problem for people like Peggy and Norma was that for some reason, Milwaukee County didn't have an attendance policy.



No one seemed to know why exactly. I guess the county administrators had just assumed that people would show up for work. Maybe they did at one time who knows.

People like Leann would take off of work constantly and people like Peggy and Norma couldn't do very much about it. There was another guy named Jose who showed up at the building one day. Jose was a caseworker at one time according to Peggy. Jose had left work one day about two years earlier and no one had heard from him until suddenly he showed up. The department administrators had taken Jose off the payroll and assumed he had quit. But Jose showed up and wanted his old job back. Jose was a minority and had a lawyer so they couldn't just throw him out. According to Peggy, Jose was hired back and even got a settlement from Milwaukee County because of the lack of attendance policy. I'm sure Vera would have found this episode very entertaining. After he was hired back and got his settlement, Jose left again and never came back that I know of. I don't think a scam like that could work more than once could it?

Poor Tom, when Leann stayed home Tom had to do her work and then his as well. I'm not exaggerating one bit about how much she took off of work. Out of any given month she would take off at least ten days and often more. Every time she called in, Tom would complain to Peggy and Peggy's office was right next to mine. When she did come in she looked more like a client than a caseworker. I don't mean that as a slight against the clients. It's just that Leann always looked like she had slept in her car the night before. She always had that worn out down trodden look about her. She would come in with matted down hair and no make-up and wrinkled clothes. Leann looked like a client trying

to apply for benefits, not take applications for benefits. At least the client's appearance would improve over time as their situation stabilized. Leann looked the same all the time.

Leann was very loud and spent any free time she had talking with her friends who would pile into her cubicle. Leann and her friends were so loud that I would have trouble hearing my clients. It didn't do any good to complain. I discovered over time that she had quite the violent temper so I learned to keep my distance. My first encounter with Leann happened after Peggy gave me a file for a 17-year-old girl who had applied for aid. Leann had a moral objection to a 17-year-old girl having her own case. Unfortunately, Leann's articulation skills were like that of a belligerent drunk at closing time. Oddly, Leann didn't have any moral hang-up over taking off of work so much and burdening her co-workers or stiffing the taxpayers. She did want me to know that she didn't like the idea of a 17-year-old girl collecting benefits. She voiced her opinion to me in a shrill scream that would have made Rachel from the hospital cower. Leann yelled so loud that Peggy heard her from her office and came to my rescue. Peggy finally had to transfer the file to another unit in order to placate Leann.

The other cubicle adjacent to mine was occupied by another Peggy. This Peggy was more like Mary at child support enforcement at the courthouse. She seemed to spend most of the time trying to sign on to her computer. The rest of the time she spent asking me how to use it. How she got a job as a caseworker was anyone's guess. Luckily she got promoted and moved to the Schlitz brewery complex. At least this way she wasn't bothering me anymore.

There wasn't a lot of interaction with the other caseworkers in the unit. The same animosities that I encountered when I first worked on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet years earlier were alive and well. Some of it was personal and some was just people getting their frustrations out I think. The blacks didn't like the whites and the Puerto Ricans and Mexicans didn't get along etc. There were endless racial animosities practiced by many of the staff. There was never any overt hostility just a lot of subtle and not so subtle signals.

Peggy was easy to get along with. I think she was just glad to have a caseworker like me in her unit who showed up every day. She was Mexican and spoke fluent Spanish which probably helped me from getting mugged when we went out for lunch. Of course I was the only white guy in the unit. The balance of the unit was black and Mexican and Puerto Rican and a couple of white women along with Sara from the training class. However, Sara got promoted after a few months and left the unit. She got promoted again about a year later. No one seemed to know why as she hadn't worked there long enough to know how to do anything. That pesky nepotism and cronyism just kept popping up. It seemed at times like half the department was related to or friends with or neighbors of the other half. All of the things that minorities and women had complained about decades earlier and even sued over were still happening. The only difference now was that women and minorities were doing the same things they complained about years earlier.

A peculiar thing I noticed was that a lot of the clients were scared of their workers. The worker that was in my zone previously was a black woman who had transferred to another unit for some reason. When I started in the zone, I had constant phone calls from clients. Many of them had their benefits cut off or reduced by my predecessor. I don't think it was race related, I think she was just mean. As an example of just how mean she was happened sometime after I started. This worker and her friends and relatives held a fund raiser every year for charity. They raised money by selling dinners to people in the office. I signed up and received a dinner of ribs and other side dishes. The container I received was sealed in plastic and when I opened it I noticed immediately that one of the ribs was already chewed on by someone. Whoever chewed it then placed the rib in the container and sealed it with tape and then wrote my name on the container. All of the dinners that this woman brought had names written on them so I know it was no mistake. I think she was resentful because she wasn't very good at her job as a caseworker. I'm sure it didn't help that I was white either. But this was how she raised money for charity every year.

A lot of the workers had the same attitude towards their clients I noticed. They would claim to have nothing but compassion for any and all people and then exhibit outright cruelty and meanness. One favorite trick that nearly all the workers liked to play was to leave their clients in the waiting room. Clients would show up penniless and hungry and beg to see their worker. Many workers would let the client sit in the waiting room for the entire day before talking to them. Then instead of dealing with their client the worker would just tell the client they would have to come back on another day. I got used to

seeing workers do this to clients but it was difficult to watch. The idea was that if the clients were jerked around enough they would just leave and never come back.

I just didn't have a hang up with seeing people that came in to the office for some reason. If someone showed up, I would see them. Whatever the client wanted usually only took a few keystrokes and a few minutes of my time anyways. But for some reason many of the workers seemed to develop what I can only describe as a "god" complex. I know it sounds too dramatic but there is just no other way to explain it. To see a grown up person break down in tears and beg their worker for help only to get turned away was a common sight in the waiting room. The first time I saw that happen, it really got to me. A client had sat in the waiting room for hours waiting to see her worker. I just happened to see the worker come out and talk to her client. It was the end of the day and the client was begging to talk to the worker about her case but the worker refused. The client started sobbing uncontrollably and was nearly hysterical. Both the client and the worker were black women about the same age. If I did something like that, I don't think I could have slept at night and might even have gotten fired besides.

That there were clients that sat in the waiting room hungry for nearly the entire day without seeing their worker was a regular occurrence. One worker whose name was Larry would leave his clients in the waiting room while he sat in his cubicle reading a book.

The reason I remember his name was that the receptionists and even some workers were amazed at his indifference. A couple times I just had to go see for myself and walked past Larry's cubicle and yes, he was really reading a book. I overheard Larry complain at one

point that one of his clients even called him at home because they were so desperate. Larry wasn't bothered by the client's situation, only that they were bothering him at home. When Larry retired years later, he was interviewed by the local media as he walked away with his pension bonus check at the courthouse. The reporter asked Larry what he did for Milwaukee County. Larry replied that he was a caseworker and spent his career "helping" people get food stamps and other benefits. Larry actually said "helping" according to the report. Larry was also one of the regulars in Leann's cubicle, when she showed up that is.

I can't talk about the waiting room without mentioning Shirley. Shirley was the photo I.D. clerk for the section. Shirley had retired from the Army according to Peggy and then came to work for Milwaukee County. The first ten years on the job Shirley wore her Army issue combat boots because she didn't want them to go to waste. The reason I mention her is due to one particular habit that she had. Whenever there was a luncheon in the department Shirley would eat in the break room on our floor. Shirley worked on the first floor but would take the elevator to our floor and walk across the waiting room with a plate full of food. She never covered the plate. Shirley was a very big girl and would fill up her plate till it was overflowing. She would then walk across the same waiting room where workers like Larry would leave their clients to languish with their stomachs growling. As the elevator door opened the clients would stop and stare at Shirley as she strolled across the floor with her plate of food. Her callousness was stunning. I had never seen anything like it before or since. To have such a disregard for people and stroll across the room with an exposed plate of food elicits more emotion than words can describe.

One thing I learned to dread was what we called coverage. Coverage meant that a worker was gone for some reason and one or more of their clients needed help. I did coverage on occasion for workers in the unit I was in. One memorable time I did coverage for a Puerto Rican worker who had refused to add a white woman's kid to her case. He wouldn't tell her why either and one day when he was out "sick" the client called in to Peggy who transferred the client to me. Another time was for a black worker who wouldn't reopen a white couple's case. The white couple had taken the bus all the way from the north side to the south side to come into the office. Luckily for the client's, Peggy assigned both cases to me. I restored benefits to both cases much to the chagrin of the two caseworkers. The clients made racist accusations against the workers. One said the black worker was trying to take out 400 years of oppression on him and his wife. Of course the accusations were impossible to prove.

Both of the workers complained to Peggy our supervisor. They knew I had done nothing wrong but I had usurped their rule in their little fiefdoms I guess and they didn't like it. Sometimes workers just liked to punish their clients for some transgression that the client had committed or thought they had committed. Whether the client had actually done anything wrong was irrelevant. I just wasn't into the head games that people played. There really aren't enough words to describe the behavior of the workers I encountered there. Believe me when I say that many of them could have easily fit into any gulag or concentration camp administration staff without any difficulty whatsoever.

Most of my clients were young women desperate to get their cases reopened or restored. Many of the workers couldn't have cared less. I used the manuals and followed the regulations to do my work. This was good for the clients as the regulations usually worked in their favor. I just didn't have the same problems that the other workers did. Many of the workers and even some supervisors would grant benefits or not based on their personal opinion of the client rather than the regulations. Even Leann would deny benefits if she was in a bad mood.

With up to ten caseworkers and thousands of cases to watch over, supervisors like Peggy could only do so much. As I went through my caseload, I discovered case after case where everything was just done wrong. My predecessor along with so many other caseworkers tended to rule their zones rather than administer mandated benefits. They acted more like nobility ruling over serfs. We were all just public servants but so many workers seemed to think that the public were their servants, especially their clients. The clients weren't so elegant in their description. Clients were often heard complaining about how many 'hoops' their worker would make them jump through in order to get benefits that they were entitled to anyways.

As I began to engage with my clients, I realized that many were due benefits. My predecessor just wasn't in the mood I guess, ever. I came across one case after another that was due money and food stamps. I issued so many supplemental checks and food stamp allotments that Norma, the section supervisor grew suspicious. Norma was always sending her secretary to my zone to retrieve case records so she could review my work.



Apparently she thought I was up to something. So I guess doing my job properly made people suspicious.

It wasn't uncommon though for some workers to solicit "favors" from their clients. Some workers wanted sex and others just wanted money. Sometimes the client went along and other times not. One worker caught his client working and not reporting it and told her to give him sex in exchange for not telling. The client went to the sheriff. The deputies were waiting in the client's bedroom closet when the worker arrived expecting his "treat". The deputies even waited for the worker to take off his clothes before they came out of the closet. Another favorite story concerned a worker from my unit, Karen. Years later, Karen transferred to another unit where she managed social security payments for patients with mental health problems. Turned out she was a closet crack head and would steal her client's money and buy drugs, even on her lunch hour.

I only sent money and food stamps when the clients were eligible. The payments were nominal and so low that I was surprised when I realized other workers and supervisors were watching. Some of the workers seemed rather amazed and even annoyed at how productive I was. Some people were so seemingly perturbed by my productivity that they would steal my computer printouts.

You see, each month all of the caseworkers received something called "monthly reports" that our clients sent us. The "monthly reports" were sent to the clients by the main office in Madison. We were then tasked with entering the information from the reports which

would update the client's case. After the report was inputted, a computer printout was generated and then the printout and the report were stapled together and filed. All of the caseworkers had similar numbers of reports to input. However, many of the workers, for lack of a technical term, just sucked at doing this task.

Many of the workers were bad at many of their work related tasks but if the "monthly report" wasn't inputted, the case would close automatically. Many cases did close every single month and then the clients would have to wait for the worker to reopen their case. Larry, no surprise, was one of them. Another was Cary who was so bad at keeping her caseload up to date she had to take the "monthly reports" home with her along with other work nearly every day. Cary told me on one occasion that she had worked as the minister of transportation when she lived in Puerto Rico. I never tried to verify that story but for some reason I just believed it.

