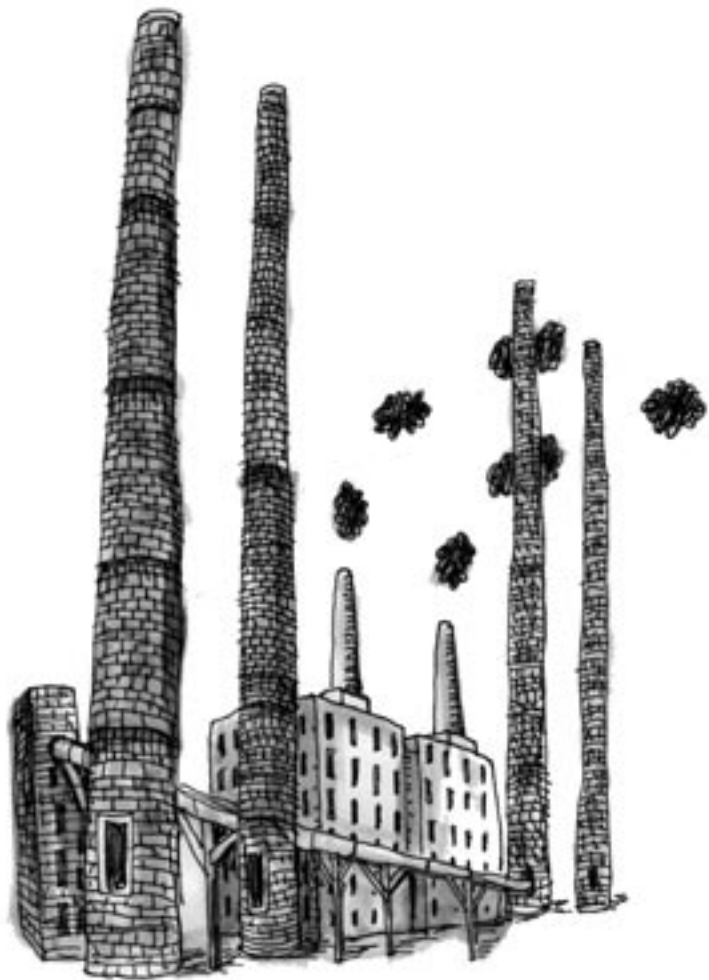


WORK STORIES

An Anthology of Student Writing



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Edited and compiled by Polly Buckingham

Acknowledgements

The idea for this collection came from two models: Studs Terkyl's *Working* (The New Press 1972) and *Bad Jobs: My Last Shift at Albert Wong's Pagoda and Other Ugly Tales of the Workplace* (Arsenic Pulp Press 1998). It was also influenced by an article by Ira Shor, "Reinventing Daily Life: Self-Study and the Theme of 'Work'" (from *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* 1987). The writers in this anthology were all English 101 students at Eastern Washington University.

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Preface: To Instructors

The Narrative

Story is one of the most common forms of communication across all cultures. It is a language we know from the time we begin to speak. Inherent in all stories, fiction and nonfiction, is not merely the notion of what happened, but also the reason the teller feels the need to narrate the story to begin with. We learn to operate in the world by reflecting upon our own experiences and the experiences of others. It is no wonder we feel the need to share these experiences in the form of narratives.

We often pigeonhole the notion of story by seeing it primarily as the tales told to children before they go to sleep, or the machinations of the creative mind otherwise unengaged in the practical world, or the confessionals we read in the popular form of the memoir. But the story is far more integral and foundational. The notion of story is a spiritual one: at the center of many cultures lies the revered storyteller; even our sacred texts are collections of stories.

Narratives are also used to effect change; they are part of social justice movements and part of policy making. In response to the Oregon anti-gay initiatives Measures 9 and 13 (1992 and 1994 respectively), human dignity groups displayed giant panels with photos of queers and their families below which were their stories. The Holocaust Museum in Washington DC is a collection of narratives. In Pittsburgh's Community Think Tank, narrative contributes to public inquiry by turning individual's personal stories into a communal resource. In circulating this knowledge, narrative lets decision makers hear what their decisions might mean in the lives of people affected by them. It is hard to reconsider policy without including the stories of those affected. Statistics do not say enough. They lack the human experience. How, for

example, could we truly understand the effects of Hurricane Katrina without the narratives provided to us through such documentaries as *When the Levees Broke*?

Thinkers in the fields of composition and education circle back again and again to narrative and its universal and practical applications. Where would we be without John Dewey's validation of the significance of experience in the academic world, his examination of the ways in which people's experiences locate them as individuals and as part of communities? Without Jonathan Kozol's narratives of inner city schools or Robert Coles's notion of the "moral imagination" sparked by the retelling of experience? John Seeley Brown, in his speech "Learning, Working and Playing in the Digital Age" given at the 1999 Conference on Higher Education of the American Association for Higher Education, retells how he discovered that even troubleshooters at IBM use narratives: "troubleshooting is really story construction, not abstract logical reasoning...These guys were storytelling, taking fragments of past stories that they knew or had experienced, weaving them together with new fragments until they had 'explained' the machine's behavior." The book *Comp Tales: An Introduction to College Composition through its Stories* (ed. Haswell and Lu) is dedicated to the notion that the teaching of teachers is most effective when it includes the retelling of remarkable moments in the classroom. These are the work stories of composition instructors, and from them we can begin to understand why the narrative (in this case the work story) can be equally as valuable to our students.

Students from all cultures coming into college writing courses may not understand the language of academia, but they know the language of story. Teaching narrative at the beginning of the quarter allows them to use a familiar language as a bridge to a less familiar language—much like the notion of bilingual education allows students to use their native language and cultural stories as a bridge to learning the new language.

The narratives in this anthology were all written by English 101 students at Eastern Washington University, many of whom were in their first quarter of college. They were asked to write about a difficult or

challenging day on the job. In them, students reshape their experiences into story and are able to look at the experiences anew, reconsider their own relationship to their jobs—their skills at dealing with difficult situations and often times difficult people. They look at humiliation and challenges, and in those reflections better see themselves. All together, these essays form a testament to the world of work and our experiences in it. In this way, the narratives form a larger picture of a community and give the instructor valuable insight into students and their levels of responsibility.

For example, one of my students who struggled with writing, wrote an essay about working at his father's apple orchard. His father, to keep the family orchard going, had to take a job as manager at a larger orchard. As a teenager, Roy was then hired by his father to manage the family orchard. One of the workers kept showing up drunk and, further, drinking on his breaks. Roy ended up firing the employee, who, to complicate matters, happened to be the father's close friend. On the drive home from work, Roy would pass the bar his father and the fired employee frequented. How could I ever see this student as only "struggling" after a story like that? He became, to me, not someone who risked failure, but instead someone full of hope, someone who'd been given an incredible amount of responsibility at an early age and had done what he felt was right, despite obvious obstacles. You can't help but admire that.

While this anthology covers only work stories, there are, of course, many other possibilities for the narrative in the composition classroom, a few of which are covered here. The prompt "When I look back I wonder why I did that" stresses the use of narrative as inquiry. Students do not know the answer before they begin retelling the story. The "dangerous moment" prompt asks students to look a situation in which there is inherent conflict. Narrative can also be taught by asking students to interview others and tell their stories, either as a way of creating biography or as part of the gathering of narratives that help paint a complex social landscape and contribute to policy discussions.

For instance, as part of their course in community outreach, students at Carnegie Mellon University practice what John Flanagan

has termed the “critical incident technique” to elicit narratives from community residents whose work-a-day lives engage them in pressing social issues. For example, a series of think tanks focused on the issues of healthcare workers including food service workers, cleaning staff, and nursing aides. Students experience the transformative capacity of narrative when they perform—as the catalyst that launches a think tank’s first phase of policy-making dialogues—the scripts they have written on the basis of their critical-incidents interviews. Examples like this show the ways in which narrative can have application beyond the story. Even the stories in this book, or your own students’ work stories, can be used to transition into discussions about workers’ rights and other issues of labor.

Two of the most important elements in writing are also key to learning to write a good narrative: using not only specific but also selective detail and making sure the essay has a point—understanding that audience and purpose often determine the way in which we understand what constitutes a valid point. These two skills, specific detail and focus, are two of the hardest for students to learn. And I would argue they are significantly more important than learning the formulas for a series of different types of essays. After all, if we can teach them to write well, they should be able to adapt to the ever changing demands on the written word. By working in a medium with which the student is familiar, the instructor has more time to spend on rewriting, finding the right details, and searching for the significance of the narrative.

Narratives can be misunderstood by instructors who expect a thesis statement or a nice concluding paragraph that ties everything together neatly. In fact, you do not always find either of these things in published essays, and you rarely find them in narratives. If a narrative is complex, its point can’t be easily summed up in a sentence. When we tell each other stories, we don’t then sum them up by saying, “And what I learned from that experience was...” If we’ve told a good story, the point should be clear, and it may be expressed differently depending on the reader.

A number of the essays in *Work Stories* are not explicit about their points. For example, in “Berry Processing Plant” it becomes clear by the

end that the narrator has positioned himself in the world of work, has come to understand that behind each item he finds in his own refrigerator are countless low wage workers like himself, and that work, in the end, is about pushing through the grind for that hourly wage. This is not a pretty picture, but it is a realistic one, and the writer need only show us this single first day of work to make the point. He never says, “And then I realized...” He doesn’t need to. It’s all in the details.

Your job as an instructor is to help students find the right details to describe that significant moment on the job and to find meaning in their narratives. The meaning should not be imposed on the narrative. It is inherent in the narrative. It is up to the student to make some sense of his/her experiences. Just as entire cultures are reflected in sacred texts, so too is the single life of a person reflected in their retelling and reshaping of events. In the end, there is no other way to explain experience than to tell the story. No amount of summing up or moralizing can say the same thing that the story itself says. That is why it is both necessary and familiar. You will not really know your students unless you let them tell their stories.

Introduction

For most of us, a large portion of our lives will be spent on the job. We may work as early as age ten and stop working only upon fatal illness. Work consumes us. And it is hard, sometimes, not to feel like another cog in the wheel, no matter how professional your position. The workplace is also the place of some of our greatest accomplishments. It occupies a space in our lives we often take for granted and rarely fully reflect upon.

When I was thirty, a friend and I spent an evening counting all the jobs we'd had. I was shocked when my count came in just under fifty. Of course, I was all inclusive. I'd done everything from working concession stands at festivals in college to selling carpet cleaning over the phone. "Hi, this is Polly from Persnicky Carpet and Upholstery, can I tell you about our holiday specials?" Lines like these never leave you.

I was a maid, a fisherperson, a deckhand, a babysitter, a transcriptionist, a proofreader, an indexer, and a banker. I worked at a gardenia nursery, a kennel, and at four independent bookstores (two closed down). I learned that I am not a multi-tasker, that I am not graceful with plates and bowls and glasses, that children like me, that I can type faster than most people I know, that I have trouble with cash registers, photocopiers, and coffee machines. I've learned that a nine to five job makes me feel dead, but a job where my heart and head are both engaged makes me feel alive.

