

Woman Barber Cuts Men's Hair

It was 1945. America had won the war. Margaret Williams lost her job.

Like millions of other American women, Mrs. Williams, a former clerk in a downtown department store, joined the war effort—she became a drill press operator at the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Corporation here. (The \$89-million plant, built in 1942, now houses the Bendix Corporation and many U.S. government offices at Bannister and Troost.)

After the war, jobs for men and women were hard to come by. With the help of her brother, a returning G.I., Mrs. Williams, then single, bought a record shop at 2457 Brooklyn and opened it for business in 1949. During those early years, there was always a decision in the back of her mind, to start a second business, either a beauty shop or a barber shop. In 1953, the black woman made up her mind, studied at a college on E. 12th Street, did an apprenticeship for 18 months and then opened the second business.

These days, Mrs. Williams works alone at one business (she gave up the record store when the work load got too much). She is a barber and the owner of Margaret's Barber Shop.

"When I applied to barber college it was unusual for a woman to be in this business," Mrs. Williams, whose age is her secret, said. "At first, they rejected me. They said they hadn't been taking any women. But then they checked around. They let me in. They decided to try one out for a while—that's what they said, exactly."

Mrs. Williams, married to a business representative for a local union, worked long hours when she first started. About 17 years ago she decided she needed to manage her time and her customer's time more efficiently so she set up an appointment system. Instead of keeping the shop open from 8 a.m. until after 9 p.m., frequently with hours in between with no customers, Mrs. Williams now works fewer but more productive hours. Although there is a 6 p.m. closing law for barber shops, Mrs. Williams explained, customers often flocked in five minutes before closing time. Since she could wait on those who had arrived before closing time, she often stayed late into the night.

"People told me the appointment system would never work," she said. "But it has. I wanted something to manage my time better. I found it."

From her shop, Mrs. Williams has seen changes: In her business—there are many more women barbers now, she said. In styles—Mrs. Williams weathered the late 60s when men wore

their hair long and got few if any haircuts. In attitudes—of men toward hair styles. In the neighborhood—in which she works but does not live.

"For so many years, a man just got his hair cut off," she said. "It was never styled. When a man walks into the shop now, I like to have him leave looking altogether different, better. I've always liked the way men looked. And I like them to look as good as they can—hair's an important part of that."

Mrs. Williams runs a tight ship. She believes in making the customers comfortable, but she needs certain rules to help her be as efficient as she can.

"You have to have dos and don'ts in your business," she said. "The conduct in a barber shop means more than anything. It means everything to me. But I'm so organized that I don't have any problems with that."

Mrs. Williams knows she could have moved her business as many of her customers left the neighborhood. But she said she is staying where she is. Many of her customers, some from as far away as Topeka, come back to her for haircuts, permanents, styling.

"I kind of like being close to downtown. So many people don't like downtown but I do," she said. "I'm happy with my work, even with the slumps in the business. The hair got long. The neighborhood changed. There was a lot of population in this area at one time. Now there aren't as many people living around here."

"I like the people in this area, and I have a lot of friends here. The East Side had a lot of bad talk about it, but I like the people here. Not all of them are my customers, but many are my friends."

Mrs. Williams has not expanded her business much over the years; she recently converted one of her two barber chairs for use as a shampoo chair where she gives customers hair treatments and permanents. In years past, she had some women clients, when bobbed hair was in vogue, but that business has dwindled. Many of those women, however, brought their sons and husbands into the shop.

Mrs. Williams takes her business very seriously, although every once in a while a bit of humor comes through:

"Sometimes, with a client of mine who works at the postoffice or at one of the auto plants, someone will walk up to him and say: 'I like your hair. Who's your barber?' And they'll answer: 'My barber's name is Margaret.'"

"My barber's name is Margaret. It kind of sounds like a boy named Sue, doesn't it?"

Mother-In-Law Ugly? Grin and Bear It

Dear Ann Landers: Yesterday I looked out of my kitchen window and could have sworn I saw an old cow across the way, munching grass between two houses. I was just about to shout to my husband and tell him a cow had wandered out of the pasture and to go put her back in.

Thank heavens I was interrupted by a phone call. A second look out the window and I discovered the "cow" was my mother-in-law wearing saddle pants.

Three weeks ago I was frightened by the sight of a tramp hanging around the machine shed. It was dusk and I quickly locked all the doors. A few minutes later I saw my husband walking toward the tramp. When they embraced I nearly fainted. The "tramp" was his mother.

To put it bluntly, Ann, the woman looks so down at the heels that it makes me sick. She also scares the daylight out of me. My mother-in-law is 74 years old, has plenty of money to spend and is in good health. What can I do about this revolting situation?

Fargo, N.D.
Dear Fargo: Nothing. At her age she's not likely to change. So grin and bear it, honey. I just hope your eye-sight remains good and thank heavens you aren't trigger-happy.

A Hairy Question

Ann Landers

family as well. All he thinks about is his hair.

