

Inn

Continued From Page 1-A

the day, she said to Mrs. Shurling, "It's time for me to get on the road." She says Mrs. Shurling gave her \$3.50 for the day's work, although, neither woman indicated whether this was Miss Stripling's normal wage. "I work inside and I work outside," Miss Stripling says today in a defiant voice. "It seems like I should make more than that."

No one expects a maid to earn much money. Traditionally, the domestic — performing menial household chores which most women do for free on a daily basis in their own homes — has been in the lowest category of wage earner.

Today, thousands of women are paid below the federal minimum wage standard — sometimes legally, sometimes illegally — to clean rooms in motels and hotels across America. The motel maids comprise one of the nation's largest, and most visible, groups of underpaid workers.

In the year ending Sept. 20, 1979, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Standards Administration identified 13,337 hotel or motel employees, most of them maids, who illegally had been paid a total of almost \$2 million below the federal minimum wage, \$2.90 an hour. As is the case with most jobs, the eight Southeastern states claimed more than their share of violations — 5,376 workers and \$903,167 in underpayments.

Daisy Stripling, however, could not be included in those statistics. Like millions of other Americans, she works for a small retail business, one which is not required to pay the federal minimum wage. Even though these workers often do jobs that parallel in difficulty those of other workers in larger businesses, they are not protected by the law.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, motels — and nearly all retail businesses — must pay the federal minimum wage only if they have gross incomes of at least \$250,000 a year. The Almar Tourist Inn grosses far less than that amount.

In a sense, then, Daisy Stripling falls within a gap in the law. If she worked for a larger motel, she would be covered. She also would have to earn at least \$2.90 an hour if she were a domestic in a private home — a specific amendment of the Fair Labor Standards Act covers those maids.

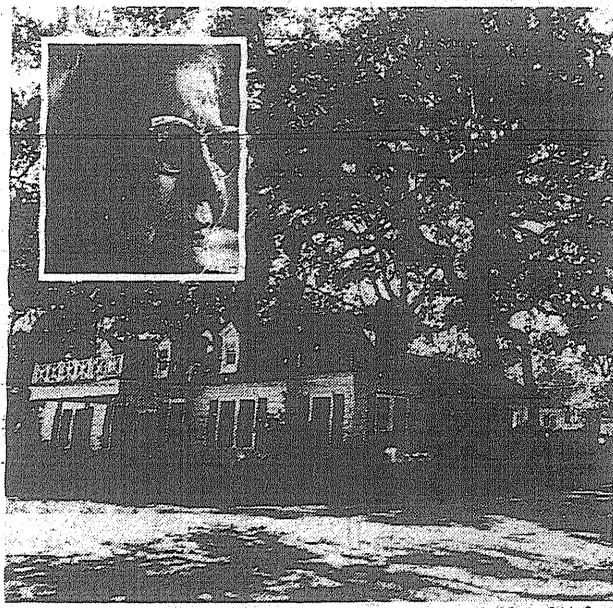
As it is, Daisy Stripling not only works for little pay, she has none of the job protections, benefits, retirement plans, paid sick days and vacations which millions of other Americans routinely expect from their employers.

One day last summer, Mrs. Shurling got fed up with Miss Stripling's dogs. The dogs showed up with the maid each morning, and they nosed around in the vegetable garden and, in general, made a nuisance of themselves. Miss Stripling said the dogs just followed her to work, but Mrs. Shurling believed that they were Miss Stripling's and came with her from home, where she lived with her mother and father.

Finally, Mrs. Shurling said, "You bring those dogs here one more time and I'm not going to let you in." On a Monday, Miss Stripling brought the dogs and was out of a job, at least for the moment. One of the boarders came up to her and asked, "Are those nigger dogs or white folks' dogs?" Miss Stripling went home.

Each morning during the summer months, a bus in Savannah fills with maids heading to work in the motels or private homes along Savannah Beach. Most are middle-aged black women wearing blue jeans or polyester slacks, their hair covered by small turban-like hats, and carrying large bags. They are a friendly, smiling group. As a woman gets on the bus, she says, "Good morning," and is met with a chorus of greetings in return.

Only a few of the maids care to talk about the money they are paid. One says \$10 a day, for about six hours' work.



Mrs. Willie Shurling (inset) Owns The Almar Tourist Inn

Another says \$7 a day. A third says she is paid "very well," but does not elaborate.

