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Instructor's Name

ENGL 1013

Date

My Experience at Tyson's

After looking for work for six months with no success, I reluctantly decided to apply for a job at one of the Tyson plants at Russellville. Having heard many unpleasant stories about chicken processing plants, I wasn't enthusiastic about the idea of working there. I went for an interview, secretly hoping they wouldn't hire me. But to my dismay, out of all the women that were applying, I was the only one told to report to work the next night.

I arrived that first evening at five o'clock sharp, full of optimism. My shift began at 5 p.m. and ended at 2 a.m. I was immediately taken into a breakroom to watch a film on company rules and regulations. Then I was shown to the supply room, where they issued me smocks, gloves, a hair bonnet, and scissors. Next, I was off to meet my supervisor, Jim.

The first thing Jim said to me was that I looked too fragile to be working on his line and that he didn't know where he was going to put me. I decided not to be discouraged by his comment. After all, could fragile not be considered feminine? Smiling back at him, I told him I would give it my best shot. He just grunted and said, "Follow me."

I trailed him down a long hall lined with rooms in which chicken was being cooked. My optimism soared. Surely I could do this job. We briskly passed all of the cooking rooms and went through two huge metal doors. As we entered the chiller, the temperature dropped about sixty degrees. I was led over to a line where several women were busy cutting chicken breasts. Jim pointed to a crate of chicken and said, "Get busy."

As I began to pick up the chicken, I noticed piles of ice everywhere. The temperature in the freezer was 32-35 degrees. I couldn't believe this. I am the type of person who thrives in ninety degree temperatures. I knew I was in trouble.

The deboned chicken breasts were brought to me in big crates. I had to cut at least fifteen crates per night. I had to reach into the crate and get a chicken breast, weigh it, cut it into the shape of a teardrop, weigh it again, and throw it into one of two bins. Each bin held cut chicken that weighed a certain number of grams. The scraps were thrown into a separate bin. The whole process was supposed to take half a minute or less for each breast. I was cutting one every ninety seconds.

Although I began to cut the chicken faster as the night wore on, I was slowed by the effects of the cold temperature. My hands became so cold I could not feel the scissors I was holding. I would try to talk, and my breath seemed to freeze and hang in the air. After four hours, I was shaking so badly from the cold that I wasn't able to stand in one spot. I was wet from all the water that was constantly being sprayed to wash the floor and the scales. Wanting the shift to end, I began to look at the clock every minute or so. Looking at the clock, however, just made the night drag on and on.

The other workers seemed to have adapted to the cold pretty well. Some wore only jeans and T-shirts. I, on the other hand, had on three pairs of long johns (tops and bottoms), a pair of jeans, three pairs of socks, and two sweatshirts. Even wearing all of this, I was still cold.

The highlight of the night came fifteen minutes before the shift was over, when I had to take my scales into the washroom to scrub them. I entered a large room with sinks lining one wall and was immediately encased by steam. While standing at the sink, I would finally begin to thaw for the first time in eight hours. Every night I would count the seconds until the time came

to clean the scales.

After they were dry, the scales had to be carried back into the freezer and placed on the line for the next shift. By then it would be time to clock out.

Arriving at home, I would spend the next four hours trying to thaw. I have never been so cold, wet, and miserable as I was at that plant. After four nights, I quit.

I am now enrolled in college with the hopes of training for a job I'll enjoy. The thought of having to go back to work in a place like that gives me the incentive to give school one hundred and ten percent. I am thankful now for the experience I received in those four nights. Had I not worked at Tyson, I might have found a job elsewhere that was not as difficult. Having done that, I might never have challenged myself to further my education.