The essays in this anthology examine our roles in the world of work, sometimes with humor, other times with pathos. In each narrative, the writers position themselves in the world of work: they face ethical dilemmas and discover the things that really motivate them. They learn when to stick it out and when to say "enough is enough." They learn when to withhold judgment on others, when to trust coworkers and bosses, and when not to. The stories in this anthology are ones we can all recognize. They are the triumphs and trials of the work place. They

Work Stories

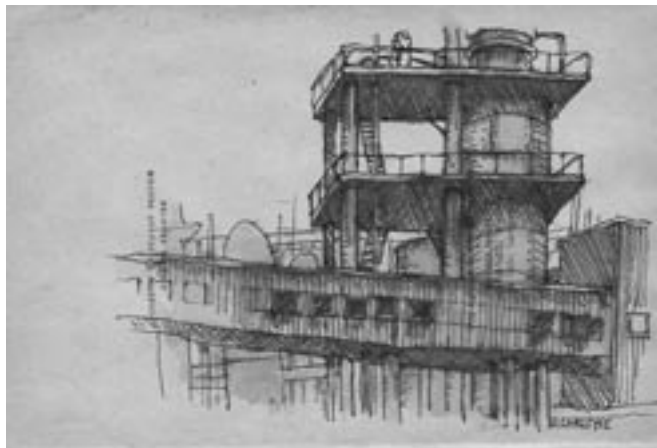
are the stories we trade with one another late at night for a laugh; they form the foundation for the choices we will make later in life, the jobs or careers toward which we will eventually gravitate.

As small and insignificant as we may feel sometimes on the job, we also have moments of great clarity, of the feeling of having something significant to contribute. Our work lives matter if we make them matter. In a 2007 interview with Studs Terkel (author of *Working*, an anthology of interviews with people about their jobs) on his 95th birthday, the interviewer, Amy Goodman, ended by asking him what he wanted people to think of when they heard his name. He said, “Somebody remembered them.” We tell stories so people will remember us. And people like Terkyl collect stories and publish them so that these memories will have some permanence. *Work Stories* is a testament to all of our experiences on the job, our digressions and our transformations.

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FARM AND INDUSTRIAL MANUAL LABOR



Berry Processing Plant

Brian Kivlighn

This wasn't the first summer that I had decided to work for a berry farm. The landscape of Whatcom County was dotted with blueberry, strawberry, and raspberry fields owned by a multitude of large berry farms. As is customary in this industry, the labor force was composed entirely of local students and Hispanic migrant workers. It seemed that every teenager who lived in Lynden worked in the berry fields or in the processing plants during, at least, one of their summers, if not every summer. It was taken for granted that if you were of the age to attend secondary schooling that you would be working at the berry farms. The question posed to you wasn't, where are you going to work this summer? The question was, are you going to work in the berry fields, and which berry farm are you going to be working at? This summer instead of Rader Farms it would be Maberry Farms.

I walked through the side door of the refrigerated processing plant along with the dozen or so other guys who had come to the same conclusion as I as to how their summer would be spent. As we were talking amongst ourselves and inquiring as to if anyone knew what specific jobs we were doing, Kurt spoke up.

"I've been working here in the plant for eight years. I should have been a supervisor this year," he said. I turned to look at him. I couldn't believe that someone had been working in the processing plant at the lowest level position for so long. He was noticeably older than the rest of us and overweight. His blue work overalls issued to him by our employer were unwashed and halfway zipped up. I took a step back.

"Yeah, then why aren't you?" said Mike challenging his assertion without hesitation.

"I didn't put in for it this year. I will next summer. Either that or put in to be a fork lift operator. I'm still making more money than any of

you,” he added laughing. With the increase in pay with each successive year that you work at Maberry, he was making almost twice as much as anyone else. In a strange way I had a certain amount of respect for him for being able to return to this job year in and year out, but at the same time I pondered why he hadn’t climbed the economic ladder. I swore then and there not to return to this job the following summer.

Stopping by the table next to the door, I grabbed a hairnet and medium sized latex gloves. While I was putting on the hairnet and gloves, the plant manager casually strolled up to us.

“Grab your cards and swipe them through the reader to check in. Are you guys ready to get started?” Dean asked with a grin. I looked down at my watch that was not supposed to be brought into the plant for health reasons. It was 10:05 AM. There were only around eight more hours of labor.

“The jobs won’t be terribly difficult but they do get repetitive. For that reason I will assign all of you a job and we will rotate jobs each day.” He began to go through the names and pair each of us with a specific job. He began by calling out five names. I was one of them. “Alright guys. It’s your lucky day. You guys are dumping flats. You may want to grab working gloves to put over the latex ones.” I decided against using the gloves.

This was only the second time that I had been inside the processing plant. It was shaped like a giant L. The noise within the plant was deafening with the whir of machinery, and the pungent odor of raspberries was overpowering. It only took a few minutes to become nauseous from the smell. It would be some time before I ate raspberries again. I walked by the portion of the plant where the washed and pureed berries were collected in four gallon containers. The raspberry puree spewed out the valve leaving small bits of raspberry on the operator who was wearing a white apron and goggles.

I leaned over the side of the conveyer belt to look at the yellow labels that were being placed on each container. The buyer was Smuckers. They weren’t being purchased by some small, obscure company, that I had never eaten their products before, like I had thought. I thought about the several glass jars of Smuckers jelly I had sitting home in my refrigerator.

Walking into the next room, I saw the women on the inspection line in white aprons and hairnets pouring over the raspberries on the conveyer belt passing their hands through the berries and occasionally holding one closer to their eyes to have a better look at the berry before tossing it into the appropriate bucket at their side to be disposed of at a later time. Some, without really examining the raspberries, would scoop up large handfuls and just toss them to their side missing the bucket entirely sending them to the plant floor. It was of no concern to them. It would be one of the guys that would have to clean it up later.

Upon reaching my station, I flipped on the switch to power up the conveyer belt and shaker setting them into motion. The women on my line quit talking to one another and peered towards the opening where the raspberries would soon be dropped after passing through the rinse and sent in their direction. Not anxious to begin, I hesitated prompting the quality inspectors, as they are more favorably referred to as, to lean backward and look in my direction. They were, no doubt, wondering what the hold up was.

I turned around to see several large trucks parked just outside the plant full of flats. Workers were feverishly unloading the palettes and using forklifts to fill the remaining opening space behind where I stood. Another truck arrived. Soon only a small walkway of space would remain in the processing plant.

Dean approached me after having finished speaking on his walkie talkie. "I just talked to one of the guys out in the fields. It looks like we're going to have a lot of berries coming in today," he said.

I turned around once more to see another truck pull in, and the numbers of palettes to be dumped continued to pile up.

"It looks that way," I replied.

"You can begin now," he said before turning to talk to one of the supervisors on the line.

Without saying another word I turned to grab my first bright yellow flat, brimming with raspberries, from my first palette of the summer and dumped it into the shaker. It was 10:15 AM. About \$1.75, I thought.

Sticky Air, Wet Corn, and The Metallic Beetle

Charlotte Graves

When people ask me what my worst summer job has ever been I say detasseling. That's when the look of "oh wow" comes over the questioner's face. It is like they become a little embarrassed, as if I had just told them a dirty joke. I find myself always reassuring them, "No, I did not violate the corn. Well, not entirely." But actually, I was doing just that, ripping the male reproductive system off of the female corn. (Yes, female corn plants are basically hermaphrodites.) But you cannot look at it that way, and you don't look at it that way. There are entirely too many other things to take all your attention away from the gender problems of female corn plants. For example, the Japanese beetle. A metallic, foreign bug not much larger than a quarter, with six barbed legs curled around its abdomen. Not something to look forward to when applying for the position of detasseling.

The day started off bad from the beginning. It was extremely humid, 6:30 am, and I was still getting used to my knee high black rubber boots. I was also extremely tired from the day before when we had detasseled a mile long field, a two day job, that we did in just nine hours. It was hell.

The corn would be dripping wet from the morning dew, we were off to a late start, and Brendan, our crew boss was irritable. We hated when he was irritable. He greeted us at the supermarket, our meeting point for morning roll call and announcements, with a quick "Mornin'. We're off to farmer John Goodman's corn field and it is approximately three-fourths of a mile long. I want nothing to slow us down and I don't want to come back and do a second pull. Now get on the bus after I call your name." Here he started with the list, and once your name was called you hustled to get on the bus. No questions asked, only a slight nod of your head was more than sufficient for him.

My fellow detassellers and I were extremely relieved to get off the bus when we arrived at Farmer John Goodman's field. Like Brendan had said it was three-fourths of a mile long, but from the bus you could have fooled me. He had to have been lying. It ran endlessly into the horizon. This field was enormous. The size of a small country. I was half expecting to have to whip out my passport and get pulled into a small room where a rather large, masculine lady by the name of Helga wearing a set of translucent, rubber gloves would make me strip.

After passing through customs, I started working on my assigned panel, a group of four rows of female corn plants that ran the length of the field. Barely twenty steps into the row, I was soaked, not just my pants, but my entire body. I looked as if I had jumped into the shower and splashed around with my rubber boots and jeans on. I instantly thought of what a burden my hooded sweat shirt had become. Halfway through the field, I had to stop to empty the water out of my boots. They were doing a great job of keeping the water in, instead of out as they should have. By the end of my first panel, I was miserable. My hair was dripping, my sweatshirt weighed over 400 pounds, my boots could have been put into the same category as the great lakes, and both my hands and feet were pruney. As I walked to my next assigned panel, I ran into many more victims of the morning corn, they too just as soaked and uncomfortable as I.

Moving on to my third or fourth panel of the never ending field, I started to notice that I was steaming, literally. I was walking along making my own clouds. It was fantastic. I was starting to dry out, or at least I was hoping. My boots were still sloshing and my jeans could have been rung out, but I was drying. So I went with it. I began to pull faster and before I knew it I was out of the field on the side that I started. I realized that I was the first person out of the field, a feat that is not common in detassellers of my experience and height. I had just beat Steve, a 6'3", four year veteran of detasseling. I found myself doing a small victory dance. I definitely had something to brag about.

In the midst of my glory, I felt a small something crawling on my left shoulder making its way south. I casually brushed it away and resumed my jig. But that failed to stop my new friend.

Becoming frazzled I started to pat around my shoulder. Again my friend wasn't willing to stop, actually he started to do the opposite, move faster down into my shirt. Frantically. I threw off my now 200 pound sweatshirt, and was patting around even faster than before. Again, this failed to stop him. Now I was beyond calm, I was hysterical. Off came my next shirt; it seemed that he had become trapped in my sports bra. Dancing all over now, I threw off the last of my three shirts. I was determined to get this thing off my being. Reaching up into the beetle's cage, I grabbed him. He wrapped all six of his legs around one of my fingers. Half naked and frazzled, I shook him incessantly. Finally, he came loose and was free. I took a deep breath and tried to gather my wits. Reaching down to pick up one of my shirts, something caught my eye. I looked up and noticed that I had an audience. Instantly my cheeks reddened. All at once, as if to be on cue, they started to clap.

I have never been so embarrassed in all my life. It seemed that I did have to strip after all, just not in front of Helga with the rubber gloves. Needless to say, I was the talk of the corn fields for the rest of the season. Every time I look back on that day, I can't help but smile and wonder one thing: was that poor beetle as scared as I was?

Get Even

Michael Veenstra

6:45. I arrived at the job site. As I walked onto the site, diesel fumes assaulted my nostrils. Steel was randomly stacked over the entire site. A few concrete footings were poured, and the foundation was up for the most part. Gravel covered the ground that was awaiting pavement. The excavation team was toiling about the site, stirring up dust. I nervously pulled on my boots, fixed my hard hat and tool belt, and began to look for the boss. I walked over to a man with an orange hard hat who was standing among three guys with white hats. “Hey I’m Mike Veenstra. I’m looking for Jim Miller—you know where I can find him?”

“Jim Miller.” He paused for a second. “He’s the steel contractor. You need to drive over to the other end of the site.”

I moved the car and got to the other side of the site. Enthusiastically, I got out of the car. With a glance at my phone, I realized I was three minutes late. A short man was standing in a circle with several other people around him. I snuck my way into the circle.

“Where the hell have you been,” the man in the center barked at me.

“I was on the other side of the site...”