An examination of the wages paid and hours worked by motel maids posed a problem similar to that encountered in examinations of other low-paying industries: Even when workers and their bosses both agreed to talk about a job, they almost invariably disagreed about the hours worked or the tasks performed.

It was for this reason that one of the women riding the Savannah bus near the end of the summer was Charlene Smith-Williams, a reporter for The Atlanta Constitution. She was looking for a job as a motel maid to find out firsthand what the work was like and how much she would be paid.

Miss Smith-Williams worked for two weeks as a motel maid, outside Savannah and in Atlanta. In Atlanta, she worked part-time for eight days at a motel off Interstate 75, earning \$2.50 an hour. To find a job around Savannah, she telephoned those listed in the Yellow Pages. Motel managers invariably would not discuss wages over the phone, and most had no job openings.

There was an opening, however, at the Almar Tourist Inn in Garden City. Mrs. Shurling, the owner, had recently dismissed her longtime maid, Daisy Stripling.

Miss Smith-Williams reported to work at 7:30 a.m., greeted then by Mrs. Shurling, a smiling, white-haired woman in her 70s.

The pay for the job was to be \$1.25 an hour.

The new maid started by cleaning a bathroom. Using steel wool, she bent over the toilet bowl and scrubbed until it began to come clean. Then she cleaned the sink and the tub, and washed the woodwork, the baseboards and the radiator. She got down on her knees to scrub the floor. Every now and then, Mrs. Shurling looked in to find out how the maid was doing.

After an hour, the maid moved to the bedroom, which was furnished with two twin beds, an imitation Oriental throw rug, a dresser, a chest, a rocking chair, a smaller chair and two luggage racks. She carefully washed and polished the pine-paneled walls and moved the furniture to get to the baseboards. She washed the woodwork and the baseboards, cleaned the windowsills, and vacuumed the rug.

Mrs. Shurling came in and told the maid to clean out the closet. The maid dusted some cobwebs from the shelves. She wiped the floor of the closet with a polish designed to eliminate bugs. Then, under instructions from the inn's proprietor, she polished the floor and the furniture in the bedroom.

Shortly after noon, the new maid vacuumed the main living room at the Almar Tourist Inn and put a load of Mrs. Shurling's clothes into the washer in the laundry room.

At 1:15 p.m., Mrs. Shurling gave the new maid her lunch — a bowl of homemade soup and some Coca-Cola. Lunch lasted 20 minutes, then the work day resumed.

The afternoon's first task was in the garden outside the inn, picking pole beans. There were wasps buzzing around the bean vines, so Mrs. Shurling produced a spray can. "I don't want you to get stung by a wasp, so take this spray can out there and next time they come by, you spray them," she said.

The work was easier after that. The maid picked the pole beans and carried them inside, then began washing the dishes and folding the laundry.

Mrs. Shurling's daughter, a woman in her 50s, was visiting and noticed a light bulb was out in a room the maid had just cleaned. "I told my mother that the room looked good, but if you were at the Holiday Inn they would have sent you back," the daughter said.

The Almar Tourist Inn would look decidedly eccentric beside one of the large chain motels with their tiered balconies and plate-glass windows. The inn was built at least 40 years ago and, when it was new, must have been attractive to travelers because of the comfortable, home-like appearance that its rustic name implies. In those days, nearby U.S. 17 was the main route south along the coast, and travelers could stop over for the night before going on down to Savannah Beach or the islands farther south.

During an interview recently, Mrs. Shurling recalled that her late husband, Mark, bought the Almar Inn in 1945. At the time, and until 1968, they owned and ran a coal and wood business in downtown Savannah, and they were looking for an investment. And the inn prospered at first, as wartime relaxation of gas rationing ended, Mrs. Shurling said.

But bigger, more modern motels with color television sets and swimming pools

were built. And the construction of U.S. 95, a four-lane interstate, dealt a severe blow to the service stations and motels that had grown up along old 17.

To adapt, the Shurlings began taking boarders at the inn. And they rented spaces for trailers behind the inn on the three-acre property.

Five years ago, Mr. Shurling — who had sold his business and retired to a life of relaxation and hunting — died, and Mrs. Shurling was left the inn. She considered selling out, but found she had grown attached to it.

These days, most of the people who stay at the Almar Inn are construction workers and contractors who move in for a week or more at a time. Mrs. Shurling herself lives in a small apartment in the inn.