Supervisors throughout the building could only cringe every month as the "monthly reports" would pile up and the clients would pack the waiting room and the telephone lines. Benefits weren't paid until the "monthly reports" were processed. It got so hectic at times that even Larry would have to put down his book. Whenever I inputted the "monthly reports" for my zone into the computer, I had to rush to the printer. If I didn't, someone would steal my printouts and then I would have to do the work all over again. I know it wasn't a mistake since the printouts were several inches thick and had my name and zone number printed on them and hard to misplace.

I never could figure out why it took the other workers so long to complete this task every month. I only spent a few hours processing my “monthly reports” but other workers would spend up to two weeks every month working on the same reports. It just didn’t make any sense but the whole department was filled up with problems like that. In addition to missing printouts, I also had to contend with other not so subtle hints that I really wasn’t welcome.

One thing that happened not long after I started was someone had placed a paper tack on my chair. I had left my desk momentarily and returned to find the tack on the chair. Someone had hoped I would sit on it I’m sure. Another time I left my cubicle and returned to find the phone ringing. When I tried to pick up the phone I discovered someone had taped the phone to the base and no one was on the line either. I don’t know what the purpose of that was but that plus the paper tack made me cautious from that point on. It seemed that someone was trying to booby trap my work station. It may sound amusing but I had an artificial hip then as now. Sitting on a paper tack and getting poked would have made me jump and maybe lose my balance and maybe end up in a wheelchair.

There was too much racial animosity to ever figure out who the culprit was. I guess Vera’s omen was still following me around and never far behind. As if things couldn’t get any worse, smoking was suddenly banned in the smoking room. I now had to go out in the hall way to smoke. Much to the distain of the administrators, someone figured out that Milwaukee County only rented the office space in the ‘Hills’ building and not the

hallways. This made for constant forays into the hallway to smoke every day. However, this also meant that I had to listen to the minority caseworkers complain about their lives and how white people had ruined them.

As Alice at the mental health complex used to remind me on occasion, we white folks all looked the same. I never knew what to say since people talked of things that had nothing to do with me. Things like how they got picked on in school because they were Mexican or black etc. Or perhaps how they had gotten short changed on some long ago transaction.

One curious topic that came up one day concerned an episode I had forgotten all about. A black woman caseworker named Vanessa who didn't even smoke made it a point to come into the hallway to discuss with another black caseworker a long ago event. They were laughing about how they had harassed the white guy in the photo id booth years earlier on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet; the county supervisor's son. They even brought up how a client was allowed by the staff (like them) to wait for the white guy in the parking lot near the employee entrance/exit just so the client could hassle him on his way out. I could only surmise that Vanessa thought that since they weren't technically on county property while in the hallway, they could say anything they wanted. I was never quite sure how to respond to these comments so I would just smoke and leave and always check my cubicle for booby traps before I sat down.

Amidst all of this drama each month, we were supposed to input all of the client data onto the new computer system. For many months, the state of Wisconsin maintained the old and new system at the same time. No one knew where the old computer system came from but the new one was purchased from a company. It was quite an elaborate system, kind of like the one at the medical complex. Just like at the medical complex, it was more wishful thinking than reality to hope the employee's would figure out how to use it.

Everyone was provided with a user manual. At least we were told it was a user manual but eventually I discovered something quite comical I thought. As it turned out, what the staff was actually provided with by the training department was a "sales" manual. This manual was a couple inches thick but it only contained general information. It didn't really explain how to use the computer system, except in general terms. It wasn't an instructional book so much as an advertisement.

Using a big main frame computer system requires a certain amount of skill and technical instruction. It's not like an excel software package that you can figure out over time. In order to make things work properly, we needed to know instructions and specific codes and where to enter them. I'm sure that seems all very logical but the training staff wouldn't give us the actual operations manual for the computer system. They gave us the sales manual/brochure and hoped it would suffice until they figured out how to use the computer system themselves. Yes, I mean the training staff didn't know how to use the new computer system either so they kept the operations manuals for themselves.

It took the training staff about a year before they felt comfortable enough to give the staff real instructions. But even then it was just the beginning of the instruction flow. It took the training department several years before they went through all of the material and passed it along to the rest of the staff. When the system first went online all of the staff attended training sessions where we were given basic instructions on how to enter our cases onto the new computer system. That was about it though. We had to wait then like I said for another year or so before we started getting any real instructions. I can remember specific instances where I had clients that were either getting too much or not enough benefits and I couldn't do anything about it. All I could do was hope that no one complained too much and hope that the training department would send the instructions over so I could fix the cases. Many other caseworkers were in the same predicament.

Like the county hospital system, the new welfare computer system started going haywire almost as soon as it was plugged in but with more humorous results. Probably the biggest screw up that no one knew how to deal with was the issuance of multiple benefits and notices. When I say multiple I mean multiple. For some reason due I guess to a programming screw up, love those government programmers, every time a worker updated a food stamp case, the client would get food stamps. I mean every single time! If a client moved for instance and I entered in the new address and pressed enter to update the case which was required, the client got another batch of food stamps. We heard stories of clients getting dozens of food stamp allotments every month.

A typical food stamp allotment at the time was in the fifty to a hundred-dollar range for a single client. Instead a client might receive several thousand dollars in food stamps every month. Yes, I said several thousand, or more I suppose depending on how many times a case was updated. That's was for a single client. Many of the clients had kids, lots and lots of kids. No one could tell us why exactly, it just kept happening. In addition, the computer system would also send out notices. Clients would receive dozens of notices every month for no apparent reason. The notices though, were mostly a nuisance because it was just paper you could throw away or recycle. The food stamp problem was enormous by comparison.

Caseworkers like myself could only do so much damage control. Once I entered a case into the new computer system, I would typically only work on that case again when it came up for review. If I had to update the case before the review was due, the client got extra food stamps. A much bigger concern were the programmers in Madison. They, like the programmers at the medical college who maintained the medical complex computer, did things in "batches". This meant that when the programmers in Madison had to update cases, they did many at once. This meant that if they had to update food stamp cases or programming for food stamp cases, they did them all at once.

This meant a lot of clients hit the food stamp lottery every time the mail man showed up. At the time, food stamps were issued and mailed in booklets so once they were in the mail they were hard to stop and nearly impossible to trace. There was one instance when a worker at a mail station in Milwaukee called the office on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. He wanted to

know if it was ok to mail 40 food stamp allotments to one person at one address. He was instructed to return the extra allotments. In that one instance at least, the overpayment was stopped but that was the rare exception. Most of the allotments went through to the clients.

Knowing what was happening didn't mean anyone knew why it was happening or how to fix it. Caseworkers like me were at the mercy of the programmers in Madison and the training department on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. This problem with the food stamps went on all the way up until I transferred out of the unit a couple years later. I heard that it went on for several years more after I left. All anyone could do was hope it got fixed. To my knowledge, no one ever did an audit to determine how many overpayments were sent out or the amount. Caseworkers couldn't just look at a computer screen and find overpayments. Each physical case would have to get examined and compared to the benefit history. Another problem was that the overpayments went out through the new computer system. This meant that we had to recoup the payments using the new computer system as well. That wasn't possible for a long time because the training staff were still trying to figure out how the system worked.

It wouldn't have made any sense to ask a client to pay back food stamps issued in error because it was happening every month. It would have looked awfully stupid to send out food stamp overpayments nonstop followed by collection notices. If the clients were made to pay back the overpayments they could have filed appeals. If all of the clients that received overpayments because of this food stamp programming error appealed it would



have overwhelmed the whole system. In addition, at some point the state administrators would have had to explain why their new computer system didn't work very well. This might have attracted unwanted attention from all the wrong people. People like legal action groups that work as client advocates or especially people like food stamp administrators in Washington D.C. They might have sent investigators with subpoenas followed by pesky reporters and those annoying indictments. Even if all of those problems were avoided, the dollar amount of overpayment was too much to ever recover from clients who were low income to begin with. At the very least it could have turned into a P.R. disaster. No, this problem with food stamps was best left alone and forgotten and definitely not worth the embarrassment or especially time in the big house.

In the midst of this turmoil, we were required to attend "diversity training". I don't know which bonehead came up with that idea as there were only a half dozen or so white guys left in the department. There was no diversity, what was the point of diversity training. As I mentioned earlier, many of my cases were due money because of my apathetic predecessor. On the other hand, at least an equal amount of clients were committing welfare fraud. As cases came up for review, I discovered one client after another who was working and not reporting it. Because I was able to check state payroll and other records, I usually knew if someone was committing fraud before they even came in for their review.

The clients in my zone at times seemed genuinely perplexed at the prospect of answering questions about employment. There was a whole range of replies that I received when I

would ask a client if they were working. It was difficult for me to keep a straight face at times. Many clients didn't want to say "yes" or "no" so they would nod their head "no" when I asked if they were working. They might also nod their head "yes" and "no" at the same time like a bobble head. I guess you just had to see it. I would then inform the client that they were required to give a verbal response. At that point, clients would get creative. Some would say "no" while they nodded their head "yes" or say "yes" while they nodded their head "no". Others might mumble or try to talk with their mouth closed.

I would mail the clients a review booklet and they would fill it out and give it to me when they came in. There were many clever tricks used with the review booklets as well. Many would circle "yes" and "no" for the question, "are you working" or draw a half circle around both the "yes" and the "no". At that point I would stop and have the client circle "yes" definitely or "no" definitely and initial the entry. I think my favorite trick was when clients would quit their job the day before they came into see me. This way they could honestly say no when I would ask if they were working. The day after the review the client would go and get another job. I knew they did this because I could check payroll records at will for any of my clients.

Inevitably, I would make a fraud referral to the fraud squad on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. Yes, the same one I worked with before. I should point out that while in training, we were instructed to process review booklets properly or they were useless to the agency. The review booklets were supposed to get filled out properly and were supposed to get signed and dated by the client and countersigned and dated by the caseworker. An extremely

important thing to do on all cases was to make sure the review booklets were notarized in the presence of the client after signing. This made the review booklet a legally binding document. I noticed immediately that my predecessor neglected to do these things on virtually every case she worked on.

The only way people could get prosecuted for fraud was if the review booklets were filled out properly. Unsigned, missing or incomplete application and review booklets were beneficial for the clients who had received too many food stamps as mentioned earlier. Signing the booklets meant the clients agreed to follow the program rules. The program rules covered things like reporting income and agreeing to pay back food stamp overpayments. Without properly completed application and review booklets, many of the fraud referrals that I sent out would eventually end up in the garbage.

There was one fraud case in particular that I came across one day while doing coverage for another worker in the unit. The worker was out sick of course on a day she had scheduled reviews. I brought the client into my cubicle and started the review. I soon discovered that she had worked for Wisconsin State Fair Park full time for the previous five years and had not reported it. This made her ineligible for benefits of course so I closed her case and completed a fraud referral. The client complained to Peggy about that. She said I was mean to her for closing her welfare case. Peggy also told me that other caseworkers knew this client well and were afraid of her. Apparently, other caseworkers had known she was working but too afraid of the client to do anything about it! Usually the clients were afraid of the caseworkers but not this one it seemed.

Peggy also mentioned that this client knew many people in the department that might help her out if needed. I soon discovered what she meant when I sent for the client's case record from the inactive records department on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. This client had a welfare case open for over ten years but there weren't any completed review booklets in the file. Most of the paperwork was missing or not complete. This meant that she couldn't get prosecuted for fraud. I have no idea who would have taken out all of the relevant paper work. The case records were shipped between zones by the clerical staff. The clerical staff was mostly minority and female like the caseworker staff and enjoyed antagonizing me just as much. But all in all it was just another day in the hood I guess. I didn't want to transfer out of the building since there really wasn't anywhere to go anyways. Since there was one supervisor for every ten workers, the odds of getting promoted were next to none. Especially since most of the supervisors were minority and or female.