The man interjected, “We’re over here. This is where you show up from now on. Don’t be late again.” The man continued with his speech that I had clearly interrupted. “Like I said I’m Jim and I’ve been doing iron work for the last thirty years. I could build this building without looking at the plans. So for all you new guys, here are the rules on how I run my site. Rule number one, Jim is always right. Rule number two, if Jim is wrong refer back to rule number one.”

I quickly looked around to see if anyone was smiling or laughing. There was nothing but blank faces to be seen. He went on and on

about safety concerns but he made sure to drive home one point. “We are the closest job site to the state L&I office, they will be here taking pictures, don’t be in those pictures.” I was very familiar with this idea of L&I pictures being negative. My aunt is a supervisor for L&I. One of her favorite parts of the job is to show pictures of the infractions in court.

Saturday was supposed to be my day off, but since we were so far behind I came in. That is to say I did not have enough hours in for overtime so I was told, “Show up on Saturday or don’t show up again.” I showed up for work and Jim was already there. I got out of my car, lit a cigarette and walked over to get some water.

Jim walked right up to me, a wad of Copenhagen protruding from his lip, and said, “You blow smoke in my face and I spit Copenhagen on your chin.” He smiled slightly but the Cope wad was glaring at me menacingly. I quickly took a step back. “Let’s get this show on the road!” he shouted. Nobody moved. It was not 7 o’clock yet and none of us were getting paid to start at 6:50. He knew why we were not moving and he only got more steamed. About ten minutes later he yelled, “We’re flying iron today, boys.” We all knew what this meant. Quickly everyone began to put on harnesses. Soon everyone was in their lifts. As the rest of our crew moved into place Jim barked at me. Over the roar of the sky trek, I couldn’t make it out. “Grab that tag line, Red.” This time I could hear him.

The tag line is designed to help the forklift driver get the beam into place. The closer the beam is the easier it is for the guys in the air to get it in place. When the forklift driver is Jim with his thirty years of experience, the tag line does not do anything. He matches the holes perfectly all on his own. I attempted to guide the beam into place as Jim maneuvered the sky trek. We got it in place and the guys on the other end were able to line up the beam and bolt it down. The forks of the sky trek were lowered and the clamps ready to be fixed to the next beam. As I struggled to move the cable that held the clamps to the forks, Jim finished fastening his side.

He walked over to me and watched me struggle for a second. Then he said, “Your mama don’t have to worry about you masturbating, you

hands don't move fast enough." I finished putting on the clamp and we got the piece in the air. I released the tag line and walked to my car.

I reached into my pocket. With hands still trembling, I manage to dig out my cell phone. For a few seconds I sat in my car staring at this object. It had all sorts of lights and buttons with writing on them. A strange sort of wire thing could be pulled from the top right corner. With my mind racing I reached for my water bottle and the reasons came to me. Suddenly I remembered why this foreign object was in my hand. This was a phone; no this was my phone with my mom's work number in it. I scrolled through my entire phone book searching for the number listed as "Mom Work." After about the fifth time scrolling through, the number miraculously appeared. "Mom Work," was highlighted on my screen. I called her. The phone rang for decades.

A voice I did not recognized answered, "Hello hunny, why are you calling, you're not on break at this time."

"No mom I'm not, I really need Aunt Pewee's work number, I promise to explain everything when I get home." She gave me the number and I dialed it.

"Lenise Williams Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, how my I help you?"

"Aunt Pewee it's me Michael."

I drove a across the street and smoked a cigarette. "Your hands don't move fast enough," I thought. I laughed, stomped the cigarette out with the heel of my boot and slowly got into my car.

Later that day L&I showed up and took a few pictures. I was not in any of them but Jim sure was. L&I caught him "flying iron" with nobody holding that tag line. I'm told that it was a five thousand dollar fine.

Frozen Monday

Caleb Bron

I noticed the ice on my bedroom window as my eyelids slid open and the world was revealed to me once again. It had been a cold week and today was no exception. Cold weather was not my favorite thing in the world because I knew I would be working outside most of the day as I always did. I tried to stay somewhat enthused about these December days, but my patience was wearing thin, especially since I was working during my Christmas break.

As I prepared for the day, I wondered, as I always did, if the day would hold any excitement for me. I pulled out of the driveway, music blaring. I arrived in my shop with just under a minute to put on my coveralls and boots. The shop had a good 400 square feet of oil stained floor, along with 40 foot high ceilings that bled water every time it rained. It also had two side rooms, one for raising vehicles in order to repair them, and one for cleaning them. The latter was my domain.

As I stood by the heater working aimlessly, a very enthusiastic voice boomed out from behind me, “Mornin Sleepy!” Jerry McIntosh was an intriguing man. By the time he was seventeen he had been expelled from school for knocking out his principal. He was simply huge in every way and always had something to laugh about, as did all the mechanics in the shop. He informed me of the Ford outside with “my name on it.”

Washing a truck guaranteed that you were going to get wet, but washing a truck in the cold guaranteed that you were going to be miserable. As I started to wash it, I noticed that the soapy water was actually freezing to the truck after about thirty seconds. I couldn’t help but laugh out loud at just how much bad luck I actually had. I finished up the truck in about thirty minutes, climbed inside and turned the heat on full blast in an effort to warm up my icy extremities.

“Pull it into the back stall!” Jerry yelled. “I’m done working on it for the rest of the day.”

I proceeded to drive to the back of the yard where two other mechanics, Chris and Larry, were talking. Both of these guys were well fed to say the least. They always had some new joke or something to laugh about, and just like everyone else, almost no motivation to work whatsoever.

Now this truck was just a normal Ford-150, but it had been used as a lead vehicle for a semi-truck with an oversize load which meant it had two large blinking lights sticking out about a foot away from the truck. The stall I had to pull into had two beams on either side of the entrance that separated the different stalls. This gave me about a good foot of room on either side of the truck. However, I was coming in at an angle which made it a little more difficult.

“You’re not gonna make it!” yelled Chris.

“Watch me!” I yelled back.

I pulled into the stall and stepped out of the truck, confident in my driving skills. I hadn’t heard anything so I assumed I had made it just as I had many other times. However, to my surprise, there was one of the blinking lights lying on the ground with little frayed wires hanging out of it.

“You’re lucky the boss is gone,” said Chris. Larry just cackled and stared at the broken light.

Lunchtime was interesting as I heard my glorious driving story retold every time a new guy walked into the break room. I did everything I could to laugh it off and stay awake. The truck light was fixed before my boss returned, but I knew that I wouldn’t live that story down for quite a while.

“What the hell happened to the light on my truck,” said Turner, a six foot seven biker that you wouldn’t want to meet in a back alley late at night.

“I have no idea.” I said it as casually as I could even though he probably had already heard the story three times. Gossip flew around that shop like it was a room full of adolescent valley girls.

“What’s up, Crash?” asked Fred, a friendly old man who had nearly run me over with a semi just a few months before that. I had given him

the nickname and now he had a chance to give it right back to me. As the day drew to a close, I was happy to run away from the heckling and to change back into dry clothes.

“How was your day?” asked my mother as soon as I reached the house.

“Fine,” I replied, my standard response.

Even though I had a bad day, my nights out with the boys were always fun. As I heard all the stories from them about how their jobs were going, I knew I wasn’t the only one who screwed up. This made me feel better, until the next morning at least. As I left for work again, ice on my windows and music blaring, I realized I might be heckled, but that it really didn’t matter.

“If we make fun of you, don’t worry, it’s only cause we get along with you.” I remembered these words that were said to me on my first day, nearly a year earlier. No matter what stupid thing I did, I knew I still had the friendship and love of my co-workers, friends, and family.

“Mornin sleepy!” yelled Jerry as I walked back into the shop. I knew everything would be just fine.

WORKING WITH FAMILY



Wintry Humiliation

Cynthia Magana

On the way to work with my dad that morning all I heard was the cellular ringing off the hook and the raindrops falling on the windshield. My dad was answering the calls, eating breakfast, and driving at the same time. I had been working for my dad for two years and he still did not believe in me. He always complained how I was not cut out for the drywall business, yet he always took me to work to help him. Every time I went to work all I wanted to do is prove to my dad that I could be the daughter he wanted. He always wanted me to be a strong independent working young woman he could be proud of. I was committed that day to show my dad what I truly was about.

When we arrived at the construction site, the two-story houses everywhere made me think to myself it was going to be a long day at work. I got out of the truck and went inside the house to see exactly how big it was. As I entered, all I could smell was the fresh primer. The house wasn't too big, but I knew it was going to take at least three hours to texture. Texturing isn't very hard, you just use a hose, one like firefighters use, spray the material on the wall and wait for it to dry. Even though it is easy, it takes a while because you want everything to be symmetrical. I was walking around the house when I heard my dad calling my name.

I went outside to see what he was going to tell me and saw the rain had turned into snow. It didn't bother me since there was snow on the ground already and I was going to work inside anyway. My dad told me to start covering up the windows and the doors so they wouldn't get covered with texture. I gathered the roll of plastic and tape and began to work. I heard my name again and I ran out wondering what my dad wanted this time. "I need you to fill up two buckets with water over there at that house across the street," he told me.

“Ok,” I replied. He needed the water to mix the texture so I grabbed the two buckets and started to walk across the street. As I was walking, I realized there was ice on the ground. I filled the buckets about halfway since they were fifty gallon buckets and started to make my way across the street really slowly. The falling snow felt like pins and needles striking my face, so I started to speed up just a bit. I started to feel the muscles in my arm cramping, so I walked even faster. My arms were getting weaker and I began to rush because I was near the texturing machine. As I approached the texturing machine, I stepped onto the sidewalk. I felt the ice underneath my shoe and at that moment all I could think was “this is going to hurt.”

I tried my best to stop from falling by trying to slide and gain my balance. I realized I was going to fall so the next best thing I could think of was not spilling water all over me. I knew if I spilled the water on me I would have to work drenched in water all day. So I tried my best to make the buckets land correctly. Somehow I managed to land in the upright position and not spill any water on me. Unfortunately, I landed on the semi-melted snow on the sidewalk. All I could feel was the water seeping through my jeans onto my skin. I didn’t know if I should laugh or cry.

I started to look around to see if anyone had seen me fall. I looked towards the house where we were working; I saw my dad and other workers laughing at me.

When I saw my dad laughing, I felt so humiliated and disappointed. I thought I was proving my dad correct. Maybe I was not made to be in the work field. I wanted to run as far away from my dad because I did not want him complaining how easy of a task I screwed up. I was at the point of getting up and calling my mom to come pick me up. I decided to get up and continue like nothing happened. I picked up the buckets and carried them to my dad. “Are you alright?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I responded. I handed him the buckets and started to walk towards the house. I wondered how this could have happened to me. I wasn’t paying attention where I was stepping while walking across the lawn. Suddenly my right foot stepped into a puddle of mixed rain and snow. I couldn’t believe my foot was soaked. I kept walking until I got inside the house.

I rinsed out my sock and placed it near the heater so it could at least begin to dry. I continued the work I had started before going outside only this time with semi wet jeans and a soaked shoe.

While I was covering the windows, all I felt was the coldness of my foot and the cold wet jeans rubbing against my legs. As my dad began to texture the house, I dreaded going outside to grab the floor scraper. I went outside and I was very attentive to where I stepped this time. I went back inside and cleaned the floors. As I cleaned the floors I thought that I needed to take my time and not rush. Rushing doesn't get me anywhere. As a matter of fact rushing made my day turn awful. By the time my dad finished texturing the house, my jeans, sock and shoe were dry.

We picked up all the materials and started our way to another house where the rest of his workers were. I knew my day was done at this point and I couldn't have been more relieved. I looked out the window and saw white crystals attaching themselves to the inch of snow on the road.

Then I felt my dad's arm on my shoulder and I knew he wasn't disappointed in me. I felt relieved and saw it had stopped snowing.