The inn is shaped like a T, with 10 rooms off a hallway down the longer leg of the building. Rooms are inexpensive, rented for from \$25 to \$35 a week. Eight rooms were occupied when Miss Smith-Williams went to work there, although Mrs. Shurling said the inn usually is full. Trailer spaces out back rent for \$35 per month, and 19 of 25 were occupied.

The reporter worked for three days. Each morning, she rode the bus to work from downtown Savannah, a 45-cent fare each way, and started work at 8 a.m. She began each of the last two days out in the back yard, picking up the scores of pears that regularly dropped from the inn's pear trees during the night. Later in the day, she would take them over to the home of Mrs. Shurling's sister, where they were peeled and preserved in glass jars.

On the second day at the inn, the maid was asked to clean rooms numbered 2, 4 and 5. In all, she worked from 8 o'clock until five.

The third day on the job, after picking up the pears, the new maid spent a good hour clearing an empty trailer lot in back of the inn, taking away the bottles, empty cans, water hoses and a deflated rubber swimming pool. A plastic Christ-

mas tree lay in a soaked corrugated box. The maid next emptied three garbage cans full of rainwater standing near the house, then scoured them with water and cleansers. She rinsed them out and stood them on end to dry near the house.

She washed windows in the kitchen and scrubbed around the refrigerator on the back porch. She pulled all the sheets from the beds and put them in the washing machine. She washed the dishes and cleaned the stove. She ran the sheets through the dryer and made up the beds.

Some of the rooms she cleaned were neater than others. One room, rented by a man living alone, was slightly dusty but otherwise in pretty good shape.

Another room was in a jumble: paperbacks under the table, belts strewn all over the bed, piles of dirty clothes on the floor. She had to change the beds, empty the trash baskets and change the towels until it was time for lunch. She sat at the kitchen table and gulped down a small helping of chicken and dressing and drank a Coke. After a few minutes, she went back to work.

The maid swept Mrs. Shurling's room and scrubbed down the floor and cleaned the kitchen for the second time. She swept the front porch, watered the plants, moved them to a place with more sunlight and cleaned an old rocker. "Would you scrub the floor in room number four?" Mrs. Shurling asked. So the maid scrubbed the floor and cleaned the bathroom. "Do you think you could vacuum the bathroom?" the proprietor asked.

By the end of the third day, Mrs. Shurling was quite friendly.

"That's about 25 hours, isn't it?" she asked when the new maid finished her third day on the job.

The calculation was accurate. "I'm going to have to pay you \$20 in cash and \$10 in a check because I don't have change for another \$20," Mrs. Shurling said.

The owner of the Almar Tourist Inn

wrote out a check, handing it over with the \$20 bill.

Three days of work at \$1.25 an hour.

It was not long afterward that Daisy Stripling appeared at the front door of the inn, and Mrs. Shurling took Miss Stripling back. Miss Stripling was still working there last week, burning leaves in the yard and scowling about her pay.

In an interview on the shady front porch of the inn, Mrs. Shurling showed admiration for Miss Stripling's loyalty. Loyal maids were hard to come by, she said; young people were different these days, and Miss Stripling did a good job.

The inn's proprietor declined only to talk about what she paid Daisy. "I don't want to publish that," she said.

A good case can be made that the work arrangement at the Almar Tourist Inn is just the type of situation legislators intended to remain free of control by minimum-wage laws. A small business is not required to pay a wage that might be burdensome. And an unsophisticated woman, who might have difficulty finding a job elsewhere, has work to fill her days and some money to contribute to her family.

"I'm not trying to get rich," Mrs. Shurling said recently. "I'm just trying to keep the property up and keep the taxes paid. I guess if I had a mortgage, I wouldn't have been able to keep it."

The inn's proprietor moves slowly around the place. With Miss Stripling's help, she is able to keep the establishment relatively clean and available to boarders.

Miss Stripling and her employer get along pretty well, Mrs. Shurling said. She gives Miss Stripling her lunch, and they talk about things.

As Mrs. Shurling speaks, Miss Stripling continues to burn leaves. She gathers the leaves into small piles with a rake and lights them, then steps aside to watch them burn and to rest a moment.

WEDNESDAY: A company's 40-year battle with minimum wage laws.



Barons Service Station Where Atlanta Constitution Reporter Steve Johnson Worked

Deductions

Continued From Page 1-A

visor) that I had a little staple gun at home, but she said, "No."