There was one place however, that the caseworkers talked about. It was called the west annex and it was an old building located on the county grounds. Only caseworkers with the most seniority were allowed to transfer there. That was the unit where caseworkers processed and maintained Medicaid cases for clients that were patients in nursing homes. One day a notice was posted with transfer openings and there was one caseworker position open at the west annex building. I applied for it and waited. Much to my surprise I got the position. I had more seniority than the other caseworkers that applied.

I guess it was kind of a fluke that I got the job at the west annex. I discovered that other people with more seniority were interested in transferring there but hadn't applied.

Luckily for me or so I thought at the time, those people didn't think they had enough seniority so they just didn't apply. The unit at the west annex building was supposedly laid back. People said it was much less stressful. Wow, was I in for a ride, but I just didn't know it yet. I said my goodbyes and left. I'm sure the real celebration happened after I was gone but I didn't care. I was getting farther away from the ghetto and 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet and Vera's omen so I was feeling good. I also hopefully wouldn't have to check for tainted food or a booby-trapped cubicle anymore.

## Chapter 6

Swindle: to take property or money by fraud or deceit.

I watched a crime program some years ago on television. A detective who was interviewed claimed that there was no such thing as the perfect crime because there was always evidence of the crime left behind. The evidence he claimed would eventually help catch the person that committed the crime. Does it matter if evidence of a crime is left behind if no one cares to examine it? What if someone commits a crime out in the open and many people know it but no one cares to do anything about it. What if the person or people or law firm that helped orchestrate probably the biggest Medicaid scam in Wisconsin history got away with it? What if they got rich in the process and made sure to pay off the right people so no one would interfere. I don't think a perfect crime means no evidence is left behind. A perfect crime only means that someone committed a crime and got away with it. That makes sense doesn't it? Do you think something sinister is going to happen now? Foreshadow: to indicate beforehand. Do you think I'm good at foreshadowing?

As with the other positions I had taken over the years, this one started uneventfully enough. Of course I was the only white guy in my unit. I was getting used to that. Although I didn't know it at the time, I was at the beginning of my last assignment with Milwaukee County. My new assignment was not a bad place to work I thought. I was now part of the Medicaid nursing home unit. We were the envy of the whole human services department. I now had my own office with a real door. The west annex building or scene of the crime if you prefer was located west of the old medical complex hence the

name I guess. The building itself was constructed during the great depression as a work project people said.

There were many such old buildings around the area at the time. Many are gone now. Victims of progress as some might say. The west annex had a basement and three upper floors. The nursing home unit was on the first floor. The basement was empty and the floor above us was used by paramedics doing some kind of administrative work. The nursing home unit I was in was one of two units on the floor and was supervised by Pat. There were usually eight workers in each unit. All of us were required to process applications and reports so there was no need for an intake or specialist worker.

As the days went by I kept getting phone calls for a caseworker named Randy. When I looked up cases on the computer, I kept seeing his name as the caseworker assigned to my zone. Pat wouldn't say much about that but I discovered indirectly that Randy was a caseworker from a special unit that only did coverage for empty zones. Apparently Pat wanted Randy to take my zone so she assigned all of the zone cases to him. Randy was a white guy like me so I know it wasn't racial, Pat just didn't want me there for some reason. Hmmmm, was there something going on at the west annex that she and others didn't want anyone to know about? What she had done was a work rule violation and she was forced to undo it and get rid of Randy. Randy had to transfer to another unit. Even though it was obvious I wasn't wanted there I wasn't going to give up my own office so I decided to tough it out. It was either this or keep looking for paper tacks on my chair on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell or look at the booger mural on the bathroom wall on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet.

Randy was extremely well liked by the whole staff I discovered. Visitors to the office also thought highly of him and I soon found out why. On my desk was a stack of carbon copies left over from a form that was used to backdate Medicaid coverage. Randy had completed hundreds of these forms and left the carbon copies on the desk where I now sat. Randy had backdated hundreds of nursing home Medicaid cases without authorization. That's called Medicaid fraud. I asked Pat but she claimed to know nothing of it and stated she had specifically told Randy not to do that, I bet. In any other situation, Randy might have gotten fired and went to prison but at the west annex he got a gold star so to speak.

Things were different here. Our actual clients were nursing home patients so we never met them. The people we dealt with were friends or relatives or representatives of clients/patients. Each nursing home had one or more employees who were responsible for keeping their patient's nursing home Medicaid cases open. It was important to keep the cases open because that's how the nursing homes got paid by the state of Wisconsin. By backdating Medicaid cases like Randy did, the nursing homes got even more money. I heard that the staffs at the nursing homes that Randy helped out were so grateful that they sent letters of appreciation to the department administrators. They even suggested that Randy get promoted to supervisor.

The other caseworkers in my unit were minority or women of course. Two of the scarier ones were Addie and Genevieve. Genevieve and Addie were very civil with our



supervisor Pat but anything but with other staff and office visitors. They were more like junk yard dogs and people tended to keep their distance. Genevieve was considered an assistant to Pat the supervisor but no one knew why. Genevieve would blow up at people for no reason at all. She would lose her temper to the point where she looked like she was ready to take a swing at the nearest person. She would conduct applications and reviews like the rest of us but she would start screaming at people for no reason at all. She wasn't interested in arguing, just yelling. If people yelled back, Genevieve would get spooked and jump up and run into Pat's office. Then Pat would have to finish up with the people.

Addie on the other hand was calmer. I could converse with her up to a point but Addie's demeanor would change suddenly for no reason. She might act pleasant one moment and act like she was ready to kill the next. Addie had physically attacked another, older worker who had since retired. Addie's attitude with office visitors was so bad that one of the county board supervisors and even a catholic priest had complained about her.

The other unit consisted entirely of women and minority caseworkers of course except for their supervisor. Their supervisor deserves a special introduction. His was, Frank the angry gay man. Frank was mad most of the time and I don't know why. Frank was an older white guy and a Korean War veteran. Unlike Alan the Vietnam War combat payroll clerk from the medical complex, Frank was actually in a war zone and didn't have to borrow other soldier's stories. Frank was crazy and mean. Not like Addie and Genevieve but Frank was always ready to fight. Even the sheriff deputies were afraid of him. Frank had worked at the office on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell that I had just left. He wasn't my supervisor

there so I had little to do with him but people loved Frank. Frank was Larry's supervisor as well, remember Larry? Larry adored Frank but Frank was "married". It was complicated. Think Carlos but without the paralegals.

Frank was a unit supervisor on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell but one day he argued with Norma the section supervisor. I forget the reason for the argument but Peggy told me that Norma called Eva, the assistant director, afterwards. The situation was so serious that Eva had to leave Potawatomi casino and come back to work. Eva then transferred Frank to the west annex to get rid of him. If there ever was such a thing as a fateful decision, that was it. By the time Frank retired some years later, the state of Wisconsin and ultimately the taxpayers had gotten scammed out of at least a quarter billion dollars and that's really a conservative estimate. Frank wasn't a mastermind or anything but as a supervisor, he knew how to make things work.

The west annex was where caseworkers went to die. Frank was put out to pasture and now he wanted payback I think. I should probably digress a bit and explain how affirmative action affected hiring and general standing within the bureaucracy. If you have ever heard someone talk about "playing the race card" it might make it easier to understand. Affirmative action is kind of like a card game. Card games are basically point based. The better the hand, the more points you have which gives you the win.

White males get zero points of course because they're evil white males. White females get one point because they're female. Non-black minority males get one point because

they're minority. Non-black minority females get two points because they're female and minority. Black males get two points because they're black and they got their seniority backdated. Black females get three points because they're black and female and also got their seniority backdated. The seniority backdating was equivalent to one point because it gave such an advantage.

The early civil rights and affirmative action lawsuits had everything to do with blacks so blacks got the biggest prize. Women and other minority groups joined in eventually but didn't get the same reward for whatever reason. People that are disabled or veterans or those that are bilingual might get extra credit but no extra points. This policy had something to do with Frank getting transferred. Frank had competed with Norma for Norma's job of section supervisor on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell but lost. There are no points for gayness so Frank was just another evil white guy in the point system. Norma was a non-black minority female, two points, and Eva, the assistant director was a black female, three points, so Frank with zero points didn't stand a chance. I never did find out why blacks got their seniority backdated. I heard three different white women including Vera complain about that policy over the years. They wouldn't say how they knew about it but they were so mad because they thought it had hurt their promotional chances. Supposedly that was how Pat got promoted to supervisor.

Now to continue, Frank had already worked at the west annex for some time before I showed up. My first month was spent reading my Medicaid manual and processing reviews. Then the fun part started. Pat gave me an application to process one day and so

began my introduction to the weird and wacky ways of the west annex. We generally did applications in the morning and reviews in the afternoon. Some of the applications that I took were rather mundane and others anything but.

My office was right next door to Frank's office. I began to realize that Frank had a peculiar way of doing things. Frank could make a proverbial drunken sailor blush with his language and woe to the caseworker that Frank took displeasure with. One day I had taken an application from a woman representing one of her relatives. While processing the case, I discovered that the client was over the asset limit. If someone had too much money and I inputted the amount, the computer system would deny the application automatically and send a corresponding notice to that effect. This was the way the system was designed to work but then came Frank.

The woman that I took the application from called Frank. Frank stormed into my office and grabbed the woman's application from me and said a few choice things and left. The next day I looked the same case up on the computer system and voila, the case was open. As I went through the case on the computer, I realized that Frank had deleted the asset amounts on the case. Committing Medicaid fraud was extremely easy with the new computer system. It was the same computer system as the one on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell that was sending out the extra food stamp allotments. Frank had computer access to every nursing home Medicaid case in the building. All Frank had to do was go into the asset screen on the computer file and go to the field containing the dollar amount. If someone was \$100,000.00 over the asset limit for instance, Frank might change the amount to

\$100.00 or even zero. By doing this, the computer system automatically opened the case and granted Medicaid benefits. To top it off Frank left the case under my name to make it look like I had done the dirty work...

Unknown to me this woman was a “fof”, or friend of Franks. I quickly learned that there were many “fof” coming and going. Frank was like the godfather of the nursing home Medicaid office at the west annex. That may sound amusing until you realize how much money was scammed. Frank was always “holding court” I guess you could say. He was receiving visitors to his office or taking phone calls nonstop. Frank was in his office in the morning when I arrived and was still there when I left at the end of the day. If someone had a problem getting a nursing home Medicaid case open, Frank could fix it. As long as they were a “fof”, anything was possible.

I should expand a bit on the concept of representation as it related to nursing home cases. The law is funny about taking away a person’s ability to represent and make decisions for themselves. Even prisoners in jail can represent themselves and make decisions for themselves. It’s no different for nursing home patients. I don’t mean to compare the two; I’m just trying to make a point. The only way that I know of that a person can lose that ability to represent and make decisions for themselves is through something called a guardianship. Guardianships are established by courts and are done only as a last resort. I only had a handful of guardianships in my case load. Guardianships are expensive and time consuming. Most people in nursing homes don’t have guardianships established.

Regardless of someone's condition, they are still assumed to have the ability to make their own decisions. In lieu of guardianships, many people designate someone to have "power of attorney" to make decisions for them. A "power of attorney" or "poa" does not take away someone's ability to make decisions for themselves. It only designates someone to do something on their behalf. A person can grant or cancel a "poa" at any time. Even if someone is comatose, in theory at least that person can get better and cancel a "poa". When a person designates another as "poa", that person or grantor is still responsible for the actions of the "poa" or grantee. If you give someone "poa" and they put you in a nursing home and take your house and take all your money out of the bank, you are still considered responsible for what they did. Maybe you could take that person to court and try to get your stuff and money back but good luck. Once it's gone it's gone.

You have to keep in mind that it's not an automatic criminal offence to trick someone into signing something. You need proof and or eye witnesses and if the only eye witness is a comatose nursing home patient then you really don't have a crime at all do you. It remains a civil matter with a whole different set of rules and that's assuming it ever gets to court. Where guardianships are a formal court matter, "poa" is used informally and were usually drawn up by lawyers representing people who were applying for Medicaid on behalf of nursing home patients.