Uplifting Tile

Dakota Taylor

My hands were powdered with the chalky debris from the square cut tile slabs. After picking up and then setting each one down on the opposite side of the driveway, I stood up and breathed in deeply. It was a relief to feel the fresh air come into me and to be surrounded by the simplistic beauty of the Arizona desert, despite that the temperature outside was well over one hundred degrees. I sat on one of the piles of tile I had stacked and took it all in for a moment. I was here for a reason, and I knew that, but for a brief second the thought of everything bothersome left my mind.

“Dakota, get in here!” my dad shouted. “Where’s the tape measure at?”

And then it all came back.

My dad has always had an abstract way of disciplining. His idea of a punishment was much more unique than a basic grounding; that naive concept does not fly with him. Due to his wonderful sense of creativity, after staying out too late one night, I was delightfully awoken at six on a beautiful Sunday morning to accompany my dad cheerfully to a day of work. Note the sarcasm. The fact is, my dad knows, just as well as I do, that having to get up anytime before eleven on weekends is one of the most exasperating things to me. Having to go directly to a jobsite and do laborious tasks throughout the day just adds to the sting of it all.

I was just barely finishing unloading the rest of the endless number of tile squares from the back of our truck. As tedious as this duty may sound, lifting twenty pound objects over and over again is extremely strenuous work. Not only was the tile heavy, some of the edges were jagged and every so often I would nick my hand or forearm leaving my

skin decorated with random pink stripes. I headed towards the front door of the mansion we were at, one that my dad had been putting new tile floors in for days now. Before completing my venture up the elongated driveway, I turned around to once more allow myself to be mesmerized by the scenery around me. This house was perched atop a gigantic mountain and from this view, I had never seen Arizona look so amazing. The rocky landscape was swirled with shades of brown, orange, and red, and peaked masses extended in every direction, encircling this majestic community. Below a couple other impressive houses could be seen, each with distinct customized themes ornamenting their exteriors, and all contained within formations of vibrant palm trees. Eventually I turned back and had to squint my eyes to spot the door as the gleaming sun had caused an intense glare beaming off the enormous window that surrounded almost the entirety of the front half of this massive home.

I pushed the door open and immediately a huge, spacious room was revealed with large black marble pillars framing the entrance of two hallways, and a cream carpet-lined staircase spiraling up to the balcony styled second floor. As awe inspiring as this first glimpse was, it was almost exactly as I had pictured it. My dad talked about this place constantly, not because of its size or value, but because of the owner who he claimed he had learned so much from in just a few days of being here. From what I remember, my dad explained something about how the man traded currencies and managed trading accounts.

Initially, I had come inside to take measurements of the dining room which, as my dad described earlier when giving me a mental list of my tasks to be completed throughout the day, was to the direct left of the kitchen. This was preparation for the work he would be doing next week, and once I found the room I instantly decided to prevent myself from getting into any kind of trouble for at least a few days so I would not end up having to help install the floor of such a large area. Once you know what it's like to carry tile about and waddle around on tender, bruised knees taking measurements all day, late night partying does not seem as appealing as it used to anyway. It was odd to me though that my dad had brought me along with him today. I've always known that some of the things I do have disappointed him, and there

is a distinct feeling of shame I get from him because of the certain choices I have made. Then again, he has never been much of a talker so I am never sure what he is really thinking, but for the most part I can tell his opinions of me have changed. For awhile though, it seemed he no longer cared to attempt to punish me anymore, almost like he felt it was pointless to do so, until now.

After playing around with these thoughts and finishing jotting down the numbers of the dining room I figured I should find my dad. While searching the vicinity of this home that needed a map to be navigated, I became easily distracted by its many brilliant features. One in particular that caught my attention was the magnificent waterfall that flowed into the enormous glistening pool outside, seen through large, translucent glass doors. I jerked back to reality when I heard my dad's voice murmuring from somewhere. I followed the hardly audible noise which led down the hallway to a half open door. As I walked inside I was partly relieved to discover my dad had not been talking to himself, a theory I had been contemplating. I was also caught off guard now that I was facing a man I had never seen before, not to imply that I did not know who he was, because I did. My dad had described him to me one night after coming home as one of the most "intelligent, successful, straight-forward without being an asshole, well respected men" he had ever met. I knew instantly by his disposition and the way he spoke that this was the same guy.

"Well this must be her," the man pointed out.

This was just great. Apparently he already had some knowledge as to who I was. A list of all the disappointing things my dad could have shared with this guy, including recent happenings of the night before which in turn led to this moment, immediately popped into my head.

"Yes, this is my daughter Dakota and I'm sure she already knows who you are." My dad looked at me awaiting agreement.

"Yeah, of course, I've heard a lot about you, you have a gorgeous house," I added.

"Well I've heard much about you as well, you can sit down if you want."

And I did sit down. From there the man went on to describe the things my dad had been telling him about me. They were not what I

had anticipated, no embarrassing truths revealed or unmet expectations, but all good things, from my accomplishments in school to my quirky obsession with always being organized. Even more shocking was what opportunity this, for the most part, stranger opened up for me. He offered me an internship to assist him in his work and to teach me the basic fundamentals of what he does. This was huge, and I could only imagine how grateful my dad was that this man was considering showing me how to start a very successful career, because that is one of the things my dad has always wanted for me. I am aware of how much of a struggle it is for him to work as hard as he does everyday and still have to worry about having enough money to pay for the bills, and I know this is not something he wants me to be forced to go through. He does not want me to be the person working on somebody's mansion; he wants me to be the one who owns it.

As astonished and appreciative I too was for this proposal, I eventually turned it down. I knew it could be a great thing for me and I knew it was thanks to the efforts of my dad that I had this chance in the first place, but I wanted to find out on my own what it was I wanted to do with my life. I am not sure that my dad was aware of this, but at that moment, realizing what he really thought about me and the potential he saw within me, gave me the confidence to be able to decline the internship and start moving towards my own goals. I found a new respect for myself in knowing my dad was proud of me regardless of the many mistakes I have no doubt made before.

It was well into the evening when we left the house. I was exhausted, my arms were sore, and I never wanted to do this again. My dad does not have that choice, this is how he supports his family, but I do. I could do manual labor everyday like my dad, I could be a multi millionaire trader like the people he works for, or I could be something in between. Whichever path I choose to take I know I am capable of much more than I had been giving myself credit for.

I walked outside seeing that the sun was beginning to set and there was no longer a substantial glare on the large window lining the manor. I looked at it and this time saw my reflection clearly without having to narrow my eyes to make out what was right in front of me.

I Hate Snow

Jared Nelson

They are thousands of white specks falling softly to the ground seemingly having the sole goal to cause me pain. I hate snow. Don't get me wrong, I've always enjoyed winter, what with the cool weather, getting three weeks off from school, my birthday, and my sister moving back home for Christmas. Snow is the only real drawback of the season. I mean, not only does it make the roads dangerous and melts then freezes into ice, it's also a pain to shovel. What's not to hate?

It was cold that day, and my father wanted me to shovel the drive-way. So, of course, I tried to stall. It was snowing—a perfect excuse to try and delay the inevitable for a day. Unfortunately, luck wasn't with me. My father wanted it done right away, something about not wanting the snow to turn to ice overnight. Upon stepping outside, I let out a sigh of frustration at the sight of the blanket of white covering everything. The pine trees near the top of the driveway would usually block some of the snow, but it would seem that the snow hated me as well. It somehow found a way under the umbrella of pine needles. I had a lot of work ahead of me.

First up was the walkway. The dog doesn't seem to like to walk through snow very much and doesn't travel very far from the door before, well, doing her "business." It's really kind of gross, but no one wants to walk Mareka during the cold months, so I end up shoveling up the mess. Luckily, it went quickly, seeing as how the walkway is only slightly wider than the shovel. Next up was the flat area in front of the garage. This part is always annoying. I can get half of it done in about five minutes, but the other half... hurts. I would push the shovel forward and run into a crack between two large slabs of concrete, forcing the handle into my gut. I would stagger back, rub my stomach, then fumble around with the shovel until I was able to place it on the other side of the crack. Then I'd continue until the handle was once again driven into

my stomach. To make things worse, rain washed dirt into a corner, and dirt is heavy. I stabbed myself at least five times in the twenty minutes it took me to finish. Looking back at the walkway, I saw that it had been covered in a thin layer of snow again, but I didn't care. It was only the walkway, and I was just about to begin the challenging part.

The slope up to the street is more of a pain than the flat area. The slope itself is at least three times the area as what I had already done. The cracks were worse, still having the fibrous remains of grass that seemed to thrive during the rest of the year. Patches of broken concrete could be found every few feet, threatening to try and stab me with the shovel.

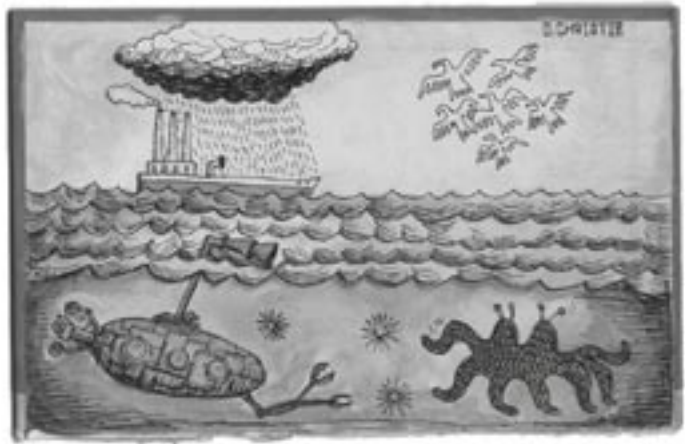
Around this time, the cold started to get to me. I breathed on my hands then stuck them into my jacket's pockets. As I waited to gain some feeling back into my hands, I grumbled to myself about the snow and the long, seemingly pointless work ahead of me. It was starting to get dark out. I really hate working in the snow during the night. I'd much rather be cuddled up with a blanket during winter nights, with a cup of hot cocoa. My attention drifted down to how uncomfortable my feet were. The snow somehow managed to find a way in and melted. The tips of my fingers tingled as sensation started to return to them.

Shoveling up hill was tiring, and I started to work up a sweat despite the frigid weather. I would shovel up a few feet, get stuck, and shovel up a few more feet. It was tedious work, but I had my complaining to keep me entertained. A little more than halfway up, my arms and back started to hurt from heaving snow to one side or the other. I used this as an excuse to take a short break.

My hands went back into my pockets as I tried to convince myself to end my misery and just head back inside. Various excuses swirled through my head, "My hands are numb. I can't feel my toes. I might get frostbite. What progress could I make while it's snowing? It's starting to get late, maybe I should turn in. I didn't even want to do this."

That last one really got my attention. It was true, of course, but it shouldn't have been a reason for me to quit. My father has always told me, "Sometimes we do things we don't want to." For years, he worked hard at his thankless job to provide for our family. I realized every one of my reasons was just an excuse to try and avoid work. As I grabbed the shovel and started back up the hill, I noticed the snow was starting to let up.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN



By Choice or By Way?

Mallory Smith

One hot July afternoon I was sitting in my living room contemplating what I wanted to do with my day, when along came an obligation putting a big fat damper on it. Call me lazy, but the idea of a job has never appealed to my sense of independence. The long drawn out melody of my doorbell might as well have been a tune of mourning. It can't be too bad, I thought, trying to mentally prepare myself for the day ahead. I baby-sit my cousins her age all the time. As soon as the little girl, Cassidy, walked into my house, the smell of body odor and cigarette smoke was overwhelming. I tried not to wince as the three-year-old immediately recognized me, not by name, but by "babysitta." She started mumbling to me in unrecognizable English. I wonder if her parents even try to teach her how to talk, I thought sadly as I pondered whether to feel sorry for the girl or just annoyed with her.

