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Juvenile Fiction

Harvey Girl
Sheila Wood Foard
Texas Tech University Press
978-0-89672-570-6
(March 31, 2006)

"Some folks, including my dad, insisted she should get married, then do for her husband and children. That it wasn't a girl's place to leave home and go off to the city to work, especially as a waitress. That nothing good would ever come of it," says fourteen-year-old Clara Massie about her twenty-year-old cousin's decision to become a Harvey Girl.

Of course, Clara doesn't feel that way. She emulates her older cousin, running away from her rural Missouri home and fibbing about how old she is (she's tall for her age), to be hired by the Harvey Company in the fall of 1919. She's sent to one of the smaller Harvey Eating Houses in New Mexico to learn the "Fred Harvey way." There were nearly 100 such establishments, staffed by respectable women, located at stops on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway from the late 1800s through the first half of the 1900s.

The author, a teacher of high school English, creative writing, and journalism for twenty-five years, has also written numerous articles for children's magazines including *Cricket*, *Highlights*, and *Teen.* This is her first novel, and she did a great deal of research to make Clara's story authentic. Foard spent three years as a docent at the Belen, New Mexico Harvey House (which now contains a small museum), interviewing former Harvey girls.

The nonfiction aspects of the subject and the era are subtly interwoven into Clara's own adventure; readers may not realize they're getting a history lesson as well as an exciting tale. For example, Clara talks to an old friend whom she hasn't seen for a while, "remembering the last time was the memorial service for his brother, who died in the war." Other time-specific details include the Suffragist Movement, the flu epidemic, and popular entertainers of the day, such as Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin.

Readers will follow with much interest Clara's experience as a young country girl out on her own, trying to learn the many details and rules of her new job, such as the strict dress code and conduct. Is her pretty new co-worker, Nellie, really her friend? Sometimes it seems that

Nellie is only interested in finding a husband. What happens if the head waitress, Vi, finds out that Clara is only fourteen? Could she be fired? Will she ever see her own family again?

Although this fast-paced novel is well suited for its intended age group, adults will enjoy it as well. Foard supplements the story with a section on the real Harvey Girls history. In Kansas City, a Mrs. Steel hires the protagonist, saying: “I like your spunk, Clara.” Readers will agree.