There is only one full bathroom in this house. We all have to wait to get in because Eric is either shampooing his golden locks or using the blow-dryer. Would you believe he goes through this routine every morning and every evening and on weekends it's three times a day?!

Eric helps himself to all my hair spray, rollers, pins, shampoo, conditioner—whatever he can lay his hands on. This kid is in front of the mirror about 80 per cent of the time.

All last summer he wouldn't go swimming because he was afraid of getting his hair wet and there might not be a blow-dryer handy.

When it rains he puts on a plastic hood and looks like a dunce. Any suggestions on how to cure this loon of what appears to be an obsession with his hair?

Sis
Dear Sis: He's 15? Time is your best ally. In the meantime, the family should insist he blow-dry elsewhere and free up the bathroom. And you should make him buy his own beauty supplies. Sis.



Mrs. Inez Kaiser... 'a unique person'

Strength Called Key To Blacks' Success

"The black woman in business has got to have something to survive. She's a unique person. She just has to be strong. She is not only a threat to the black man, she is a threat to the white man and to the white woman. She is a threat to everyone."

Those comments are from Mrs. Inez Kaiser, who is such a woman. When she began her business 18 years ago, she said, "I didn't have a dime to my name." Inez Kaiser and Associates, Inc., now thrives and provides specialized services to businesses in dealing with the black community—sales promotion, advertising, management assistance, marketing research, and something Mrs. Kaiser views as the major function of her firm these days, work with companies on equal opportunity employment and affirmative action plans.

Awards for her business work and projects with church and civic organizations are piled high on a table in her offices in the Ozark National Life Building. Mrs. Kaiser, businesswoman, lecturer, former teacher (she spent 22 years at it before starting her business), is also president of the National Association of Minority Women in Business, which she estimates now has 5,000 members across the country. Mrs. Kaiser has staged conferences for the association and attended meetings in several cities on women in business, including a White House meeting in March with former President Gerald R. Ford.

Mrs. Kaiser, 58, is critical of the scope of government assistance to minority-owned and women-owned businesses here and across the country, saying government contracts are hard to come by. And she is critical also of the lack of support given such businesses by the business community.

There are government programs to start businesses, but none to keep existing businesses going, Mrs. Kaiser said. There are conference sponsored by private business on the existence of minorities and women in business ownership, she said, but the private sector is not showing much interest. In terms of lending money or giving business, to those businesses.

Right now, Mrs. Kaiser, a Kansas City native, said, she has no clients here.

Bar Owner

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hour, her inheritance in the bank, looking for the perfect spot.

"I just drove and looked, drove and looked." Then she found the property on Prospect and told herself: "I think this ought to be a good spot for a bar."

She and her brother-in-law worked three months putting in the bar and making other improvements before Rena's opened.

But things are not the way she would like them to be. Miss Hardwick would like to open the bar at 11:30 in the morning, but often the sales from the few customers who come in at that time don't pay for the utilities and overhead. Some of her customers complain when she doesn't open that early. She tries to stay open until 1:30 a.m.—if there are enough customers. Most of them, she said, arrive after 4 p.m. on their way home from work.

Despite hard times Miss Hardwick

"My concern is what is Kansas City doing to help the entire economy of this community," she said. "It's my philosophy that if one has the ability, experience, stamina to survive this long in Kansas City that in itself should be the basis (for the judgment) that you are a stable business."

"I have seen little evidence of any part of the city, county or state government putting forth to help minorities in Kansas City, especially women. The cities and communities are behind these women in other places. It (Kansas City) is the most liveable city for some. But in terms of business, is it?"

Mrs. Kaiser lectures at colleges—talking to black students and white students about business. To blacks especially she urges that they work and not look for gifts, strive for excellence and keep their religious training.

She feels it was hard work and faith that made her successful, even though she feels a lack of recognition of that success here.

"If I had it to do all over again, I'd still be in business," she said. "It's a whole new world."

"I provide a professional service that is in competition with white business and that makes a difference. What we (the company) does reflects on Kansas City. What an Inez Kaiser does is a reflection of this community because I am a product of this community."

She estimated that blacks comprise 25 per cent of the population here and concludes that businesses run by blacks should get business, ideally, comparable to that part of the population and its spending power.

"I think black people need to support their own, too," she said. "Black people need to work for blacks and women need to work for women."

"We are proud people," Mrs. Kaiser concluded about minorities. "I don't expect a hand-out. I only want to provide a service and run a business."

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partnership with her mother has done to their relationship.

"She's been hollering at me for 30 years now, so it's really no change," she said jokingly.

Countered her mother: "In a very few words, Pat can make me feel like a horse's rear end better than anyone else."

They recalled their first out-of-town buying trip, to Chicago, for accessories to stock the store.

"We were like five-year-olds turned loose in a chocolate factory," Pat said. "We walked and looked, and walked and looked. But we learned—the first day you looked at everything; the second day you buy what will sell."

They have matured in business and made close friends with the customers they served, the women said. "It's broadened our world a lot," concluded Mrs. Resch.

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