She immediately ran over to my childhood movie collection and picked out the first movie for the day, *The Jungle Book*. Soon after, she started begging for a soda out of my fridge. I offered her milk or water because I didn't think a kid that young should drink pop. Instead of accepting my rule, she ran to my refrigerator and tried to grab what she wanted out of it. I still refused and eventually got her calmed down enough to accept some milk. Then she wanted a snack. Being a health nut myself, I offered her some carrots and dip. She had never seen a carrot before. She was awed by the flavor and surprisingly good taste of the vegetable. Soon enough, I introduced her to every fruit and vegetable in my refrigerator and she loved them all as buried treasure that she would not come across too many times. She sat on my couch with a smug look on her face. Again, she ran over to the movie collection and grabbed a movie from the shelf. I took a deep breath and firmly said to her, "No! We're finishing *The Jungle Book* before we watch anything else."

She rolled her eyes up into her skull while tilting her head downward and growled in discontent. The look on her face said to me, “Don’t mess with this.” She stood up from her cross-legged position and started angrily shoving the movie in my face. Instead of giving in, I came up with a new plan: to go to the park.

She was wearing a long sleeved dress and rubber rain boots twice her size. It was at least 90 degrees out. I once asked her mother why she dresses the way she does and she replied, “I let Cassidy wear whatever she wants. I don’t really care.”

Of course, as any kid would be, she was as excited as ever to go to the park. When we arrived, she eagerly ran to the nearest swing but was too small to hop on herself. She began to give me her devil face until I ran over to help her. I pushed her lightly so as to not make her fall, repeatedly telling her to hold on. Of course, she didn’t hold on. I told her I’d push her really high if she promised to hold on. She promised, but the way she reacted to anything I said, I couldn’t tell if she really understood what I was asking her to do. Her grasp on English was far behind other kids her age. Sure enough, I pushed her, and sure enough, she didn’t hold on. Everything turned to slow motion as she flew for what seemed like a very long distance off the swing and onto the sawdust. By instinct it seemed, the tears started. I never know what to do when someone’s hurt, which probably isn’t a great trait for a babysitter to have. I ran over to her and put my arms around her. In that instant, she seemed so helpless: she was just a child looking for someone to care about her and to love her. This moment was soon forgotten as she squirmed away from me and attempted to go play some more.

The other kids playing wanted nothing to do with Cassidy. I wasn’t sure why exactly, but they always ran away from her when she tried to talk to them. Smelling of sawdust from her fall, she ran over to another little girl on the monkey bars. Immediately, her mother called the little girl over. I guessed it was the way that she was dressed and the preconceived notion people had that I was her young mother. On the way home, she refused to walk. She saw how I held her when she was hurt and wanted me to carry her home. Again, she gave me her devil look and started jumping up and down, creating an earthquake

in her wake. All the while she whined about how her feet hurt in her two sizes too big rain galoshes in the middle of summer. I sighed, knowing that she was used to getting her way no matter what. She wasn't going to change her ways just for me. I grabbed her hand and tried to pull her toward home. She refused, wearing a pout and a sly grin. I eventually gave in and carried her for part of the way until my back began to ache.

Her mother never showed up, so I called her and got directions to drop Cassidy off with her dad at home. She got instinctively into the car and didn't buckle her seatbelt. Following the directions, we ended up at a campsite right outside town. This couldn't be right, could it? I must've written the address down wrong, I thought. Cassidy began to eagerly bounce up and down in the backseat of my car seeing that she was almost home. I nervously turned into the campsite not being absolutely positive of where I was heading. She pointed to the camper she called home and almost jumped out of the car while it was still moving.

There were dirty tattered clothes scattered randomly all around the campsite. The red paint was chipped and one of the legs was missing off of their outdoor dinner table. Hard rock music blared from the camper. I knocked on the door, but no one answered. Glancing behind the trailer, I noticed a grimy bucket of water and blankets and clothes hanging from tree to tree. Anxiously, I continued to knock for about five minutes until a young guy, couldn't have been more than 19 years old, stepped out of the camper with a towel around his neck and a beer in his right hand. He apologized for not answering his door. He smiled at me with a wave of apathy directed toward his daughter.

Poor Cassidy, no wonder she was so different than other kids her age: her parents were children themselves. I almost gasped as I saw the little girl run up to her dad and try to give him a hug. He gave her an awkward glance then brushed her off and told her to go inside. I now understood why Cassidy seemed so desperate for love and attention; she wasn't getting it at home. I sighed, knowing that one afternoon with me was going to do nothing to change the way the Cassidy was being brought up. We all are, indeed, victims of our environment.

Work Stories

Cassidy was so young: she would have many opportunities ahead of her, but not if she continued living the way she was. Collecting my five dollars for the day, I held back my tears and left the campsite. Now every time I pass that campsite, I'm reminded of my afternoon with Cassidy. One day, ten years down the road, I might turn into that dirty little campsite and look for her. And maybe, just maybe, she'll have broken the cycle that has destroyed many before her and not be there, blaring her hard rock music, answering the door with a beer in her right hand. Maybe, but I'm not counting on it.

A Day in Candyland

Stephanie Krieger

It was almost 2 o'clock, on a hot summer day. By hot, I mean over 100 degrees. I was excited it would be my last day, at least for a while. I had been helping out for about half of the summer. I walked up to the front door and knocked. I heard someone running to the door. The doorknob wobbled a bit as the person on the other side struggled to open the door. When the door opened, I saw Alyson standing there with a huge grin on her face. I could see spaghetti sauce on the corners of her mouth. Her thin, yellow hair clung to the back of her neck. You could tell she had been running around. Her mother was behind her and she let me in. She led me to the living room where Jonathon was. There was a couch and a chair near the window and a T.V. touching the next wall. Next to the T.V. was a basket of toys, but the toys were not in the basket. They were spread out all over the living room floor. The kitchen was next to the living room, where the door to the backyard was.

I could smell the leftover spaghetti coming from the kitchen. The laundry must have just been finished, because I could smell the laundry detergent coming from the laundry room. The Disney channel was playing on the T.V., while Alyson was running around and jumping on and off the couch. Her mother needed to go to class and her father needed to go to work. Her parents were trying to say good-bye, but all she could focus on was showing off in front of me. She continued to run around, but now her tongue was sticking out as if she were an energetic puppy.

Jonathon was clinging to his father's leg hiding from me, but it wasn't very long before he joined his sister in her little game. Still not getting their attention, their parents finally gave up. I was told where the emergency numbers were and when they should be back. Then they left me alone with the two children.

Alyson finally settled down on the couch and watched some T.V. as I sat on the floor next to Jonathon and played cars with him. He always had to have the red car, so he gave me the green one. He crashed his car into mine while he made sound effects. A commercial came on. Alyson jumped up and tugged on my arm. "I want to play a game."

"O.K. what do you want to play?" I asked her.

"Candyland!"

"Alright, let me go get it."

She raced to the cupboard, where the games were. I opened the doors and started to reach for the game. "No! Let me get it! Pick me up!" Alyson demanded. I picked her up so she could reach the shelf. She grabbed the box, almost dropping it. She was already running back to the living room before I could even shut the doors. When I walked back to the living room, she was taking pieces out of the box and handed me the cards to shuffle. Next she took out the gingerbread men. "You will be red." She handed me the red gingerbread man. "Jon, you will be green. And I will be blue and yellow!" We each took our turns, except for Jonathon. I helped him move his gingerbread man. A few turns later Jonathon got bored and started to play with his cars again. "No, Jon! We have to finish the game!" Alyson yelled at him.

"Aly, that's O.K. I'll play for Jon." We continued to play the game. Once Aly won the game she still wanted me to finish for every gingerbread man left. Most little kids like everyone to finish the game. Sometimes Aly would say, "You win too!" after the gingerbread man would cross the finish line. So I drew a card for my gingerbread man and moved to the last space. Jonathon's gingerbread man was still far from finishing, but I kept drawing cards and moving him until he got to the end of the game board.

"O.K. Aly, let's put this game away," I said.

"You put it away."

"Why don't you help me?"

"Can we go outside?" she asked me.

"Yes, after we put this game away." I really didn't want to go outside when it was so hot out, but I didn't mind going out for fifteen minutes. I could sit in the shade, while she and Jonathon played in the sandbox.

“I want to go outside.” She was starting to get upset.

Jonathon looked up from his cars. “Outside?”

“We’re going to put the game away first,” I told them. I put a few of the pieces in the box and started to organize the cards.

“I want to go outside!” Now she was laying on the floor pouting.

“Outside?” Jon asked again. Jonathon got up and ran to get his shoes. He brought them back to me for me to put them on his feet. They hit the ground and activated the twinkling red lights on them.

“My mommy said I have to go outside today!” Aly pleaded to me.

“O.K. we will. But first we need to pick up the game.”

Alyson started to cry. “I’ll get in trouble if I don’t go outside,” she sobbed.

I thought Oh great, here we go again. “Aly, we’ll go outside, once the game is put away. We don’t want to lose the pieces.” She continued to cry.

Jonathon walked over to her. “Sissy?”

I walked over to her to try to talk with her, but she wiggled her way away from me. Jonathon, not knowing what to do, sat down and started to play with his cars again. Aly was crying so loud that she couldn’t hear anything I said. I tried to reason with her but she wouldn’t respond. Her only response was to cry even louder. Fifteen minutes after just sitting there, I went over to her. She was still crying.

“Aly, honey?”

“I want my mommy,” she said, choking on her tears.

“She’ll be home in a little bit.”

“I want my mommy!” she cried a little louder. “Mommy!” She buried her head into the couch. I tried to get her to sit up but she wouldn’t let me touch her. I finally decided to just put the game away. Since Aly wouldn’t listen to anything I had to say, I played with Jonathon. I looked over at her. She had moved to the reclining chair where she again stuck her head in the cushions. A half an hour went by and her mother walked through the door. Alyson was still crying. She ran over to her and started blabbering, but no one could understand underneath all her sobbing.

Work Stories

I told her mother, “She’s been crying for forty-five minutes.”

“I knew she was going to be like this. She’s been bossing everyone around all day.” She handed me money and asked if next Saturday I could baby-sit. I hesitated for a moment.

“I’ll have to check my schedule. I might have something going on that day.” We said our goodbyes and once I got outside I walked home as quickly as possible, where everyone is above the age of ten.

THE OFFICE



Last Call

Kat Lamberson

The office was silent that morning, and I was alone. All that could be heard was the quiet hum of my computer and my slow, deep breathing. Sometimes, when my computer wasn't humming, the vents would turn off and a silence would occur in the office that you would never think possible. It was so painful. Sometimes, I would make up little stories in my head or play music from my computer just to keep myself from going crazy. Today was one of those days. It was only 9:30 a.m. and I was ready to be done working, but I still had many hours to go. I sat quietly at my desk and started filing Mrs. Carauthers' report. She was a short, stocky woman who was always wearing too much make-up and perfume. I didn't enjoy talking to her, ever. She was always loud and bossy, and for a 49-year-old woman, she acted rather childish. She could never do anything for herself. My job at Fernwell Finances as Frank's assistant was fairly easy, and it was hard to complain about, except when the phone rang. I always feared that it would be Mrs. Carauthers and I would yet again have to baby-sit a woman more than twice my age.

Around 10:30 Frank finally strolled in, chatty as usual but I just wasn't in the mood. By this time I had finished filing Mrs. Carauthers' report and started doing my little housework jobs around the office. No phone calls yet, thankfully. However, just as I started thinking that, the phone began to ring. My heart dropped.

"Fernwell Finances," I answered politely.

"Oh hello dear, it's Julie Carauthers. I wanted you to look something up on my report for me. I have misplaced my account number again! Silly me..."

