

my first job

Dwight Brock**Collier County Clerk of Courts**

>>I grew up in **Vernon, Fla.**, a rural farming community where children were the laborers for the families. That was the way our community survived. My first jobs were all hard labor.

In the summers during high school I'd work for friends' families, picking watermelons and loading them onto trucks, baling hay and stacking it in the barns. I don't remember how much money I made, but it wasn't a whole lot. I spent it on movies, food, shotgun shells—stuff that high-schoolers spent their money on at the time.

The summer between my freshman and sophomore years at college I was a construction laborer. I did a little bit of everything—drove nails, hauled dirt, cleaned concrete, scraped floors. I remember after that summer the gentleman I worked for sent my dad a letter. He said when I came asking for a job, I was such a little thing he didn't know what he'd do with me; I was probably 120 pounds soaking wet. By the time the summer was over, he said I could outwork any two of his guys combined. I will never forget it.

While I really didn't like anything about those jobs—except that they gave me spending money—they did teach me the principles and values that make me who I am today. I learned that if I didn't work, I didn't have. My parents were educated farmers and Southern Baptists. They always stressed being ethical and principled in everything you did. If it was worth doing, I had to do the best I could. As my father would have said, those jobs were teaching me the importance of learning that I had to work to get what I want.

—Lauren S. Bernaldo