Envision a situation where a person living at home goes to the hospital and then gets sent to a nursing home. The patient is not well and is probably receiving medications and is not fully coherent. Then, say a relative, or friend or neighbor shows up and tells the

patient they will help them. How nice. The person might say sign this 'poa' paper work and I can help you manage your finances and affairs. How nice. Then that person, now armed with a "poa" goes to the county nursing home office and applies for Medicaid for that patient. How nice. But unfortunately the nursing home patient has say, several hundred thousand dollars in the bank and not eligible for Medicaid. Uh o, but fortunately, that person with the 'poa' is a "fof" and goes to see Frank or just calls him on the phone. After talking with Frank, Frank retrieves the case record from that pesky worker (like me for instance) and proceeds to make a few "corrections". Wouldn't you know it, the case is now open and Medicaid benefits are approved.

But you might ask, what of the piles of money the patient has in the bank. Well not to worry sparky, the "poa" can now run down to the bank and make a really big withdrawal. What about the house the patient owns you might say? Well the patient did sign the "poa". Hey, why not put the house on the market and sell it. The home sale proceeds are payable to the home owner who is still in the nursing home but not to fret. Just use that "poa" and cash the check and keep the money. No sense telling that pesky worker (like me) about any of this, after all the "poa" is a "fof". What of the patient who maybe had hoped to go home at some point you might ask. Well no the patient needs too much assistance according to the "poa" and is probably better off to stay in the nursing home. It's for the "best". And then the "poa" lived happily ever after. How nice.

Variations of this situation played out over and over through the years. Different people all doing essentially the same thing. People and their lawyers would get so mad at me

when I wouldn't open a Medicaid case. Men would look at me like they were ready to kill. Women would yell at me like I was their ex-husband. Luckily for them, Frank's office was right next door and he could fix it. By following the aforementioned procedure, there were really no legal implications. By signing the "poa", the grantor had given the grantee the ability to clean them out and they often did. Who or how could you prosecute someone in this situation. The patient signed the "poa" paperwork. The "poa" grantee did what they were authorized to do. All the lawyers did was witness the signatures and affix their notary public stamp to the paper work. I as a lowly case worker could only watch.

There was one other form of representation used. It was called simply "authorized representative". This "a/r" was a way to gouge people and the system with even less culpability. The "a/r" forms were handed out with the applications which made Medicaid fraud even easier. The "a/r" form was signed by the patient. This allowed whoever was designated to submit the Medicaid application on the patient's behalf. I'm not sure how exactly but many "a/r" were able to gain access to bank accounts and such much the same way that a "poa" might.

As mentioned earlier, approximately 16 case workers were in the building. I discovered that like the case workers on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell, many were doing their "own thing". Some followed the regulations and some not so much and some not at all. Mostly they didn't. I don't know why. Most of the case workers were old and set in their ways and not about to change. That still didn't explain why they did what they did however. Many of the case



workers were like Frank. They would open cases and approve Medicaid coverage for no particular reason that I could tell. I'm pretty sure Frank's motivation was revenge for getting transferred but the other case workers were a different story.

The only thing I can think of was the "god complex" that I ran into so often on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell. But here at the west annex the motivation was just the opposite. Case workers on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell would deny benefits or close cases and leave their clients crying in the waiting room. At the west annex, case workers were always happy to accommodate "special" requests and open "difficult" cases. Many of the case workers were committing Medicaid fraud as Frank was. I can't say for sure how much fraud was committed. With Frank, I was able to catch him committing fraud only on occasion. I'm sure there were other cases of mine that he "fixed" that I didn't know of.

The reason I know other workers were committing fraud is because of a quite comical rule that we had. I'm sure who ever came up with the rule had good intentions but obviously had never met Frank or Pat or any of the case workers at the west annex. Although we were all tasked with processing applications, we were not allowed to keep the case once we had finished processing the application. Would you like to know why we did that? Are you ready? This was done to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest. Do you like that? Its' a little funny isn't it?

After completing the applications, we would give them to the supervisors who would check for "errors" and make "corrections" as needed. Then the supervisors would give

the cases to the clerical staff. The clerical staff would then transfer the cases to the appropriate case worker. Where Frank was breaking the rules as fast as he could, Pat never seemed to know the rules to begin with. I realized almost immediately that it was pointless to ask her any questions at all about anything work related. She was the supervisor but I think her hiring had more to do with the affirmative action game I mentioned earlier. From an objective stand point, the system there at the west annex was broken long before I arrived. Having a more knowledgeable supervisor probably would not have made much difference.

What I have described so far only covers individual efforts. What I have described so far was mostly illegal. Probably even a little bit immoral don't you think? Do you think that was the worst of it? Do you think what Randy and the other case workers did was the worst thing? Do you think what Frank did was even worse? Remember I asked if you think I'm good at foreshadowing? Are you ready for the worst part or were you thinking I already told you? Should I start now or do you want to take a baby aspirin first? Ok, I'll start now.

So far I have only discussed the efforts of the staff and visitors who were unrepresented by lawyers. But their actions were mere child's play compared to what the Medicaid lawyers had in store for us every day. So far I have tried to emphasize the lax oversight in the nursing home unit. Of course I had no idea how bad it was until I started. However, there were people like attorney Bruce who did study the loop holes in the whole Medicaid eligibility process. Attorney Bruce found a loop hole in the system that you

could drive a locomotive through. By the time I started the gravy train was off and running. More and more people were jumping on every day. And what kind of school could produce a graduate like attorney Bruce capable of orchestrating the biggest Medicaid fraud in Wisconsin history you might ask? Well, Marquette University of course.

What attorney Bruce came up with was quite ingenious I suppose. I must give credit where credit is due. Instead of just cleaning out some ones bank account and stealing all of their money, attorney Bruce had another idea. He came up with a plan to streamline the whole process to make Medicaid fraud more mainstream and entirely guilt free besides. Attorney Bruce came up with an idea that would satisfy even the most discriminating palate I suppose you could say. He made it so easy to scam people out of every dollar and dime they ever had.

He called his creation the “personal annuity”. This little gem would help attorney Bruce and countless other lawyers commit what was most likely the biggest Medicaid scam in Wisconsin history and get rich in the process. Do you need another baby aspirin yet? The “personal annuity” or “p/a” was designed to make Medicaid fraud a breeze. If you think back to the “poa” example I discussed earlier, what if a bank or nursing home employee grew suspicious. It could cause a problem if someone asked too many questions. Those indictments are so annoying. Attorney Bruce came up with the “p/a” to assuage any problems that might come up.

The concept of an annuity is to give a company your money and receive usually a monthly check in return. There are all types of annuities to fit most any need. Of course usually only companies that have a proven asset base and a solid track record are allowed to sell annuities. Of course that didn't stop attorney Bruce. What he came up with was quite simple. For example, say a person had to go into a nursing home and that person's spouse didn't feel like paying the bill for the nursing home. Tough you might say, get out your check book right? Not if the spouse went to attorney Bruce.

Let's expand the example and say that couple had four adult children. Attorney Bruce would look over the couple's assets and figure out they were say, for example \$400,000.00 over the asset limit. Well you might say, wouldn't that couple have to pay the nursing home in cash until they used up their excess assets. No sparky, they wouldn't, not with attorney Bruce on the case at least. To further the example, attorney Bruce might tell the spouse to transfer \$100,000.00 to each adult child. In return each adult child would agree to pay back say \$10.00 a month for 20 years with a lump sum payment due the last month to pay off the remaining balance.

Stretching out the payments over such a long period virtually guaranteed that the patient was dead by the time the annuity expired. This was the idea. The annuity would automatically cancel upon death and no more payments were required. By creating the annuity, the couple was now under the nursing home Medicaid asset limit. The spouse could go into the west annex and apply for nursing home Medicaid with a clear

conscience. All the spouse had to do was show the 'p/a' paper work to the case worker and all was well.

But you might say this sounds ridiculous. Don't people need a license to sell annuities you might ask? Well, probably sparky but that didn't stop attorney Bruce. Then what about the tax implications with the I.R.S. and Wisconsin revenue you might say, who cares. Well, you might add, the whole concept sounds stupid. No one in their right mind would give away a total of \$400,000.00 in exchange for a total payment of only \$40.00 a month. Well, sparky you're on to something there. There is something called an "arm's length transaction" clause that applies to contract law. That's supposed to apply in a case like this. Well, why didn't it then you might rightly say. Didn't the supervisors try to stop this so called 'personal annuity' scam? Well, no sparky, they didn't, not really.

Remember there were only two supervisors and one didn't care and the other one probably couldn't spell personal or annuity anyways.

Attorney Bruce wasn't the only lawyer doing this. There were other lawyers coming in to the office five days a week. There were so many schemes and scams' coming through the office every day it was hard to keep track of them all. Every lawyer had a different angle to work. The only consistent theme was that none of the lawyers liked me. Quite a few complained about me nonstop from the time I started in the nursing home unit to the time I left. Of course most all of the lawyers were 'fof' so if I did something they didn't like, they could and often did go next door to Frank's office. Remember, whatever it was, angry Frank could fix it. So many lawyers were trying to get me fired, I lost count. After

working in the other county departments, ornery lawyers and nutty coworkers just didn't get to me so much. At least none of them were putting paper tacks on my chair.

Not long after I started, a methadone clinic opened in the basement of the west annex. Now things were getting interesting. Do you know what methadone is used for? I must admit, it was rather entertaining to watch the drug addicts mingle with the lawyers wearing their thousand dollar suits as they accompanied their blueblood clients into the west annex. I guess on a certain level, all of them needed their fix for the day. The addict's drug of choice was methadone. The lawyers and their client's drug of choice was money of course. Nobody could ever get enough of either it seemed. Each morning as I pulled into the west annex to park, I was greeted by a lot full of junker addict cars squeezed next to the lawyer's luxury cars. The addicts would stream into the basement for their fix. The lawyers and their clients streamed upstairs to the first floor for their fix.

The west annex building had seen its better days come and go. It was now a roach hotel. The only thing that kept the roaches at bay was the exterminators that came in at night to spray. We would often find the dead roaches, many several inches in length, throughout the building. The lawyers and their clients along with the other various applicants didn't seem to mind and would pack the waiting room each day. After registering the applications, the clerical workers would hand them over to the case workers like me. Then I got to go fetch the lawyers and their clients from the waiting room and bring them into my office.

As mentioned earlier, Frank and I just didn't get along too well. That whole Medicaid fraud thing was just a big turn off to me. Frank seemed to pick up on that vibe and wanted me to suffer as much as possible as a result. He accomplished this by sitting with the clerical workers each morning while they registered the cases. Frank then made sure that I received the most difficult cases along with the most irritating lawyers. The clerical workers adored Frank and would do anything for him. One, Joyce, made it a point to tell each and every applicant that I was a 'brand new worker' as if to imply that I didn't know anything. Maybe I knew too much.

Denise, another of the clerical workers knew that Frank was committing fraud and would wait to transfer cases that Frank had worked on. Denise and Frank didn't realize that the entries Frank was making were recorded permanently on the computer system. After entries were made on various cases, the I.D. of the person that made the entry would disappear after a certain number of days. After that data erasure, Denise would then transfer the case thinking Frank was in the clear. But unknown to her and Frank, the entries weren't erased, they were just archived. The archived data was still available for retrieval; they just didn't know it.

I don't know why but Frank always went to great lengths to get back at me for whatever perceived slight he seemed to have thought I committed. Maybe he hoped I would quit but I didn't. I think his ploy kind of back fired on him. It was because of angry Frank's attitude that I found out about many of the fraud schemes going on there. Attorney Bruce along with his partner attorney Dave were regular visitors to my office. Whenever I saw

either one, I knew a big fraud case was coming my way. The lawyers in general didn't get involved in cases involving small dollar amounts. A standard fee charged by the lawyers was \$5000.00 to prepare a 'p/a' contract. Generally, only people with large amounts of money went to see these lawyers. Otherwise it really wasn't worth it for either party. Like I mentioned, many lawyers were committing the same scam. Why not, it worked. I heard from several people that some of the Medicaid lawyers were even holding seminars. People with lots of money would show up to find out how to scam the Medicaid system. They always got what they were looking for.