As she rambled on, I sulked to my desk and opened up my files to find her account. Sure, it was a simple task that anyone who knew how to work a computer could do, but I was sick of it. This job, this client, everything, it was all getting to me. And to top it off, the computer was showing me errors and I couldn't pull up her account.

"Just one moment please, Julie," I said, and I changed the line to Frank's office. "Frank, it's Julie again. I need to pull up her files, but it's not quite working. I have no idea what's going on but this is getting ridiculous! I'm sick of babysitting her. She's obnoxious and acts like a child. I'm less than half her age and I have to do everything for her. I can't take much more of this."

"Ok, ok, calm down," replied Frank. He tried to comfort me. "Tell her you'll have to call her back and we'll figure out this account thing, our system has been being weird this week anyways."

I switched back to our main line. "Hey Julie, thanks for waiting, and sorry about all that," I said. "We're having some problems with the system so Frank is going to try to figure it out and we'll have to give you a call back later today. Will that work for you?"

"Fine," snapped Julie. "Have a good day."

Silence on the other line.

Weird, I thought to myself. Julie is always so nice to me. I brushed the thoughts off my mind quickly and got back to work, so I could end the day as quickly as possible.

Shortly after, the phone rang again.

"Hi, it's Julie. Could I please speak to Frank?" She sounded bothered.

"Of course," I replied, "One second." I transferred her call.

It was about noon when Frank called me into his office. I remember that moment well.

"Kat, come into my office for a minute please." He sounded upset.

I got up slowly from my desk and pulled myself into his office. "Problem?" I asked, innocently.

Frank took a deep breath and folded his hands slowly in his lap. He was avoiding the issue for as long as he could. "I just got off the phone with Mrs. Carauthers," he stated, unyielding. "She was not happy."

I swallowed the lump in my throat. I began to feel hot and clammy. “...Well what is it?” I stammered.

“Remember when we had that little conversation a bit ago?” he asked.

“Um, I guess I seem to recall it, yes, why?”

“Well it is our understanding that you did not switch the phone lines properly, therefore Mrs. Carauthers heard what you said to me about her.”

I stared blankly at Frank. I wasn’t sure what to do or say. My legs began to feel weightless.

Mrs. Carauthers was one of our multi-million dollar investors and clients; if we lost her business, we lost a lot.

After what seemed like an eternity, I began to feel my mouth moving and words coming out. “I don’t know what to say, Frank! I can’t believe I was so careless, and more importantly so immature! I feel terrible. What am I going to do?”

“It’s ok,” Frank replied. “It was a mistake. I know you didn’t mean for this to happen. But I think it would be a good idea for you to apologize to Julie right away.”

Of course I agreed. I called her office, but she didn’t answer, and left her a long message apologizing about everything. I even had flowers sent to her that day. She called back later when I wasn’t in the office and left me a message saying she had forgiven me, and that she would just try to learn from this and try to change the negative things I said about her. I still felt terrible, for Mrs. Carauthers and Frank’s business. I could no longer walk into that office without thinking of that horrible day, and how I had become everything I said about Mrs. Carauthers.

Preparation and Presentations

Laci McElroy

The man at the gate wears a perfectly white, freshly ironed uniform every single day. His hair color resembles a Hershey's milk chocolate bar, and it seems as if each and every short strand resides in a particular place. As each automobile approaches the entrance, he glances up, raises his hand as if making a miserable attempt to wave, and then quickly turns to a clipboard and scratches down a number. Most days I would offer a "Good Morning" to him by giving an energized wave and gigantic smile, revealing each and every one of my pearly whites. But today is different.

"Safety is a value in all we do. We are safe because we care," reads the poster on the wall. Paper Mills are infamous for these "tacky" safety sayings and even go as far as creating a new one as a theme, year after year. Directly below the green and white logo sits an unappetizing box of day-old doughnuts, most likely left behind from an important business conference or monotonous weekly safety meeting. Eight grey tables are crammed into the room and flawlessly lined up into four rows. Pushed under the tables are hard, undersized, plastic chairs, the kind nobody wishes to sit in for more than fifteen minutes. Even from inside the main building, the aroma of wet, musty wood chips and rotten eggs is dominant.

A man wanders into the grey-walled room and snatches a maple bar, failing to notice my presence. Attempting to drive my assignment to the back of my mind, I study this eater of the doughnuts. I listen to the crunch of the stale treat as he devours it, and he is not yet through chewing it when, much to my surprise, he inquires, "Are you ready for your big day, McElroy?"

Then I remember why I am here again. In fact, it is the entire purpose of my labor as a summer intern in this towering, forest looking mill. “I suppose so, but I should probably begin practicing if I want to make a good impression,” I reply, nervously. If I want to have a positive reflection on my Dad, would have been the complete truth. When I received this job at the end of May, I was under the impression that I would be put to work with laborious tasks, such as digging ditches and hole-watch duty, but in fact, my assignment is much more difficult. Just like any other industrial factory, there is waste that comes off the hundreds of machines that run this paper mill, this waste consisting of mostly just water. Every day, I go to approximately twenty sewer lines connecting into a pond, and perform Chemical Oxygen Demand tests to discover the exact amount of harmful substances that comes from each sewer line. I must also figure out why these COD levels are either high or low and present ideas on how to keep them low. The lower the COD in a sewer line, the less environmentally harmful it will be, even after the various cleansing processes.

After practicing for many hours, it is time to show my supervisor and four other corporate environmentalists my progression with a practice run of the presentation. It is to be roughly twenty minutes long, and must summarize all of the work that I performed around the mill for the last three months. Also, I am expected to make a few statements and generalizations about what I learned regarding the environmental department and what they might do to improve this area. I wonder how an eighteen-year-old girl is expected to know how to compose advances for a department that men with PhDs are unable to comprehend. Although I can learn a lot from practice like this, the immense amount of pressure this job entails is ludicrous for someone of my age and experience.

“If you start getting excessively nervous, focus on the most kind looking guy in the room, and imagine that he is the only one watching,” a friend had advised me. I scan the room for him. The first guy my eyes come upon would be my very last choice for a soothing candidate.

Mr. Lam wears black and leather, steel-toed shoes, outdated glasses, as well as a pair of tan slacks that are about four inches too short. His

eyes are squinty, but are piercing, much like a menacing hawk preparing to hunt its prey. I continue to examine the space for the perfect contender, and Dave's shiny, bald head and his look of pure confusion catches my attention. The gaze is absolutely blank, though cheerful, so I select him to be my audience.

Standing timidly at the front of the room, I take a glance down at my note cards to see if the black flow of ink will remind me of the words that were supposed to be coming out of my mouth. I am struggling to focus on the words written on these miniature cards, and I blink and squint repeatedly, an effort to make out the sentences. Take a deep breath, slow down, and just start talking, I tell myself. Small beads of perspiration trickle down the back of my neck and I can tell my legs are quivering uncontrollably. In fact, I cannot control a single thing. My voice is shuddering awfully and my eyes blur as I try to center my stare on the patches of snow-like hair on either side of Dave's gleaming head. The words my Dad comforted me with weeks before pop into my mind. "Laci, just go to work every day, show up on time, bring home a paycheck, and do the best that you know how. That's all you can do, and that's all I expect from you. It doesn't matter what they expect."

After listening to much of my nervous stuttering, Mr. Lam abruptly stands up and switches the lights on, and I make the wise choice to suspend my babbling. "I will assume you realize that this practice run was a mess. I expect your performance tomorrow to be one hundred percent improved," the tiny man says sternly. He turns around and walks out the door. For the first time in three months, I do not care that this man is "disappointed with my performance." I think again about the reassuring words of my father and realize that I have put every bit of effort that I possess into this job and if that does not meet this company's standards, so be it. I still get paid, regardless. As long as I know that I have done my very best and also have the support of the man whose opinion means the most to me in the entire world, I am satisfied. Needless to say, the final presentation was an absolute success.

Dirty Drywall and Rotting Spittoons

Theresa Montgomery

I awoke to Leah looming over me. “I’m thinking you overslept,” she said, quite calmly, and brushed the hair out of her eyes.

I looked at the clock and yelped. It was 6:30, a full half an hour later than I had planned for the two of us to already be at work. I shot out of bed and frantically began to get ready for my day, simultaneously brushing my teeth, putting on my shoes, and packing my lunch.

We arrived at the jobsite at 7:06, but only because I sped every chance I could get and made what would have been a 30 minute drive into a 20 minute one. Leah and I were employed by Trendway, a company that specialized in office furniture. Their current client had ordered 270 cubicles, and it was Trendway’s task to assemble said cubicles and ready them all for use. Easy enough, it seemed, but that was before the client informed them that other general construction would be going on inside their building, and that the cubicles would get dirty. Trendway then proceeded to hire Leah and me for the cleaning of the cubicles.

“You’ll only have four days,” our manager said, “I want you in and out of there like white on rice, like fleas on a dog, like the hairs on my chinny-chin-chin.”

“How does that even make the slightest bit of sense?” I said to Leah under my breath, who tried her best not to laugh.

Our first day of work was miserable, but mostly uneventful. Each cubicle was about nine-feet square, had two filing cabinets, both with three drawers, three foot-long shelves, one long cupboard above the computer, and, of course, the super important u-shaped desktop. All we had to do was spray every possible surface of every possible cubicle with 409 and wipe it down. It didn’t sound too bad while it was being explained to us, but it wasn’t long before the cubicles started to blend together. I couldn’t remember what parts of what cubicles I had or hadn’t

cleaned, and I'm sure some got wiped down twice or not at all.

"You should be able to finish the second floor in one day, so break the first floor into thirds and make it your goal to finish it in three days," our manager had told us, clipboard in hand. "And don't forget what I said about the rice."

"What about the dog and your chin?" I had mumbled as he walked away, sending Leah into another fit of laughter. We did as he said and left the second floor for the last day.

That last day everything seemed to be going wrong. First, I woke up late. Next, our radio that we kept with us got knocked out a window and into a huge truck full of gravel, and then came The Room. I call it The Room because it's too horrible for an actual name. Leah and I had just finished cleaning a small group of cubicles right off to the side of the stairs that brought us to the second floor, and were already covered with the drywall that coated everything in the building. This particular group of cubicles had been exceptionally dirty, and we complained until we finished them.

"Well, at least the worst is over, right?" Leah stood up and tried to wipe the grime from her face but only smeared it more. "Oh my God! Why won't this- it's so- I can't even-" she couldn't seem to complete a single thought as she desperately tried to rid herself of the muck.

"Leah, stop. Breathe in, breathe out. Inhale, *then* shout."

"And you! I have just as much problem with you as with this freaking crap we're working with." I cocked my head slightly and looked at her, wondering what I could have possibly done. "You never talk. And when you do you don't even form whole sentences."

"Maybe I don't like to talk."

"And THAT!" she pointed a finger at me and shook it. "You always doubt yourself. Have confidence. Say 'I don't like talking', not 'well, you see, maybe, in this weird like only halfway sort of roundabout reasoning do I yada yada blah blah'...do you get what I'm saying?"

"I think so." I caught myself and rushed to continue. "I mean, yes. I do."

"I'm sorry. Let's get back to work." She sighed and bent down to pick up her bucket of supplies. I did the same and walked beside her down the hallway in search of more cubicles. As we rounded the last corner we both stopped, seemingly frozen.

“That’s got to be over a hundred cubicles,” Leah whispered. “How is that even possible? We’ve cleaned 200 in the past three days. There should only be 70...” She continued talking, but I was having trouble listening, choosing instead to look about the room.

As my gaze drifted from cubicle to cubicle I noticed something other than the number: the sheer lack of cleanliness. There was a dark, filmy covering on every surface. I ran my finger over one desk and sighed.

