

FORK IN THE ROAD ARTICLE

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BY Truly Herbert

Possible titles:

Bustiers and Bass Guitars: A Hard Rock Dream Job

Jamming with a Hard Rock Fanatic

Becoming a Mega Memorabilia Junkie

Picture yourself opening a package one day and finding a signed drum head from Creed. Or imagine spending an afternoon talking to Britney Spears' press agents about the pink costume she wore in the video for *Crazy*. Or suppose you got to decide which priceless Matchbox Twenty, Destiny's Child, or Backstreet Boys memorabilia to buy at the next auction. Not a bad life, huh? For Barrie Herman, Memorabilia Acquisitions Manager of the Orlando, Florida-based Hard Rock Café, it's all in a day's work.

"My job," says Herman, "is so cool."

Herman's responsibility it is to obtain each new item added to the mega-restaurant chain's collection, which in total is valued at more than \$32 million. The Hard Rock Café's Memorabilia Acquisition department, comprised of only eight staff members including Herman, has the exciting and monumental task of not only acquiring memorabilia for the collection, but they also catalogue, research, frame, install, maintain, and create informational plaques for each of the more than 63,000 items, not to mention design each new restaurant's layout.

Herman worked for Camelot Music for 11 years prior to working at Hard Rock Café, and has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Print Journalism. She began at Hard Rock Orlando as a temporary worker, and says, "once I was in, I was hooked." She must have made a good impression, because in May of 1999, she was asked to join the company full-time.

Though her current job is relatively low profile—she fields telephone and email communications from various collectors, band managers, and individuals who have memorabilia to sell—she also has the unique opportunity to attend major auctions six to eight times per year to purchase rock-n-roll memorabilia on behalf of Hard Rock Café. Estimated prices for rock memorabilia can range from \$500 for an autograph on a plain piece of paper, for instance, to \$125,000 for a set of KISS costumes, so doing preliminary research prior to attending such events is crucial to estimating a price for an item.

"Auctions are awesome," Herman says, "and very nerve-wracking... for example, at the Eric Clapton guitar auction in 1999, bidders went wild, the guitars were being auctioned off at four and five times their estimated value." Regardless of the pressure, Herman has always managed to keep her cool, and says "No matter how crazy things get, I never bid higher than my estimation."

And Hard Rock Café doesn't put up its highly sought-after memorabilia on its walls haphazardly, either. Each Hard Rock Café tells the story of rock-n-roll through its unique memorabilia, and wherever possible, individual restaurants contain memorabilia of bands or artists who may have come from that state or city. This attention to detail involves a great deal of research, and the company has a custom database that houses all of the information, which Barrie Herman and her staff maintain. When Herman's department is called on to either design a new restaurant or refurbish an old one, she meets with the Memorabilia department's designers and determines the needs of that individual restaurant and city, then begins to locate items to fill those spaces. "Sometimes what [the designers] are looking for is already in our warehouse. If not, I use my contacts to see what I can find that will fit the design."

Barrie's contacts include a host of intriguing sources—anyone from celebrity promoters and managers, to her old friends from Camelot Music, to curators at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, and she sometimes even approaches the stars themselves when they perform at Hard Rock Café's Orlando 2,800-seat music venue, Hard Rock Live.

Speaking of stars, let's get down to the nitty gritty. What about celebrity sitings? "I have met Paul Stanley of KISS, Mark Slaughter of Slaughter, John 5 of Marilyn Manson, Innosense, Godsmack, and several others. All were very gracious and a pleasure to deal with," says Herman. Herman also frequently gets calls from artists who want to know which Café displays their items.

In addition, rumor has it that Britney Spears, Motley Crue, N' Sync, members of the Backstreet Boys, Scott Stapp of Creed, Eddie Money, members of Matchbox Twenty, Bon Jovi, Jeff Beck, and many other celebrities have recently graced the doorsteps of various Hard Rock Cafés.

And of course, depending upon which Hard Rock you're in, you might behold Madonna's famed pink corset that she wore in her *Blonde Ambition* concert, the venerable Jimi Hendrix's Flying V guitar, the snowglobe that once topped Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love's wedding cake, a snakeskin print vinyl jacket worn by No Doubt's Gwen Stefani, or the costumes worn by Destiny's Child in their *Bugaboo* video.

Herman stays current with today's music by reading magazines like *Billboard* and *Pollstar*, listening to the radio, using the internet, watching MTV, and by simply talking to people in the industry. She recommends that people looking to get involved with rock memorabilia use those same vehicles, and use Hard Rock's website, which contains features like downloadable music, a searchable database, a pin collector's club, and event calendars. "Hard Rock Café International is a thriving entertainment corporation and there are employment opportunities for people of all ages who have a passion for music, past and present," she says.