Ask any of the wage and hour men whose job it is to enforce the Fair Labor Standards Act, the law guaranteeing at least a \$2.90 hourly wage to nearly 58 million American workers, and they will tell you that deductions like the one taken from Agnes Glover's check are one way thousands of workers today wind up making less than the minimum.

Deductions from paychecks of these workers are not automatically illegal. They become illegal, however, when they force earnings below the minimum wage.

Richard Robinette, director of the U.S. Department of Labor's wage-hour division for the Southeastern region, cites as an example young workers employed as busboys, dishwashers, or counter men at many restaurants and fast-food chains. "The employer deducts from your paycheck 25 cents an hour for meals — whether you eat them or not," he said. "Many of them don't tell you. By the time you're done, you're lucky to take in \$2.50 an hour."

Clearly, this violation has been a prime target of the government's minimum wage enforcers lately. In the year ending Sept. 20, 1979, 166,867 employees in "eating, drink" establishments nationwide were found to have been illegally paid almost \$16 million below the minimum wage. The Southeast accounted for 53,636 of the restaurant workers and just under \$6 million of the underpayments.

The fact that most employers are aware of the law in this area is shown by what happened at Denimite, where Agnes Glover worked.

Nick Francis, production manager for the commercial laundry, said the business had stopped taking the cost of staplers out of employees' paychecks on advice from the company lawyer. Francis said the deductions ceased about a year ago, and that any since then — such as the one appearing on Mrs. Glover's June check — were inadvertent.

"If it has been done, it was an oversight," he said.

Francis said the company in any event traditionally returned the amount of the deduction when a departing employee returned the work tool. But he said many workers took the tool when they left.

"We get a lot of transients," he said. "We had more than 200 employees in one year. At \$10 a piece, the staplers can get pretty expensive."

Several employees attributed the high employee turnover to working conditions at the laundry, which they described as frequently unbearably hot, especially in summer. "It's a laundry," agreed Francis. "Of course it's hot."

Jim H. Smith said the system of deductions in the gas station business depressed him. But he admitted having been a participant in that system, which he said was widespread.

A short, slight man of about 30 wear-

ing jeans and a T-shirt, he sat behind the control panel of a north Atlanta self-service station watching carefully through the window as cars pulled up to the self-service pumps.

Smith liked being the only one responsible for the pumps, for the cigarettes he sold, and for the soda in a cooler in the office.

At the last station where Smith worked, also as manager, he had to rely on other employees. He had to worry about their stealing or allowing "drive-aways" — customers who filled their cars with gasoline and then sped off without paying.

These problems would cause shortages in the cash register. Those shortages, in turn, would come out of Smith's commission. So he would deduct the shortages from the employees' wages.

Smith explained how he did it: "It's not taken from their paycheck, because the law says you can only take out a certain amount. But if they came up \$5 short, you'd try to get that no matter what the law said."

"The way we'd handle it is to cash their paycheck. If you let them take the check away, you'll never get your money. So I would cash the paycheck on the spot and collect my shortage."

"I collected \$45 from one guy one week. His daddy raised Cain with the company, and I had to pay it back. The kid was 18 years old, and he goes home and says something like, 'I only made \$20 because I had to pay a \$45 shortage.'"

The station manager estimated he took an average of \$6 a week from employees, and "in some cases a little bit more."

"I had one guy, a new guy, and he comes up \$100 short on a shift. There's no doubt in my mind that he took it. But he wouldn't give it to me. So I fired him."

"I let many, many go," he said.

Shortages of cash at the end of the day are a fact of life in the gas station business. Smith was not alone in describing how such shortages, and the common deduction systems that go along with them, often fell most heavily on the lowest-level employee, the attendant or cashier.

The U.S. Department of Labor identified 32,456 workers at service stations nationwide who were illegally paid \$3.9 million under the minimum wage between September 1978 and September 1979. In the Southeast, 5,625 station employees were listed as having been paid \$1.1 million below the minimum.

Some of the cases approach the bizarre: One gas station attendant, robbed at gunpoint, was made to pay the loss from his salary. Another attendant, working for an Atlanta-based service station chain, proved to be illiterate and was actually given two paychecks made out for \$0.00 after losses wiped out his entire salary.

The manager of Barons service station said the quality he is looking for in employees is simply "experience countin'

money." And he warned a new employee that mistakes would come out of his salary.