A typical day at the west annex might bring in a dozen or more Medicaid lawyers along with their clients. The amount of money that was moving around was really quite staggering. The highest net worth that I encountered was about \$500,000.00. That case involved a woman who came in with her lawyer to apply for Medicaid for her husband who was in a nursing home. Her lawyer had advised her to transfer the excess money to her adult kids which she did. The lawyer then drew up a 'p/a' for each kid with the standard language as mentioned earlier. The couple wasn't eligible for Medicaid but for the 'p/a'.

I knew nothing of these 'p/a' until they showed up in my office. The first time I saw a 'p/a', I showed it to Pat because I knew it didn't make any sense. Pat assured me though that we were required to accept the 'p/a' as valid contracts. She claimed that she had denied a 'p/a' case about two years earlier but was over ruled by a state of Wisconsin fair hearing examiner. Pat showed me a copy of a fair hearing decision. Pat claimed that



decision was the reason for accepting the 'p/a' contracts. Pat wouldn't give me a copy of the decision and wouldn't say why so I had to take her word for it. She was the supervisor.

I should expand a bit about fair hearing examiners. They generally came from Madison every day to hold hearings on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. The fair hearing examiners were also known as administrative law judges. They were also lawyers. They didn't like driving to Milwaukee and certainly didn't like working on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. But who did? They didn't seem to like anything having to do with 'the state of Milwaukee' as it's also known in Madison. Above all, the fair hearing examiners didn't like case workers.

Fair hearing examiners would listen to complaints from clients and or representatives nearly every day. Because of the specialized nature of our work, we generally were assigned to or stuck with the same fair hearing examiners. The opinions that the fair hearing examiner would issue were generally contrary to the case workers opinion. If it was sunny outside and the fair hearing examiner was sitting next to an open window and I told him it was day light, he would say it was dark outside just so he wouldn't have to agree with me.

I'm not sure why this particular fair hearing examiner decided to allow the 'p/a' but he did. The fair hearing examiners had the role of judge and were supposed to decide complaints based on regulations. There was no basis for allowing the 'p/a' but he did. Because of that one decision, the state of Wisconsin was scammed out of probably

hundreds of millions of dollars. How is that you say? The arithmetic gets a little complicated but I suppose that was the point. Evidence of this malfeasance was all around but nobody cared. I hope I have explained how the personal annuity contract worked. How it impacted the state budget might make you get out your calculator, and more baby aspirin. I have tried to remain conservative in my estimates so here goes.

When someone applied for Medicaid for a nursing home patient, we would look at the three prior years of their life. If that patient had transferred money or assets during that time, the case worker would have to figure out if a penalty was warranted. To use the case just mentioned as an example, the couple that had a net worth of about \$500,000.00 had transferred over \$400,000.00 to their adult kids. The asset limit for a couple at the time was about \$82,000.00 so that meant the couple was more than \$400,000.00 over the asset limit and should have gotten penalized. The penalty period ran up to three years because the case workers could only 'look back' as we called it three years. The average nursing home cost at the time was about \$3000.00 per month. What we were supposed to do was take that \$400,000.00 amount and divide by \$3000.00. That result is over one hundred and we only could look back three years or thirty-six months so the penalty in that case should have run for thirty-six months.

The logic may seem goofy but married couples are not expected to drain their bank accounts to pay for nursing home care. That's where that thirty-six month 'look back' period and penalty came from. The policy was quite generous I thought. Some people like attorney Bruce didn't think so and came up with the 'p/a'. The idea and concept of

transferring money was perfectly legal as long as it was done properly. People were not expected to go broke paying for nursing home care so the regulations allowed all types of exemptions. There is a near endless list of exempt assets like houses, cars and burial policies and such so I won't go into that as it's kind of irrelevant. The basic idea was that people had to pay for up to thirty-six months of nursing home care before they were eligible for Medicaid. Some people did this and others went to see attorney Bruce or one of the other Medicaid lawyers.

On the other hand, there were cases where wealthy people would go into nursing homes and their relatives would take all their money and pay for nursing home care for thirty-six months and then apply for Medicaid the thirty seventh month. This was legal since we could only 'look back' thirty-six months. There were cases where people would go into the nursing homes and pay for thirty-six months and transfer small amounts of money and this was also legal. Of course there were even cases where people would pay many hundreds of thousands of dollars for nursing home care and go broke. I encountered all of this and many other situations.

Now getting back to the example, the couple had transferred over \$400,000.00 to their adult kids. This meant they were not eligible for thirty-six months. The penalty was side stepped thanks to people like attorney Bruce and the 'p/a' contract. This meant that the state of Wisconsin paid out for nursing home care for thirty-six months and it shouldn't have. Remember the average cost of nursing home care at the time was about \$3000.00 per month which is how much the state of Wisconsin paid the nursing home. \$3000.00

for thirty-six months comes out to, ready, \$108,000.00. The state of Wisconsin paid out approximately \$108,000.00 because of each personal annuity contract.

Well that's not much you might say considering that the Wisconsin Medicaid budget runs into the billions of dollars over many years right? Not much, really? The waiting room at the west annex was packed with lawyers five days a week. This scam went on for about four years, I'll explain later. If one personal annuity contract was submitted with a Medicaid application every business day for four years and the state of Wisconsin paid out \$108,000.00 for every case, how much is that. Drum roll, how does \$108,000,000.00 sound. That's just assuming one case per day with 250 business days in the year. I estimate that is the minimum amount scammed. To give more perspective, if all of the 16 caseworkers took an application with a 'p/a' every day for four years, that amount comes to \$1,728,000,000.00. That's billion with a b kids. There was generally more than one case per day submitted with a 'p/a'. I'm sure there were days when all sixteen case workers in the building processed cases that had a 'p/a'. Some days the case workers had to process two applications.

Just to keep the numbers conservative, with an average of say, four 'p/a' submitted each day for four years, the amount comes out to \$432,000,000.00, yes 432 million dollars.

Quite a brilliant scam don't you agree? This amount doesn't even include angry Frank's fixes. This also doesn't include fixes made by the other caseworkers like Randy. This was the perfect crime you never heard of. This scam was engineered in such a way as to keep

everyone clear of the actual Medicaid money stream. None of the people I've mentioned ever received any money directly from Medicaid. Not that I know of anyways.

When I worked on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell, I had to issue supplemental food stamp and money allotments to my clients on occasion. After I entered the case number and amount and pressed enter, the data went to Peggy the supervisor. She could approve, question or even deny my request. If approved the payments would show up on reports generated by the computer system. The unit and section supervisors could monitor payments this way. This is called quality control. It doesn't always stop fraud, but it's better than nothing. There were no such reports or monitoring of benefits with nursing home Medicaid that I ever heard of. The only quality control we had at the west annex was the integrity of the caseworkers like Randy and the supervisors, angry Frank and Pat not to mention the Medicaid lawyers.

Medicaid is similar to an insurance company. When Medicaid pays institutions like nursing homes they typically combine all of the patients on one report which is called a remittance. Usually only one check is sent for all of the patients and the check is computer generated along with the signature. By getting someone certified for Medicaid, the case was then comingled with the legitimate cases so no one could tell which was which. There were other schemes and scams coming and going over the years I worked there so I can only project these figures up to a point. I have kept my calculations conservative by only making estimates on what I can prove or legitimately estimate. The fraud squad detective's I worked with on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet liked to use the 'kiss' principle,

as in 'keep it simple stupid' or in other words, stick with what you can prove. Do you like that?

On the other hand, just for the purposes of salacious speculation, I often wished I could have sent some of the nursing home cases to the fraud squad. There were people that came in representing patients in nursing homes who were probably not eligible at all. I had people come into my office with lawyers who as far as I could tell had no relationship with the nursing home patient at all. I mean it looked like they had befriended the patient while the patient was still living in their home and then ripped them off. Some of the people that showed up appeared to me as 'confidence men' or women, who had tricked the patient into signing over everything they had. They took the patients confidence and then their money and then dumped them into a nursing home.

The lawyers wouldn't let me question their clients ever so it was impossible to tell who these people were at times. One lawyer, attorney Bruce's partner Dave actually, liked to make faces at me while I processed applications. He would even jump around in his chair or get up and look over my shoulder just to try to disrupt my concentration. Attorney Dave tried to get me fired at one point because I sent a request to a bank for information on his client. I was allowed to do things like that but attorney Dave sent a letter to the Milwaukee county corporation counsel's office claiming I had violated his client's constitutional right against illegal search and seizure. Attorney Dave liked to send me correspondence in the form of lawsuit letter head as in him vs. me. That didn't scare me

much as the corporation counsel lawyers were more like pretend lawyers than real ones. Kind of like the child support enforcement lawyers at the courthouse.

I contacted the corporation counsel office on occasion to see if they would look into the many scams going on in the office. The corporation counsel office would reply that they were just too busy. The Milwaukee county corporation counsel was the legal counsel for Milwaukee county employees or so I was told. What could have possibly made them so busy? I worked in the nursing home unit for approximately four years and never once was the corporation counsel not busy. When I found out how much some of the corporation counsel lawyers had gotten from the pension scam several years later I understood why. Maybe I wouldn't have wanted to get involved either. The gravy train was rolling baby.

The biggest problem with the 'p/a' was that as time went by more and more people found out about them. More and more lawyers were packing the waiting room every day. The lawyers were charging \$5000.00 for each 'p/a' contract scam they brought in to the office. Using the previous example, if four 'p/a' were submitted each day at a rate of \$5000.00 for each lawyer for four years that comes out to, ready, \$20,000,000.00 in fees. Yes, sparky, 20 million dollars. That was a scam worth protecting don't you think.

Everyone did their part it seemed except me. I just didn't play well on this with others I guess, what I can say. Eventually even accountants and financial planners were creating 'p/a' contracts.

The amounts of money were just incredible. The largest money transfer I knew of involved another case worker. She told me about it as we stood outside the west annex building on a smoke break. A lawyer and her client were just leaving the building, with smiles all-around of course. The caseworker, Sue, said that lawyer's client had come into town to manage her uncle's affairs. Her uncle, who was single and in a nursing home had over \$1,000,000.00 in cash, His niece had simply taken all of his money and had a lawyer create a 'p/a' contract to make it legal. The niece then was headed for the airport to go back to where ever it was she came from. Easy money if you can get it hey? Keep in mind that in a case like that where the patient was single, the asset limit was only \$2000.00. Single people were allowed many of the exemptions that married people were but the asset limit for single people was still only \$2000.00. In this case, this uncle in the nursing home would have probably never qualified for Medicaid. If he wanted his niece to have all of his money, he would have given it to her beforehand wouldn't you think?

The extra money paid out by the Wisconsin Medicaid office was increasing exponentially but there was no end. The biggest hang up with these scams that I had was that only certain people knew about them. Most of those people were lawyers or knew lawyers who knew how to work the system. The biggest problem I had was that the general public didn't know about 'p/a'. There were even some lawyers who either didn't know or didn't want to get involved with 'p/a'. You have to understand that when you work for a government agency, you are spending someone else's money. After people pay taxes to the federal or state government, that money belongs to the federal or state government. Agencies like Milwaukee county human services are created in order to service federal



and state programs. County agencies are only acting on behalf of or acting as administrators of programs created and funded by the federal and state governments. When people like Frank the angry gay man or attorney Bruce or his partner attorney Dave came up with their own rules, it's called intentional program violations or in laymen terms, Medicaid fraud. You're just not supposed to do that. But they did.

I should mention that the 'p/a' scam wasn't the only thing going on at the time. There were other types of fraud going on that had nothing to do with 'p/a'. The worker I just mentioned, Sue, was popular with lawyers because she never asked any questions. She would take applications and process them without asking for any financial information at all. The lawyers and their clients liked Sue so much they would often send her gift baskets afterwards.

There were other workers that were simply overwhelmed when trying to decipher financial information. I took an application from a man who was a nephew of a nursing home patient. During the interview the nephew provided me with stock certificates that his uncle, the nursing home patient owned. The stock only had a par value of several hundred dollars. Par value is nearly meaningless when determining stock value but the nephew wanted me to think that was all the stock was worth. I checked and discovered the stock had a market value of about \$25,000.00. I denied the application due to that fact and informed the nephew. I also recorded this information in the case record so other caseworkers would see it if the nephew ever came back.