“Dirty drywall, my favorite,” I turned to the windows. Someone had tried to put plastic sheets up to keep them clean, but they didn’t do a very good job. Most of the plastic was now lying on the floor, exposing the windows to the horrors of construction. I took one step and heard a crunching noise under my feet. Looking down I saw that the carpet was littered with dust and mud while miscellaneous tools and other general clutter lay strewn about the room.

And the smell. I can’t even begin to describe the smell. It was like a cross between mayonnaise that had been left out in the sun, a dumpster and a skunk. It was what Darth Vader would smell like if he didn’t use an anti-perspirant.

“This is disgusting,” Leah said, plugging her nose and looking at an old McDonald’s bag with disdain. “These are grown men. They should be able to throw away their own lunches.” She sighed and dropped her head into her hands.

I looked about for a chair to sit on before noticing the state in which they all seemed to be. They were encased in the same filthy prison as the cubicles. I had a sudden fear that if I got too close I might develop a dreadful case of leprosy.

Leah suddenly shot up and beamed at me, “How about a break? A break would make me feel a *ton* better.”

I shook my head and chuckled. “Whatever you want, Leah. Whatever you want.”

We returned from our break a few minutes later, pop in hand. Leah set hers down on a filing cabinet and sighed. Looking at me she crossed her eyes.

“The best part is how you said, ‘the worst is over’.” I smiled, trying to lighten the mood.

“I know. It was like saying we had luck with a three leaf clover.” She gave a crooked, half-hearted smile in return before twisting away.

We began working, spraying the desktops with 409 and scrubbing hard enough to make our arms fall off. It wasn't long before I saw Leah, out of the corner of my eye, reach up to grab her soda. And it only took me a moment to realize that it wasn't her can.

It wasn't mine either.

"Leah!" I shouted, as she brought the can to her lips, seconds away from taking a sip of what could have quite possibly been liquid death. She turned to me and arched one eyebrow, but my cry was in vain as she took a swig of the noxious fluid. I watched her as she realized what had happened. She spit, over and over, trying to rid herself of the taste. I gasped as the goeey brown mess plummeted to the ground and stared at it for a few seconds before I realized what that can had been for.

"That is the most disgusting thing that has ever happened to me!" Leah screamed, "What the hell is that?"

"You know...how when people chew tobacco...they spit a lot?" She nodded and grimaced.

"Is that what that is? Someone's day-old...spittoon?" It was my turn to nod as she doubled over, saying, "I think I'm gonna be sick."

I offered her the rest of my pop and she recommended that we keep working. We did and finished every last cubicle that night.

"9:30," I said to her, "let's go home."

"Yeah. And wish on every lucky star that we never have to come back here."

"You know, looking back, it wasn't really that bad." I shrugged my shoulders and we headed out to my car. "I think it'd be a better use of a star to wish for a Cracker Jack prize or something."

"You didn't drink from a rotting spittoon." Leah glared at me and started to walk faster. "Take me home."

I held open the door for her then followed her outside, leaving the labyrinth of cubicles behind me forever. The sky was a brilliant shade of blue, and there were no stars out. I hung my head, sniffled a bit, and shoved my hands into my pockets. The silence between us was deafening that night, and the traffic seemed louder than ever. Looking to the sky again I saw two stars and only two.

I wished on both.

FOOD SERVICES



The Dreaded Sunday

Alec Rice

It started on another hot and sunny Sunday morning. You go to work for the sixth day in a row to begin another 9 to 6 shift for your part-time job at Fred Meyer. The first thing that you notice is that none of the jobs that are usually done by the closing shift have been done. You walk into the back room where you are encountered by numerous security cameras, blank white walls, and a rack that holds your “protective gear.” While looking for your bright orange vest with reflective strips on it you notice that the rope you like to use to keep control of multiple shopping carts at once is missing. You decide that the search is not worth the time and settle for a lesser quality rope.

Walking outside you realize that you still have seven hours and 55 minutes left on your work shift, and today there is actually going to be another person to work with you. They arrive in three hours. You are working frantically to get caught up on all of the things that got neglected the night before when you hear a ringing noise over a gust of wind and the incessant rattling of the ten shopping carts that you are pushing into one of the store entrances.

The sound you hear is the cordless phone that you are forced to carry with you all day long. This phone is the usual way that everybody gets into contact with you. You pull the phone out of your pocket and thumb the jagged plastic remains of a clip that used to hold it onto your pants. The case is tattered, and there are scuff marks from where numerous people have dropped it onto the hard black asphalt that is the parking lot. Reluctantly you answer the phone to find out that it is your boss who would like to speak with you.

You go inside where you see your boss, a blond-haired woman of about six feet, standing with a list of additional jobs that she would

like done. She asks you how you like working at Fred Meyer and you lie by telling her that you enjoy it a lot. She tells you that since they do not have anybody else to work that your lunch is going to be postponed until 2:00, and that you cannot take a break until 12:00 at the earliest. You tell her “That’s fine” and smile as you walk away with the list of jobs, which you will not have time for, in your hand.

Reading the list you see things such as “Wash out the cigarette pans,” “Clean the tops of the garbage cans,” and “Wipe down the quarter toy machines.” Eight things total on the list that you have to do in addition to carrying out groceries for anybody who asks, pushing in every shopping cart that gets taken out into the parking lot, and returning any items that a customer brought to a check stand but decided not to buy to their respective locations. You try to get some of the easier stuff out of the way as soon as possible, but keep getting interrupted by calls about frozen items at the ends of check stands, and carry out orders.

By the time that you are able to get back to pushing carts, you realize that there are about 150 carts already in the parking lot and it is going to take you at least 45 minutes of constant cart pushing to get them all in. That is not counting all of the other carts that shoppers are going to bring out there, or the time you will have to spend doing carry outs for the customers. No matter how hard you try, you cannot seem to get the carts to an acceptable level. Your boss tells you that you need to try harder to get things done.

Finally, after what seems like forever, the other daytime worker, Ryan, shows up. You finally feel like you can relax, and that you don’t have to work as hard. You pass the phone off to him and go take a 15-minute break. You go get some food from the deli, but you have to eat it as fast as you can so you can get back to work in time. When you come back, you see that the situation in the store is only worse than you left it. Shopping carts are scattered all over the parking lot, and Ryan is over at the end of the store flirting with some cashier that you can’t even remember the name of.

By this time you are just about fed up with the day. You are able to get most of the shopping carts in at about 1:30 because things slow down for a little bit. At 2:00 you are finally able to just relax for a bit

as you get an entire hour off to eat lunch. You watch the end of some nameless college football game, and then get back to work. Once again the store is a total mess. You rush outside to try and get some carts in, only to see Ryan out in the back of the lot talking on his cell phone to the same checker he was flirting with earlier.

You work as if he was not even there because he is of no help at all. You work relentlessly through the next two hours and he goes home. He was only there for four hours so that he could help you out during the busy times of the early Sunday afternoon. By 5:50 the load of people dies down to a level at which it is actually manageable for one person. This happened just in time for you to get off work at 6:00. You hand the manager the list of jobs that you only did three of and clock out for the day. Exhausted, you go home to write the first paper for English 101 that you so wisely put off until the night before it was due.

You think about looking for a new job in a field that doesn't require you to push any shopping carts, and somewhere that you don't have to be overly nice to everyone. "Maybe another day," you tell yourself. You look back on the day and realize that even though they expect too much of you, and you barely survived the day, that paycheck at the end of the week is going to look pretty nice when you see that you got \$9.22 an hour on that dreaded Sunday.

Abandonment

Kyra Allison

“Finish up them dishes,” Felicia commanded, “I need a cigarette.”

I rolled my eyes and submerged my dry hands into the subzero bleach water. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her, slouched over the railing, shouting slang into her cell phone and sucking down a cigarette. She gave me a slight smile out of the corner of her mouth, the corner not holding the cigarette, and turned away from me.

I sluggishly attacked the mountain of clear containers, hoping for a helping hand, but no such luck. The bell on the front door rang; Felicia looked at me and then stepped out of sight. I dried off my hands and hustled to the front. There stood a robust woman wearing a harsh frown covered in pounds of pink lipstick.

“I want my money back,” she demanded. “You stupid people screwed up my sandwich and I paid...” She went on, but I quit listening. My lips spread into a polite smile while my head nodded understandingly.

Felicia poked her head around the corner and interrupted the dissatisfied customer. “Yo, I gots to blitz, Megan’s on her way.” Before I had a chance to respond, Felicia blitzed, and the clown fish resumed her long winded explanation.

Without speaking, I took the woman’s sandwich, a sweet onion chicken teriyaki, minus the chicken teriyaki, stuffed the missing ingredients inside, and placed it on the counter. The woman puffed out her chest, swiped her food off of the counter and marched silently out the door. It’s three, I thought, only one more hour of this. I proceeded to complete the mindless tasks bestowed upon me by Felicia, scrubbing the bathrooms, cutting vegetables and so on.

Being new, I didn’t know how to make everything on the menu yet, and was uneasy about being left alone. I looked over at the greasy clock on the counter; the big hand was on the four, the little one on the

six. Everyone around here was so undependable. Hoping that someone would save me soon, I piled up my things and then paced the floor anxiously. I glanced at the phone, and then to my manager's phone number on the wall. It's too soon, I thought.

I was supposed to get off at four and meet my friends at eight. So much for that, I thought. By this time it was seven o'clock, and there was no one to relieve me. I decided to call my manager, Jody, to inform her of my situation. A drunken woman answered the phone after what seemed like an eternity of ringing, "Yeah?" she blurted.

"May I please speak to Jody?"

I heard her drop the phone and slur, "Hey baby! Phone!" There was hysterical laughter and then Jody answered, giggling, "This is Jody."

"Jody, it's Kyra, I was supposed to be off at four, no one else has come in, and I'm all alone."

"Well I'm sure as shit not comin' in!" she announced. "If no one's there by seven thirty, call me." Click. I set the phone aside, lifted myself onto the table behind me, took off my hat and stretched out my legs. The floor needed to be swept, the trash emptied, and we were out of teriyaki chicken, but all I did was sit and munch on the veggies that I had cut. At seven forty-five, Walt, the manager's nephew and the owner's son came strolling in through the front door.

He didn't have his hat or his apron, and his shirt was only half tucked in.

"How was your day?" Walt asked sarcastically.

"Better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick."

"What's left to do?"

"Oh, this and that, I tried to get most everything done." I hopped down off of the table and swooped up my purse and keys. "Well I'd love to stay and chat, but I have better things to do." I smiled at him and he smiled at me. I gathered my things and punched out for the night.

“We Call Them Falsies!”

Courtney Lycan

I hate my job. I despise the smell of antiseptic, old people scare me, and khakis are my mortal enemy. So why, might you ask, would I take a job as a dishwasher at an assisted living facility? The answer is simple, it is pure and total desperation. As a brand new sixteen year old with a gas tank to fill, a car payment to make, and a never ending need for new “cool clothes,” I was at the mercy of the real world, and the real world was not being nice to me.

First of all, I was tricked! Scammed into the world of work with a job description that went something like this:

- *Assist cooks in preparing and serving food.
- *Help with cleanup of kitchen and dining room
- *Help bus tables and retrieve trays from resident rooms
- *Wash Dishes, and random cleanup

That doesn't sound so hard right? Let me tell you what the real description should be.