"Folks mess up and then complain to me when it comes out of their paycheck," he said. "I get folks that come in every payday and complain to me that they aren't gettin' the money they were promised. But it either comes out of your pocket or mine."

The station is just a block off Interstate 20 west of Atlanta, at the corner of Fulton Industrial Boulevard and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive — a busy location. It is directly across the street from the Fulton County airport, beside a string of fast-food restaurants and motels and not far from the Six Flags amusement park.

The station, one of 23 around the state run by Doraville-based Triton Inc., has 14 pumps, all self-service, surrounding a small office for the cashiers, who sell cigarettes as well as gasoline. On a corner of the station, to attract attention, is a model oil well, its pump rising and falling. Large letters on a canopy over the pumps read: "Save with self service."

To find out how inevitable cash shortages were in the business and what would happen if they occurred, Steve Johnson, an Atlanta Constitution reporter, took a job this summer at the station as an attendant-cashier. Johnson answered advertisements for openings and applied at several, using his real name. Eventually, three stations offered him jobs.

Charles Fowler, the station manager, said the job would pay the minimum wage, \$2.90 an hour, with time and a half for overtime. But shortages might be deducted from the total.

"You gotta be careful with all of these computers," he said, gesturing toward the gadgets which show how much gas customers have pumped. "If you don't collect from folks right, then the register doesn't balance out right at the end of the day, and that comes out of your paycheck."

Johnson began work at 2 p.m. on a Saturday. There was one other employee on the evening shift — Arthur Bell (not his real name), a neat man of 27 who had worked at the station for three days.

At the start of each shift, the manager took a reading of the gas pump meters and counted the cartons of cigarettes on the shelf. At the end of the shift, he recounted the meters and the cigarettes to determine how much money should have been collected.

The cashiers began each shift with \$100, a third of that in coins. As soon as several hundred dollars was collected, an employee placed the money in an envelope, signed the envelope with his name, recorded the total in a log book and dropped the envelope into a safe.

The two men worked over a control panel showing which pumps were in use, how much gas was pumped and how much money the customer owed.

Continued on next page.

Some 'Surprised' ...I Pay \$2.50'

"I know it's worth a lot more — I don't ask anyone to do anything I wouldn't do myself," said Jane Love who, with her husband Sandy, owns and manages the 39-unit Rose Garden Motel on Interstate 75 a few miles south of downtown Atlanta. Mrs. Love, 41, sat in the motel office by an old-fashioned telephone switchboard and talked about the wages paid the motel maid — \$2.65 an hour at the moment, she said. Earlier, Atlanta Constitution reporter Charlene Smith-Williams had worked at the motel as a maid for \$2.50 an hour. Like the Almar Tourist Inn in Savannah, the Atlanta motel seemingly is small enough to fall short of coverage under the federal minimum wage law, which requires a wage of at least \$2.90 an hour for employees of businesses which gross more than \$250,000 a year. Rooms at the Rose Garden Motel rent nightly for \$18 or, on a weekly basis, for from \$65 to \$85. The rooms are similar to those of other modern motels, but the motel has one unusual feature — the stunning hillside rose garden facing the interstate. Across the highway are three other motels: a Best Western, Mark Inn and a Holiday Inn.

next thing I knew we were here. It didn't bother me, though. Georgia's my home. All my family lives here. He always wanted to go into the motel business. He's an ambitious person. He doesn't like to stand still. Now we're in the liquor store business too. The store is down there on the property.

"Usually, we've always just had the one maid. I cleaned the rooms myself for the first 1½ years we had this place. Then Mildred was with me for about a year. She moved to Alabama.

"Since then, I've had a couple of other ones who work one day and then don't show up for a few days. Then they come back and expect their jobs to be waiting there for them.

"How do I decide what to pay? I just don't know. I start them out at \$2.50 an hour. They come and go so fast. I want to see whether they're going to work out. Then we set a wage. It's a lot of book keeping and all. The one now she's getting \$2.65."

"I cleaned these rooms myself. I know it's worth a lot more — I don't ask anyone to do anything I wouldn't myself. But that's just what we start them out at.

"A lot of the different ones that I hire have been surprised that I pay \$2.50.

"This one girl — it was obvious she didn't want to work. If they don't come in, my daughter and I clean the rooms."



Jane Love and her husband have operated a motel on I-75 in south Atlanta for three years. She says she never asks a maid to do anything she would not do herself. (Staff Photo—Calvin Cruce)