The nephew waited over a month and did come back and reapplied. If someone waited that long to reapply as he did then the case was given to a different caseworker. The nephew probably knew this and was just playing the system. The next worker that got the case didn't know the difference between par and market value and asked our supervisor Pat. Unfortunately, neither Pat nor the case worker knew enough about the stock market to understand the difference between par and market value so they opened the case. I didn't know what to say. Between the caseworker and Pat, they had over 50 years on the job. Cases like that came and went every day. There wasn't a lot of brain power at the west annex I'm afraid and what little there was usually was put to no good end.

Another case worker came into our unit who only processed food stamp and medical assistance cases. She was there only temporarily but I got to do coverage for one of her cases one day. Do you remember coverage? This worker had scheduled reviews and then took off of work. Sound familiar? This was a favorite trick amongst caseworkers. While processing the review, I noticed that the caseworker was giving the wrong amount of credit for shelter costs. The client in question owned a house and paid about \$2000.00 a year in property taxes. Instead of dividing \$2000.00 by 12 as in 12 months, the caseworker entered \$2000.00 as the monthly amount paid for taxes. This made it appear as if the client was paying \$24000.00 a year in property taxes instead of \$2000.00. This made the computer system generate food stamps based on the wrong amount.

The client was supposed to get about \$50.00 or so per month but instead got over \$400.00 in food stamps per month. I corrected the error but the client complained and even Pat

asked me why I did that. I tried to explain the finer points of food stamp eligibility to our supervisor along with computer logic but it was pointless. The caseworker put the \$2000.00 amount back in the client's case so the client could keep getting over \$400.00 in food stamps each month. Another case of fraud, just another day at the office, what else can I say. Eventually the caseworker was transferred along with her cases to another unit. Later I heard she had gotten promoted to a supervisory position.

Believe it or not but one of the caseworkers from the west annex actually got arrested. I could never get all of the details but from what I was able to find out, he had solicited money from people to help them get Medicaid for their relatives. It wasn't bribes to open cases; he just offered to help people understand how the system worked after hours. His name was Ray and apparently he was forming some type of Medicaid eligibility consulting business on the side. I think it was a sting operation because I kept getting phone calls from people asking me how much I would 'need' to get a particular case opened. This went on for a while. I suspect that Ray got caught up in that. I don't think he was the target, I'm pretty sure that I was. Poor guy, he was a black guy too so I was really surprised when I saw the Milwaukee county sheriff detectives take him away.

Ray's arrest never made any sense. I mean between angry Frank and Pat and the caseworkers and the Medicaid lawyers, millions of dollars were getting scammed every week. What was so special about Ray when Sue was getting gift baskets? There were other caseworkers committing their own little scams as well. Why didn't anyone else get to ride downtown in the sheriff's car? Ray was the only other straight guy besides me in

the department. This meant I didn't have anyone to talk to. Now it was just me and Frank the angry gay man and 18 ornery women. I was so glad to have my own office with a door to close.

If the sheriff's detectives were so bored, why didn't they check into the other scam going on right in back of the west annex building in full view of anyone going by. There was a small warehouse building behind the west annex. Trucks with Milwaukee county markings would back up to the door and workers in Milwaukee county uniforms would unload the trucks into the building. Some of the stuff looked like junk and some of it looked like brand new office equipment and furniture. You might want to take another baby aspirin now before I go on any further. So some days the county trucks would pull up and the county workers would unload all the stuff from the trucks into the building. No big deal right sparky? Well here it comes. On other days, people in civilian clothes and driving private vehicles, usually trucks would load up the stuff from the warehouse building and drive away with it. Where they went, I have no idea. It was a coordinated effort, I'm certain of that because the county trucks and the private vehicles never showed up on the same day. They would always alternate so they didn't run into each other. It was a lot easier to steal stuff this way I suppose. I should point out that county buildings were always quite secure. I doubt if the people taking the stuff were anything but county employees'. Where the stuff went to is anyone's guess. I imagine the furniture made for a nice addition to many basement rec rooms and up north cabins all over Wisconsin.

While the warehouse building was getting cleaned out, there was a sheriff deputy on patrol everyday giving us parking tickets. He showed up one day and had trouble getting through the parking lot. All of those lawyers and bluebloods and drug addicts had the west annex parking lot packed every morning. The deputy decided to start writing parking tickets for no particular reason. He would show up in the mornings and write down license plate numbers and come back a couple hours later to write tickets. By the time he would come back the addicts and lawyers were usually gone so he wrote tickets to the county workers instead. After I had gotten about a dozen tickets from this guy I found my disabled parking permit and displayed it on the dashboard of my car. The deputy was furious when he realized I had a disabled parking permit. He parked his cruiser behind my car and sat there for about a half hour at least. He looked like he was ready to open fire. He was so mad, his whole head turned beet red. I could see his scalp through his white hair.

The county grounds were filled up with unused parking lots at the time. Many of the county buildings that the parking lots were for were long gone. All of the parking lots had plenty of 'no parking' signs or '2-hour limit' signs but they were installed for traffic control of traffic that didn't exist anymore. The deputy didn't care. He just kept writing tickets as fast as his boney little arthritic fingers could write. The sheriff's deputies even at that time were making \$50,000.00+ a year in wages and benefits. This job the deputy had writing tickets made as much sense as Vera's job. Milwaukee County probably lost money on every ticket he wrote. He finally started to go overboard though. He wrote Addie a ticket but he lied about the time he wrote the ticket. Addie had proof of this

because she was shopping at the time of course, and had her time/date stamped receipt with her when she went to court.

The deputy finally crossed the line one day and wrote one of angry Frank's caseworkers a ticket. The caseworker showed it to angry Frank and he called the deputies supervisor and chewed him out. I really mean that too because remember my office was next to angry Frank's and I could hear him yell. The sheriff's supervisor drove to the west annex with the deputy and met angry Frank in the parking lot and angry Frank shoved the ticket in their faces and told them to shove it more or less. They never got out of their car, they knew better. They took the ticket back and drove away. Frank the angry gay man had his moments.

Eventually Pat called the county grounds maintenance department and had them remove the 'no parking' and time limit signs. They did this project on a Saturday when the deputy was gone. The following Monday, the deputy returned to work with his trusty clipboard. He stopped and put his cruiser in park and picked up the clip board and suddenly realized all of the parking signs were gone. All he could do was put the clipboard back down and drive away and he never came back. Awwwwwww.

All the millions in fraud going on in the west annex and all the theft going on in back of the building and nobody cared. Well as long as nobody parked too long while they were doing these things I guess. One day I heard several shrieks from some of the other caseworkers. I went outside and one of them pointed out a crow. The crow had killed

another bird and took it to the top of a utility pole in front of the building so it could eat its prey. Such a ghastly sight at the time but now rather symbolic I suppose, the carcass, like the taxpayer, getting picked clean right out in the open.

A Milwaukee county court commissioner came to see me one day. Finally, an honest lawyer right? He was there to apply for his mother. She was a patient at a nursing home and needed Medicaid. While we discussed his mother's Medicaid application, the court commissioner proceeded to boast about how he and his brother the dentist had conspired to commit insurance and tax fraud. Yes, he really did and he didn't seem to care who knew it either. He seemed rather proud of himself actually. His brother, who had a dental office in Wauwatosa on about 122<sup>nd</sup> and North Avenue as I recall, employed their mother as a janitor. She didn't actually work there though but this way he could deduct wages and benefits paid on his tax return plus give his mother free health insurance. I suppose it sounds almost noble to help ones' mother in such a fashion but not if you consider how much money dentist's and court commissioners make.

To top it off, the court commissioner told me another story about property transfers. Seemed he had attended a cocktail party in Madison where the topic of Medicaid eligibility was discussed. Turned out there was a secret fair hearing ruling that only those in the know knew about. His mother had supposedly transferred her house in Washington heights to his brother the dentist. The problem was that the property transfer was never recorded at the courthouse. This meant that the court commissioner's mother was not

eligible for Medicaid since his mother was not returning home from the nursing home which made her house an available asset.

This meant she was supposed to sell her house to pay for nursing home care since she was never going back home anyways. This was the rule that we caseworkers used in our eligibility tests. Now according to this court commissioner there was a secret ruling or as secret as one could make it concerning property transfers. The ruling stated that property transfer's need not get registered at the courthouse. This was a pretty big deal. I and other caseworkers had denied similar cases over the years because that's what we were told to do. I know this is getting a bit complicated but that's the point. The more complicated it is, the easier it is to get away with.

The three year look back rule I previously mentioned should have applied in this case.

The court commissioner claimed that the house was transferred by his mother to his brother the dentist more than three years earlier. However, his mother wrote the transfer on a piece of scrap paper and the transfer was never registered at the courthouse. Other people over the years had tried this scam but generally didn't get away with it. Suddenly there was a ruling that made such property transfers legal for Medicaid purposes.

I told the court commissioner before he left that I would have to call the office of fair hearings in Madison as it was called to verify this. These were the people who dealt with these issues. I had called this office periodically over the years trying to get information but I was almost always unsuccessful. Usually I couldn't get past the telephone operator.



This time when I called and mentioned the Milwaukee county court commissioners name I was put through to the number two man in the whole department within seconds.

Almost as if he was waiting for my call. Yes of course he said, such transfers are allowed, but I said what about all of the other people that do the same thing yet are denied and sometimes financially ruined as a result. Well he assured me, everyone is eligible for this, but I said how would they know that if you don't say anything. Well not to worry. A Medicaid bulletin update was soon issued to inform everyone concerned that such transfers were now suddenly ok. What about all the smucks that lost out because of this previously secret ruling, too bad.

The nursing home unit was kind of like a financial death camp I suppose. It never mattered what people did, it was all in who they knew that made the difference. There were many days when I would see the Medicaid lawyers coming and going with their clients and their personal annuity paperwork. I would see other people in the waiting room with or without lawyers or the 'p/a' paper work, sitting unawares that they were about to get their applications denied. Those people were the ones that would end up paying a fortune for nursing home care. It was all in the flick of the wrist.

Some people had their lawyers who made up the 'p/a' and didn't pay anything for nursing home care and others would just about go broke paying for nursing home care. While in the waiting room, sometimes people with the 'p/a' would end up sitting right next to the people without the 'p/a'. To paraphrase an old country western song, some got the gold mine and some got the shaft. If someone didn't have the right lawyer or didn't

suck up to Frank the angry gay man, figuratively of course, not literally, then their lives were often times turned upside down or even ruined as a result. You're not supposed to treat people differently or worse when administering mandated, taxpayer funded benefits. It's not about the golden rule. It was more like a civil rights violation. Pretty harsh hey, but nobody cared.

Then one day came some redemption in the form of a Medicaid bulletin. The formal title was, bureau of welfare initiatives operations memo, number 99-19, file 2730 and 2731 with an issue date of 3/17/99, non w-2, priority: urgent. Wow as angry Frank might say, that's a mouthful. There were so many of these bulletins, but this one was quite special. The bulletin was written regarding personal annuities. The very same ones that attorney Bruce had invented to scam the Medicaid system. The bulletin states specifically that the personal annuities were not allowed for Medicaid purposes and never were. The bulletin even details how lawyers tried and failed to get the personal annuity contracts approved in other counties. Remember, the only reason according to Pat that the 'p/a' were ever allowed in Milwaukee county was because of that one fair hearing examiner mentioned earlier.

The bulletin is quite detailed and filled up with legal jargon that's hard to follow but it basically says we know what you're doing so knock it off. The author of the bulletin seemed quite perplexed that the personal annuity was ever approved to begin with. Strangely there was no mention of the 'p/a' in Milwaukee county. The cover-up was beginning already. I was overjoyed when I read through the bulletin. Attorney Bruce and

his cohorts with their 'p/a' had created a two tier benefit system. I suppose that angry Frank and the other employees at the west annex had helped create a multi-tiered system as well but on a smaller scale.

