

ELVIRA: A Testimonio on Employment and Sisterhood

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In 1977, after living in West Germany for five years as a military wife, I returned to my hometown, San Antonio, Texas. I was anxious to get a job, and I thought I might be able to find employment at Fort Sam Houston. So, one morning I decided to apply at AAFEE, the company that ran the PX on base. Pencil thin, I donned the nice business suit I had recently purchased, a black skirt and gray jacket with black piping. To complete the vision I had conjured for working at Fort Sam, I chose a white blouse with ruffles and pearl buttons. Black panty hose and shining black pumps sealed the deal. I was ready to go.

I drove to the base and located the office where I needed to go apply. Entering a nicely air conditioned room, I was greeted by Elvira and told her I wanted to apply for a job. She asked me, "Can you type?" I smiled and told her, "Yes." She then asked me to wait a few minutes so she could set up the space for me to take the required typing test.

Soon enough, Elvira reappeared and led me into a very large office where several people were busy at work. I sat down at the assigned desk, turned the typewriter on, and began the test.

Clickity... Clack... Diiinnng, I pushed the return lever on the typewriter.

Clickity... Clack...

My fingers moved faster and faster. I was so fast, it felt like people stopped working to watch. Elated at their attention, I continued with the sensation that all were looking at me. Then, it was over.

I finished the test and handed it to Elvira. Then she led me to the reception area, where she asked me to wait.

A few minutes later, she joined me in the lobby and directed me to follow her to her desk so we could go over the typing test. She sat me down, and when I looked up, I noticed Elvira had a very stern look on her face. Glancing at me, she pulled her glasses down on her nose. I sat there. I waited. I just knew that I had done well on the test.

“You typed *three words!*” She told me in slow motion, as if to make her point.

“Three words a minute?” I asked.

“Nooooo. Three words. *Total,*” she said.

“Well, that’s not too bad considering I got a ‘D-’ in typing,” I responded, smiling.

It was then that Elvira’s stern face turned into a soft smile. This very professional woman put my test down on her desk, stating, “With this typing score, I cannot hire you to work in this office. But, I admire your spunk and effort to find a job. So, I can offer you employment at the PX answering the phone and checking the military ID’s. Would you be interested in that position?”

“Of course I would. By the way, can I ask you a question?”

She nodded.

“How many words-a-minute are required for a position here?”

“At least 50,” she replied.

“Oh, that’s a lot!”

I drove home happy I had found a job and was determined to help Elvira out. My sister Evelyn, who lived across the street from me in a very small cul-de-sac, needed a job. So, I went straight to her house.

When she answered the door, I rushed in and asked her if she wanted a job.

“I might be interested,” she said. After all, she had been unemployed for a while.

I told her where I had just come from and that there were several openings. Since she knew how to type, maybe she would be able to get a job, too.

“Come on, what do you have to lose? Go apply today. Right now!” I was so excited.

Evelyn looked at me and declared, “I don’t have anything to wear to go apply for a job.” She whined that she hadn’t typed in a long time. Then came a bunch of “yada...yada...blah...blah...blah.” Just more excuses.

A light bulb went on in my head. I asked Evelyn if she had an extra pair of sweats and a t-shirt.

“Sure I do. Why?”

“You can borrow my suit, complete with shoes and pantyhose.”

Before she could change her mind, I slipped out of my outfit and swiftly

changed into her clothes. Quicker than an eyelash flutter, we were on our way to Fort Sam Houston.

My sister, Evelyn, and I look alike. We look so very much alike, that when we walked into the office in our switched clothes, Elvira's mouth dropped to the floor.

I cheerily announced, "Hi! I am back. I figured, since you gave me a job, I would help you fill the typist position you still have open in this office. This is my sister. She does know how to type!"

For a moment I wasn't sure what Elvira was going to do. She just stood there in shock.

Finally, throwing her hands up in the air, with a sigh, she said, "Okay, give me a few minutes to get the station ready for the typing test." A few moments later, Elvira led Evelyn to the typewriter.

I waited in the lobby. The *clickity...clack...ding* sound had some harmony to it, going faster and in a different rhythm than mine. When she was done, Evelyn returned to the lobby, followed by Elvira.

She looked very pleased. With her eyebrows raised, Elvira asked my sister to join her at her desk.

I couldn't hold back my excitement and burst out, "How many words per minute did she type?!"

Elvira looked at my sister and asked, "May I?" Evelyn nodded in affirmation. With a huge toothy smile, Elvira responded, "*Ninety-seven!*"