

Reminisce

# A Time to Remember

MOMENTS THAT SHAPED US



*(top) Paula Hassler poses for the camera on opening night of the New Horizon Room.*

*(right) Soaking up the sun on Oak Street Beach*



*On the Job*

## I WAS A SHERATON GIRL

PAULA HASSLER TEMPE, AZ

THAT'S ME (far left) standing on a coffee table in my one-shoulder tunic and diaphanous skirt. It was the opening night of the New Horizon Room at the Sheraton Hotel, 505 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Even though I didn't know a martini from a manhattan, I'd been hired as a cocktail waitress along with six other young cuties from a group of 20 applicants. During the group interview, the hotel executives requested that we girls raise our skirts above the knee. It was 1948, and we thought nothing of it.

The press covered the lounge's grand opening, and a news photographer with a 4x5 Speed Graphic asked me to step onto the table with my drink tray. One burst of his flashbulb, and the next day, the photo appeared in newspapers all around the country as publicity for the posh new room. Several years later, that photo was etched life-size on the room's heavy plate glass entrance door.

Barely 21, after one year of college, I had picked up and moved to Chicago to attend the Patricia Stevens Modeling School. It was obvious to me that a regular university was not my cup of dorm coffee. Not only did I find my pot-of-gold job and learn how to place my feet in a model's stance (see photo), but I also found a place to live, in an old mansion turned into a girls' club at 1040 N. Lake Shore Drive. I had three roommates, and we all enjoyed our view of Oak Street Beach and the Drake Hotel. I paid seven dollars a week for my share of the room.

We Sheraton girls were treated like celebrities. The hotel publicized a story that we were ferried home by limousine every night. Not true, but we all could easily afford to take a taxi. Another fiction was that

we were not supposed to date customers. That excuse came in handy if and when we wanted to use it.

Notice the dainty size of the tray balanced on my right hand. We spoiled girls never had to lift anything remotely heavy, even if we had a large drink order, because Marty the busboy took care of it. Life was good.

Today the hotel is no longer a Sheraton, and the lounge long ago ceased to exist. I often wonder what happened to that plate glass door with my picture on it. It would have made a lovely tabletop in our dining room!