The fact that people were getting a break on nursing home cost didn't bother me at all since nursing homes are very expensive. The problem was that only certain people got the break and others didn't. If people didn't know lawyers like attorney Bruce or attorney Dave or the other lawyers, they paid in full. Only those people willing and able to pay \$5000.00 got the break. If they were a friend of Frank's, that was even better. There were many times that I approved applications that were a quarter or half million dollars over the asset limit. They were approved because they had a lawyer and the 'p/a'. The very next day, I might deny a similar application from someone else who didn't have a lawyer or 'p/a'. I as a caseworker wasn't allowed to give financial advice so all I could do was watch.

It was all based on money. The more money and connections people had, the better they were treated. If not for my artificial hip, I might have jumped up and down on my desk after I read the bulletin. I had to settle for closing a recently opened case where a personal annuity was used as a guise to transfer money. The computer system sent out a notice detailing the closing. The client took the notice to their lawyer who filed for a fair hearing because of my decision to close the case. The fair hearing was held on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet and was presided over by the same fair hearing examiner that had approved the 'p/a' to begin

with years earlier. It was just me against the lawyer, her Para legal assistant and a stenographer along with the client.

In this particular case the patient was in the nursing home. The patients spouse had transferred about \$200,000.00 using the 'p/a' contract. I had not taken the application for this case but it was assigned to me after it was opened. The fair hearing went on forever it seemed. The Medicaid lawyer kept trying to trip me up on legalities and obscure regulations. I took the easy approach and sat there with my Medicaid bulletin copy and kept repeating what was in the bulletin.

Finally, the fair hearing examiner started asking me questions about what I thought of the whole situation. The question didn't make any sense as caseworkers and even fair hearing examiners were supposed to make decisions based on rules and not emotions. The fair hearing examiner was clearly advocating for the other side and seemed perplexed that he couldn't change my position. Every time he asked for my opinion, I told him he should get arrested and go to prison for Medicaid fraud. The fair hearing examiner never flinched when I said that. He just kept looking at his tape recorder that he used to tape fair hearings. It appeared to me that he was looking at the tape counter on the recorder. I think what he was doing was keeping track of when I said he should go to prison so he could go back later and erase my statements from the tape.

The biggest question I had that I never got an answer to was why did this fair hearing examiner approve the personal annuities to begin with. Was he trying to get revenge for

some slight or insult like angry Frank? Was he trying to vent some hostility? Was he the creator of the booger mural in the basement bathroom on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet? He would have had easy access. The fair hearing room was very close to the escalator on the third floor. The escalator would have taken him directly to the basement. The bathroom was only a few feet to the left from the escalator. I guess I'll never know.

After the hearing was finished, I went back to work at the west annex and waited. I don't recall how long it took for the fair hearing examiner to make his decision but it finally arrived and I had won. I just know it pained the fair hearing examiner to no end to rule in my favor but he had no choice. If he had ruled against me, I could have complained to his superiors in Madison. With that one fair hearing decision, I had run the gravy train right off the track and the lawyers weren't about to take it lying down either.

Not long after this fair hearing decision, I was named in a lawsuit by the very same lawyer who had lost against me. That was a little bit unnerving but the suit was dismissed without me having to do anything. Finally, the era of the personal annuity was over.

Based on Pat's statements to me, the personal annuity scam had gone on for a total of about four years. Times had changed and not for the better for all. I'm sure my name was mentioned in many a meeting regarding personal annuities. That was a pretty screwed up situation. The Medicaid bulletin clearly stated that the personal annuities were never allowed to begin with. I thought it odd that the bulletin didn't mention Milwaukee County even though Milwaukee County was the only county I knew of where the personal annuities were ever accepted. Maybe the author of that Medicaid bulletin didn't

want anyone to know how many personal annuity scams had already gone through the system.

I suppose if the wrong people in Washington D.C. would have found out about the personal annuities, forget about indictments. Milwaukee county human services might have lost its certification to accept and maintain nursing home Medicaid cases. I know angry Frank didn't care but why did Pat go along with the scheme. I used to see attorney Bruce's partner attorney Dave in Pat's office from time to time. I don't know what they discussed. Did attorney Dave offer Pat some kind of payoff? One day when I was walking into my office, I noticed attorney Dave standing in angry Frank's office. I didn't hear much but I did hear attorney Dave say they were 'putting money aside' and 'under the table'. I didn't know what he meant by that at the time but I would find out later. The recent 'p/a' decision only concerned personal annuities. It did nothing to stop angry Frank from continuing to make his own fixes. Angry Frank was holding court just as before without skipping a beat.

One day I discovered a Medicaid case that angry Frank had backdated way too far. To top it off there was no paper work to support the backdating. I complained to Pat who didn't really care but told me to call E.D.S. in Madison to find out how it was possible to backdate cases without a paper trail. E.D.S. was an acronym for Electronic Data Services. E.D.S. was started by a man who became a billionaire off of government contracts. Why doesn't that surprise me? E.D.S. had the contract for maintaining the Medicaid data base. I called and talked to an operator at E.D.S. to ask how it was possible to backdate a

Medicaid case without documentation. The operator said it wasn't possible and promised to call me back with an answer. When this operator called me back several days later, she seemed rather dejected. She said she had no idea how it happened but it did and that was her answer. To make it worse she said that the entry to backdate this particular case was done using a generic E.D.S. computer I.D. that was impossible to trace since more than one person had access to that I.D.

This was a rather unnerving development. This meant that angry Frank now had a co-conspirator at E.D.S. in Madison. All angry Frank had to do was pick up the phone and call E.D.S. in Madison to commit Medicaid fraud. This way, angry Frank's name and or computer I.D. didn't show up anywhere. People like angry Frank and the lawyers were no dummies. I don't know where they came up with these schemes and scams but they did and they just kept coming. I'll never know how much the personal annuity scam cost or how many cases angry Frank 'fixed' over the years but you have to admire that evil genius at work. It's rather impressive and even breathtaking I suppose in its own right.

Even if someone had stepped in at the time to hold angry Frank and the lawyers accountable, what could they prove? All the lawyers were doing was preparing legal documents and witnessing signatures. That's what lawyers do. That's not illegal. The Medicaid lawyers generally didn't sign the Medicaid applications, their clients did. The clients were only acting on behalf of the nursing home patients who had granted them 'power of attorney'. As mentioned earlier, none of these people received money directly

from Medicaid. The only people actually responsible were the nursing home patients. In many instances the nursing home patients were barely conscious.

What could anyone do, roll a nursing home patient into court with an oxygen tank and I.V. drip dangling off the side of their bed? What about angry Frank. He didn't document the Medicaid fraud he committed. He tried to cover it up at every turn. Even if he got arrested and went to court, he could always claim it was a misunderstanding or a computer error. Could anyone even figure out how much fraud was committed over the years? Many of the caseworkers at the west annex were like the caseworkers on 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell. They rarely if ever had client's sign or date applications. How could you even accuse someone of fraud if they didn't sign the application? Unlike the soap opera kangaroo court cases on late night TV, if you accuse someone of financial fraud you have to have proof.

What little proof of wrong doing there was started disappearing almost immediately. Previously, when I received new cases from other caseworkers that were transferred to me after the initial application, I would check for a 'p/a'. If the case contained a 'p/a' then I would place that whole record in a separate file cabinet drawer. This way I could keep track of them. I had to keep track of the 'p/a' somehow as the computer system didn't have extra fields to keep track of Medicaid scams. When I received the 'p/a' fair hearing decision, I went to the same file cabinet drawer to pull out the 'p/a' cases. They were all gone! Someone had taken the whole batch of physical case records out of the file cabinet drawer. I had no way to find them. It never occurred to me



to make a list or anything. That caught me way off guard. I started to go through the rest of the file cabinets. I pulled out one record after another but I couldn't find a single 'p/a' case. Angry Frank or even Pat could have easily transferred those 'p/a' cases to other caseworkers. Both angry Frank and Pat had keys to the building and could have gone in after hours and done anything they wanted with those 'p/a' cases.

Many of the caseworkers were like Sue who I mentioned earlier and just didn't care. They would take whatever information the lawyers gave them and rarely asked any questions. Many of the caseworkers wouldn't make any notations regarding 'p/a' either in the physical record itself or on the computer case. Because of that, even if you could magically produce a list of all of the case numbers for all of the 'p/a' cases and looked them up on the state computer system, you might not find much. Even if you could magically produce all of the physical case records for all of the 'p/a' cases, you still might not find much information. For many of the 'p/a' cases, the only proof that there ever was a 'p/a' was the 'p/a' contract itself. All anyone had to do was remove the 'p/a' contract from those case records and the evidence was gone.

Well I guess in the end these people were just too diabolical for me to deal with. I just couldn't keep up with all the schemes and scams. At least I stopped one scam. I have that to my credit. As a side bonus, now I didn't have to watch attorney Dave make faces at me anymore. He didn't do that all the time though. Some days he wore one of those skullcap things like Rachel at the medical complex. When he had that on his head, he was quite civil. After I won the 'p/a' fair hearing, I never saw attorney Dave again,

awwwwwwwwww. I wonder how much money the lawyers actually made off the 'p/a' scam. I suppose looking at attorney Bruce or attorney Dave's income tax returns might give some insight. Just look and see how many \$5000.00 payments they reported on their tax return right? But so many lawyers and eventually accountants and financial planners started to get involved, it's probably impossible to figure out.

I only saw attorney Bruce once after the 'p/a' fair hearing decision and he looked rather petrified. HmMMMMMMMMMMMM. Most of the other lawyers disappeared from the west annex building as well. That was quite a sight really. The parking lot was no longer filled up with luxury cars. Most of the lawyers that showed up now weren't pulling any scams. There were some isolated cases but nothing organized like the personal annuities. There were a few cases that made me suspicious because Pat told me to open the cases without giving me any reason why. I only know that she didn't have to give me a reason since she was a supervisor. These were applications I had denied or were about to deny. These were also cases with a lawyer involved so I don't know if she got something for her effort or not.

To cover myself, I would make a notation in the computer case record for future reference. That way no one could blame me for opening the case. I made notations when I caught angry Frank working on my cases as well. The problem with angry Frank and even Pat was I never knew for sure what cases of mine they had worked on. Angry Frank was such a slippery character. He was by far the more devious one. One day, angry Frank handed me an application to process. I knew something was wrong immediately. He had

registered the case and gave it to me in the afternoon. That made me suspicious right away because angry Frank and the girls from his unit usually went shopping in the afternoons. The case also had a lawyer involved but the nursing home patient had no assets. I called the lawyer and found out the nursing home patient was a convicted child molester. As soon as I found out, I gave the case back to angry Frank and told him I wouldn't work on the case at all. Angry Frank looked a little sheepish. He could have written me up or even fired me for refusing to process the case but I didn't care. I figured I had to draw the line somewhere. Angry Frank just took the case back and never said a word. For some reason, angry Frank wanted my name associated with the case but I guess I was too clever that time at least.

Even Frank the angry gay man had to leave sooner or later and then one day, angry Frank retired. It was the end of an era I suppose. No longer would I have to worry about angry Frank locking me out of the building if I went out to smoke a cigarette, yes he really did. Angry Frank also liked to turn out the light in the bathroom if he knew I was the only one in there, yes he really did that too but at least he didn't put any paper tacks on my chair. Angry Frank was a character and hopefully one of a kind because I'm sure the taxpayers could never afford another one like him.

I suppose though that what angry Frank and the others had done wasn't much different than what caseworkers and supervisors had done in previous years. Vera told me stories many years earlier about how caseworkers had scammed the system back in the 1960's and 1970's. One popular method involved Milwaukee public school teachers. Many of

the teachers would show up every year in the summer after classes let out for summer break. The welfare staff would get an avalanche of applications but the cases would open and close too fast for anyone to do proper verification. According to Vera, many people would show up to apply for welfare claiming they were school teachers whether they were teachers or not.

An older caseworker named John who was also a union steward told me an interesting story. He said when he started as a caseworker in the 1960's; his supervisor would open and close dozens of welfare cases every summer. John said his boss wouldn't let anyone see the cases and if anyone asked he would claim they were friends of his. This was before computers and easy verification. By the time anyone could get around to verifying information the cases were closed.

I bet the amounts scammed back then were nothing compared to what angry Frank and the lawyers pulled off but it was the same idea. As always it's better to leave these situations alone. It wouldn't look very good if welfare supervisors and lawyers and county court commissioners got arrested and dragged into court would it? It's better to lull people into complacency by arresting people like Ray or Karen the caseworker from 9<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell. Campaign finance violations and day care fraud are a lot easier for the public to digest. It keeps the courts and cops and news media busy and creates an impression that things are getting accomplished but it's really just a feel good exercise.

I should point out that there were other people who caused just as much trouble for me but on a smaller scale dollar wise. One day I took an application from a person who worked for the old first Wisconsin bank in downtown Milwaukee. Coincidentally she happened to work in a records department. She applied on behalf of her mother who was in a nursing home who coincidentally had all her accounts at the same first Wisconsin bank. When I requested bank account information from first Wisconsin bank on this person, I received copies of microfiche statements that were damaged. I discovered that my request for information had gone to the supervisor of the woman that had applied. The only information I could decipher on the statements was the name and account number. It appeared as if all of the financial information was scratched off on purpose. When I questioned the bank supervisor, she claimed it was just one of those things that happened.

In another case, a person applied for a nursing home patient who owned a home. According to the property record, the home had dozens of owners. If a home had too many owners, it was considered an unavailable asset. The home was located outside of Milwaukee County. When I called that county register of deeds, I discovered that the woman that applied also worked in the department I was calling.

One last case I must mention made me wonder about how screwed up the whole system was. A man came in to see me one day to apply for his father and his step mother who were both residents of the same nursing home in Milwaukee. As I processed the application I noticed that the case had already opened and closed in another county in

Wisconsin. When I looked up the case further, I found a comment entered on the computer file by a caseworker from that county. This caseworker left a note on the computer file saying to anyone who looked, don't open this case unless you call me. I called her and discovered this man was trying to pull a pretty big scam. The caseworker sent me a copy of that county's sheriff investigation of this man. This man would have put any of the Medicaid lawyers to shame. According to the sheriff report, this man's parents had lived in Milwaukee. After his mother died, things got interesting. The man's parents had been friends with another couple who lived right across the street. That husband had also recently died. His widow was in the early stages of dementia. According to the sheriff report, this guy that was in my office had somehow gotten his father to marry the widowed neighbor woman across the street.

Based on the information available to the sheriff investigator, the neighbor woman may not have realized that she had remarried! After the marriage, the new stepson had also gotten his new step mother to sign a power of attorney form. He also got his father to sign a 'poa' as well. With the 'poa' in hand, this man proceeded to sell his father's and new step mother's houses and the money disappeared according to the report. He moved the new couple to the county he lived in. In addition, the step mother also had over \$500,000.00 in cash which also disappeared. After all the money was gone, this man had applied for nursing home Medicaid for his father and step mother in that county. The caseworker in that county had denied the application and called that county's corporation counsel who called in the local sheriff who produced the report that was sent to me. I was genuinely amazed at how much work went into that report. I denied the case and the man

took his father and step mother back to his home county and reapplied for nursing home Medicaid. That same worker later told me that their corporation counsel had eventually taken the man to court where he was ordered to pay back about \$20,000.00. That was only a fraction of the total scammed of course but much better than nothing and at least they tried. Episodes like these just mentioned were quite frequent. I could write a whole other chapter on them but in the grand scheme of things, the individual dollar amounts scammed were just a pittance compared to the personal annuities.

## Chapter 7

Oh my, the last chapter is at hand and just in time, you're probably out of baby aspirin anyways. Don't worry sparky, this is an easy chapter I think. Well the personal annuity scam was done and Frank the angry gay man was gone. What was left? Things seemed more peaceful now. Angry Frank wasn't replaced so Pat had charge of both units. Several of the older caseworkers retired and one died, sad. Another caseworker, Debra had to have emergency heart surgery. Debra became the poster girl for sick time abuse. Debra had more than twenty years on the job but less than fifteen years of paid service.

Employee's accumulated more than a month off each year which made her story even more incredible. All the paid and unpaid time off she had meant that she was only on the job on average of two days out of three for the previous twenty years. What's the point of having a job at all? After the heart surgery she looked more dead than alive but she didn't have enough credit for a disability pension because she took too much unpaid time off over the years like Leeann did, remember her.

One caseworker did go out on disability. She couldn't stay awake at work so she retired on Milwaukee county disability pay. Apparently she had a medical affliction. It was called 'I can't stay awake so I think I will retire on disability pay' syndrome. Her condition was similar to the union steward I mentioned who worked at the medical complex who went out on disability. His ailment was called 'I don't feel like working any more so I think I will fake a back injury and retire on disability pay'.



One day, Bob showed up. He was Pat's supervisor. He said we were moving to 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. Somebody wanted the west annex building but not the people in it. Go figure. The west annex and the warehouse building or scene of the crimes if you will were demolished to make way for a new building. That's really appropriate since there was probably nothing left to steal anyways. A moving company did all of the actual moving for us. I left the west annex one day and went to 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet the next.

The cycle was now complete. I was back at welfare central. Vera's omen had come to pass. The old guys at the Wisconsin department of revenue were right after all. At least I never saw any roaches on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet and the janitors never ripped us off like they did at the county grounds. When I worked on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet before I was in the basement and now I worked on the third floor.

I made the mistake of going to my orthopedic doctor for a checkup and he said I needed a new hip. Why not I figured, what could go wrong right? Everything, I found out. I was on medical leave for a while waiting for my hip to work again. I finally did make an attempt to resume my duties. Things had changed quite drastically in my absence. Pat and most of the nursing home caseworkers had transferred to another unit. The nursing home unit was now filled up with new caseworkers who, not unlike the old caseworkers knew virtually nothing about nursing home Medicaid eligibility. Wouldn't you know it; all of the new caseworkers were women/minority, Vera would think that was funny. They were complimented by a new supervisor Jim; who not unlike Pat didn't know much about the work either so I guess everything kind of balanced out. Jim, not the same guy from

chapter 3 at the courthouse, was a former dormitory supervisor at the county grounds. He liked to tell stories about how he and his charges would go out and steal vegetables from the public gardens on the county grounds. He bragged that no one could do anything about it as all of the patients he was responsible for were all wards of Milwaukee County and not considered responsible for their actions.

Every day back seemed to bring another surprise. Elaine now worked on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet after getting laid off from the medical complex. She was still a supervisor but now with a private office which I'm sure made her discipline sessions with her boyfriend/master a much more private affair, thankfully. At least she no longer wore her nurse ratchet uniforms much to my relief. Elaine's statements about 'weeding out the Neanderthals' came to mind as I moved about the building. It looked like the purge was complete.

Nearly all of the white guys were gone. When I first started as a caseworker, the department director, a white guy, came to visit the training room. He mentioned at one point that the department was 80% female. That was then, now the department looked like it was at least 95% female and minority. Percentages this high in the past evoked claims of institutional racism and sexism and were the basis for many lawsuits; what would Vera say now? The only white guys left besides me were older and waiting to retire and all but hiding underneath their desks.

You know if you create a privileged group or groups within an organization and let them grow unchecked, eventually they will overwhelm the whole organization. Some people know how to play that affirmative action card game quite well. No one can do anything

about it either. The hiring and staffing policies were created or inspired decades ago by court orders that were issued as a result of lawsuits filed by women and minority groups against those evil white men. You can't just change these things unless you have another court order to nullify or modify the existing order otherwise you're in contempt as they say.

Leeann got promoted as incredible as it seemed. This was the same person that took so much unpaid time off. Cary was now a supervisor. The same caseworker that couldn't get her work done so she had to take it home with her was now supervising other caseworkers. Randy got promoted. Yes, the same caseworker that committed more fraud than anyone in the west annex save for angry Frank. Even Vanessa, the black woman caseworker who thought it was so funny to torment the white guy from the photo id booth years earlier got promoted.

I had an interesting conversation with one of my old supervisors Peggy. She had stopped in to speak with a supervisor she knew. He was interviewing for a position that her daughter had applied for. He told Peggy that her daughter's name was on the eligibility list and he was going to hire her. This was before he had even interviewed anyone! That's a violation of civil service rules and even misconduct in public office but no one cared. Peggy thought the whole situation was hilarious, just another day in the service of the county.

One of the clerical workers that I knew from the west annex got promoted to supervisor as well eventually. I always thought that was quite amusing. When she worked at the west annex she liked to 'play' supervisor. Everyone including the supervisors knew about it. Whenever the mood struck her I guess, she would tell callers to the office that she was a supervisor. She would even make up answers to questions that people had. Her husband made it a point to visit her at work and would wander the west annex going through our offices one by one. That didn't bother Pat or angry Frank either.

Speaking of angry Frank, he came into the office on 12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet to submit a nursing home Medicaid application. Maybe it was fate that brought angry Frank and I together one last time, or maybe angry Frank knew I was back from medical leave and wanted me to see how well he had done in his retirement. Angry Frank had transformed. He was even happy to see me. It was almost creepy. I didn't want to turn my back on him if you know what I mean. He was now, Frank the happy gay man. Then he gave me his business card and I understood why.

Happy Frank was now a Medicaid eligibility consultant for several of the Medicaid lawyers he had committed fraud for. I finally understood what attorney Dave meant by 'putting money aside under the table'. Happy Frank was now getting his payoff. I have no idea how much happy Frank got but it was enough to make him smile. Happy Frank had committed enough Medicaid fraud to spend several lifetimes in prison so you just have to hope he was compensated accordingly. Poor Ray, he was doing essentially the

same thing as happy Frank but he got arrested. Franks buddies, attorneys Bruce and Dave are still around. Attorney Bruce is listed on SuperLawyers.com.

I had to resign my post in 2002 not long after my return from medical leave as my hip surgery just didn't work out. Initially, I notified the human resource office of my predicament as well as Jim. Jim in turn wrote me up for taking off so much work and then threatened to fire me. I then received a letter from a woman I never met who worked in an office I had never heard of. She informed me that I could return to work as my supervisor Jim had agreed to move my desk 20 feet closer to the door. It was approximately a half block walk to my desk from the parking lot. How 20 feet would make any difference was beyond me. But so it went.

Years later I called the pension office to inquire about my future pension benefits. The clerk, a minority female of course, told me that my pension wasn't that much since I had quit and never came back to work. She made it sound so easy to get hired back into Milwaukee County. I couldn't tell if she was sarcastic or delusional but I thought I should give her the benefit of a doubt. I went on the human resources website and applied for a position just to see. I provided all my county experience and education. Less than 24 hours later I received a rejection letter from a clerk, minority female of course, informing me that I didn't have the 'skill set' for the job. I'm not even sure what that meant.

I doubt if much has changed in the years since I left. I'm sure a whole new cast of characters and scoundrels have come along to fill the void left by happy Frank and Vera

and the others. I'm sure there are some token white guys around somewhere and I bet they know their place although I never did. Hopefully someone finished the booger mural by now. Maybe there are daily showings and you can make an appointment to see it. I bet there's even a whole new crop of Medicaid lawyers doing their thing.

Who knows what kind of schemes and scams have come and gone in the years since I left but I bet they were big. The personal annuity is probably just a story now if anyone even knows about it. I don't think anyone could pull the same scam twice could they? I'm sure people have moved on to bigger and better scams now. I never did get the big promotion or payoff or even a gift basket but I still have the memories. I don't know what became of most of my former co-workers and supervisors along with the office visitors that collectively made so many of my days eventful. I don't know if or how many are still on the job but I'm sure they have nothing to fear as no doubt the statute of limitations has long since expired by now. I must acknowledge all of them as it was their behaviors and mannerisms along with a seeming inability to realize how far their voices carried which has provided me with a near endless amount of material from which to draw from. Thank you. In the end, I know I can't complain. Don't forget, all's fair in love and work.

**End**