First the food made at an assisted living facility is usually pureed and sticks to everything including skin, clothes, and walls. Second be ready to handle chewed, gummed, smelly pureed mess. Floors will be covered with un-eaten food, napkins, plates, and silverware. Third the residents are extremely bored. They will talk to you and won't want to stop for a while. You are expected to be nice, and reply with one word answers quickly and efficiently so as to get back to your job as soon as possible. And finally no matter what anyone tells you, you are going to get attached to the residents even though they smell like stale soap and have a lingering antiseptic stench. They really are sweet little people. They don't get a lot of attention, and you are the perfect person to talk

to them. You will find yourself falling in love with that little old lady that thinks you are “absolutely beautiful” as well as the grouchy old man at the end of the hall, who although he always complains about his food, never fails to tell you that you are the sweetest person who works here. They become your mentors, and your extra curricular friends. You will find yourself spending your free time listening to stories of “when I was a kid,” and “now a days.” But what is really the most important is that you will enjoy it.

Going to work early and staying late isn’t as bad here as it is at other jobs. Listening to the residents is like reading a book, but in better detail. As residents pass on, you will feel as though you have lost a grandparent. But these residents who shared their stories enrich your life and you are a better person because of it.

Of course the last of these requirements for the job is true, you do wash dishes. Yet these are not just dishes, they are gross spit covered demons, coming to get you from the depths of the Sunrise Room. They are “pudding thick liquids” and specially ordered half melted ice cream.

One time while I was rinsing off a dish of pureed tuna or something of the sort, I became fully aware of the job, and why it wasn’t for me when I started screaming with fright. From out of the depths of a creme colored mess, chunky and thick, I saw a pearly white gleam, pink plastic flashed, and I came face to face with a beautiful smile. Only it would have been more beautiful in someone else’s mouth. After my kitchen advisor stopped chuckling to herself she simply said, “We call them falsies!”

“Falsies?” I repeated, “What do you mean falsies? Those are teeth!”

“Yup, you’re right, false teeth...Falsies!”

This simple conversation was followed by endless laughing from my co-workers, many of whom had previously had the chance to exchange a smile with a pair of dentures. I may have felt humiliated and like somewhat of a baby but thankfully it wasn’t my job to find out who those teeth belonged to. As I soon learned we simply set them on a shelf out of the way, knowing that the nurse with the smell of bad cigarettes

walking by would grab them up in her hands with her bright pink finger nails. Then she would saunter back to her work station, nothing on her mind except her next break, and when she passed the office, she would toss them into a box. And there they would sit on top of the pile, until someone claimed that their “falsies” were missing, and an owner could be re-united with their smile!

Needless to say, I have never looked at a dish of pureed mess the same way again. I lasted about three months more (without another falsie accident I might add) until I found a job at a coffee shop. But I made friends that I will never forget who helped me spread my wings and showed me how to be a better person. And I even learned to tolerate antiseptic, old people are my friends, and khakis, well I still hate them.

Cafeteria Duty

Ashley Wagner

The sun shone through the windows, taunting Veronica, Jennifer, and I as we stood preparing food for supper. I longed to be in the warm sunshine, hating the thought of being stuck for even five seconds in the disgusting school cafeteria.

“I need someone to clear the salad bar!” Mr. Campbell barked from an unseen vicinity to our left.

“Okay!” Veronica called back, then she looked over at me, “Come help me.” Her skater shoes slid across the floor in a relaxed, slow shuffle out to the dining room. We got to the salad bar and I couldn’t help checking the clock even though I knew I’d only been there maybe ten minutes. I went through the same routine every day, continually thinking how boring and pointless this job was. I didn’t even have the satisfaction of a paycheck. Every dollar I earned was taken off my school bill and I never saw a cent. There wasn’t much comfort in knowing that all the students employed at Upper Columbia Academy were in the same position. I guess it was supposed to be a work-study program, but I found it unreasonable being mandatory for everyone.

“What do you say we ditch work tomorrow?” Veronica joked, reaching out with her nail-bitten fingers for a container of dressing.

“Sounds good.” I laughed, wondering if we might eventually follow through on skipping out. I followed Veronica to the refrigerator to put away the various salad toppings. I was the official fill-in person, doing any odd jobs that no one else was assigned to. More often, I helped out a friend on their job (whether they truly needed the help or not).

After goofing off and wasting as much time as was reasonably possible, there were only two large salad bowls left on the bar.

“What do you think about this lettuce?” Veronica asked, tilting her black spike-covered head.

“It looks pretty nasty,” I replied, staring at the limp, slightly browning leaf.

“That’s what I was thinking.” We dumped the leftover salad into the trash.

“What are you doing?” We both jumped at the sound of our supervisor’s voice directly behind us. “That lettuce is still good. Take it out of the garbage and wash it off so we can still use it.” Mr. Campbell’s head glistened through his thinning crew cut while he frowned down at us. Veronica and I looked at each other aghast. Was he serious? Veronica raised an eyebrow, turned, and walked away. I watched the back of her black shirt disappear around the corner; apparently the right motivation warranted vanishing instantaneously. When my gaze returned to Mr. Campbell, he was still glaring at me, thumbs hooked in his stained apron. I looked at the floor, sighed, and then bent to retrieve the soiled lettuce from the garbage can. Satisfied that I would complete the task he had assigned, Mr. Campbell nodded and went back to the large vats of reeking slop they called food.

I wanted to puke, flinging the lettuce into the sink. As water poured from the tap, I swallowed, resigning myself to my menial position. The attempt to preserve these leafs with the use of lemon juice had failed to hide their age. The water swirled down the drain and I allowed for my resentment as I vowed I would never eat the salad, or any other food cooked in that kitchen again.

When our shift was over, Veronica and I lay out on the lawn in the beautiful spring air.

“That was so gross! I can’t believe he’s going to use that lettuce!” I exclaimed.

“I can’t believe you actually took it out of the trash like he asked! That’s just disgusting...I wonder what else they do to the food.” Veronica rolled over, laughing. I smiled, somewhat ruefully, deciding not to mention the fact that she had ditched me without a word, leaving me to face Mr. Campbell alone.

“Yeah, I don’t think I want to know. And I really don’t think I’ll be eating there again.” I couldn’t bring myself to laugh about it quite yet.

The next day Veronica and I didn't go to work. It seems that we weren't missed much since Mr. Campbell never said anything to us. Skipping work became a somewhat regular habit after that. I never felt guilty for the afternoons I spent lying out in the soft green grass, soaking up sunrays, and sipping red and blue slushys. The crushed, sugar-covered ice melted in my mouth, and as it did my grudge toward working at the cafeteria dissolved away, too.

Profanity Has A Purpose

Darcy Morlan

The rule of food industry is when you walk in the door, you leave all personal problems aside. Though it seems like a simple concept, it's harder than you think. The first thing I realize when I walk through the door everyday is that I am an employee working for the oldest Pizza Hut built in plain old Spokane, Washington. How can anyone enter a building with a positive attitude when the first thing you hear when you open the door is the most awful screech because the owner is too cheap to buy new door hinges? Like nails on a chalkboard, the screech represents every overbearing customer I will have to deal with who enters the premises.

One particular day, I came into work to see my normal scenery, employees being lazy sipping their unpaid pop waiting for the rush to start. Just as we were enjoying our time doing nothing, "Mr. Boss-man" Duncan came breezing through the doors. He was twenty-two, going through a divorce, with a child; his career plan: Pizza Hut. The past few months, he had been extra grumpy always yelling at us for not having black shoes, black pants, and pressed red shirts. Before he could make any comments about our imperfections, Shane walked in the door late to work as usual.

Shane is one of those guys that pushed the boundaries and broke all the rules. While all the employees were neatly kept to avoid harassment from Duncan, Shane came in wearing green and purple shoes stolen from the bowling alley, wrinkled khaki pants, and a sloppy Pizza Hut shirt ten sizes too small for him. Duncan stared at him and opened his mouth like he was going to say something and just walked outside to smoke a cancer stick.

"I hope it doesn't get busy, then we could all just sit and do nothing," said Shane.

“Do you ever do anything anyway butthead?” I said sarcastically, yet there was some truth to it.

Soon the rush was going to hit and I already knew it would be a bad day for the servers.

With Shane on the clock, it meant double the work. Suddenly I found myself yearning to hear that repulsive screech from our worn out door. I hoped a customer would come in soon so I wouldn't have to pretend Shane's flirting and unintelligent conversation was charming. Yes I thought. That wretched sound.

“Hi how are you doing today? Would you like a table or a booth?” I said in a fake bubbly way.

“Sure the two of us want a booth and we're ready to order,” said the plump couple.

My worst nightmare came true in that second. I realized as I was walking them to my section, their stereotypical American bodies probably wouldn't fit. The woman tried with all of her might to squeeze in between the table and the red cushy seat. Without making it obvious, I asked the couple if they wanted a nice table with a good view. They seated themselves acting like nothing had ever happened. I could see the woman's chair begging for mercy as she seated herself on the weak legs of the chair. With a crack the chair legs surrendered and she was on the floor. Holding back my sinister laughter, I got her another chair and apologized. I felt myself biting the insides of my cheeks still replaying the incident over and over in my head in slow motion. In attempt to get past the “tragic scene” the husband quickly ordered.

“We want a large, thick crust, meat lover's pizza with double the sausage and ham. Can we also get two diet Pepsi's, but could you make one quarter of that regular Pepsi because it tastes better?” said the eager couple.

“Sure, would you like to add some appetizer's like salad or...”

“Are you calling us fat?”

“No I just thought you might like an appetizer while you...”

“Fine we will take two one trip salads, but last time a waiter named Shane gave us larger plates for the same price.” They were looking threatening now.

“I’m sorry, he wasn’t supposed to do that, and I can’t give you bigger plates without charging you more. If I could I would, but my boss would not approve.”

“Fine whatever, just get us our food. We are starving.”

“Not a problem,” I said overly enthusiastically.

As I walked to the drink station, the room felt sweltering hot and it was becoming very difficult to remain nice to unreasonable demands. I could feel anger squeezing my brain like a prune. I let in and out a deep breath, but my throat felt caked with grease since that is all we serve. Heart attack in a pan is what I call it. To appease the couple, I brought them their drinks and salad plates with efficiency. I kept telling myself, get through this and everything will be fine. I was wrong. The doors came swinging open and two very unpleasant men came in.

“Shane, can you get them?”

“No I need a smoke break.”

Great I thought to myself, I wish I was a smoker.

“Hi how are you today? Would you like a table or a booth?” I said with probably the most fake smile of the night.

“I’ll sit wherever you want me to, baby.”

I briskly walked them to a booth dreading their presence. His eyes looked at me up and down like a busy elevator. Both of these men had grungy, sweat stained clothes. I kept saying in my head, please don’t hit on me. One of them was quiet and intimidating while the other just smiled at me. The whole time, I could smell his putrid breath leaking through the gaps between his teeth. Trying to ignore it, I attempted to take their order quickly.

“What can I get for you tonight?”

“Are you on the menu?” he asked while cackling, and his beer belly moved up and down like a giant bouncy ball.

I just smiled like I didn’t mind.

“My gosh, you are so hilarious, I have never heard that one before.” My teeth were grinding. Good thing my orthodontist wasn’t around.

“I’ll take two beers, a pepperoni pizza, and your phone number.”

“I’ll grab your drinks and get that pizza started for you.”

As he returned the menus, he touched my hand and commented on my soft skin. It was all I could do to stop myself from projectile vomiting all over him and his friend. You could cut his bad breathe with a knife. Before I walked back to the drink station, I asked the portly couple if they needed anything else. For some weird reason, they didn't have any demands.

Now was the moment I was dreading. The bill. I walked over to the "perv" table and handed them their receipt with some complimentary mints. As I turned around to deal with another table, I felt a hand brush against my bottom. I snapped. I whipped around so fast that I felt my head spin trying to catch up with the rest of my body.

"You better have a damn good reason for touching me, I would highly suggest you leave this store before I cut your man-hood off!"

I could feel everybody's head turning. Everyone's eyes seemed to be burning into the back of my neck. My yelling brought the room to a silence. I could hear the words replaying in my head over and over again, almost like an echo; my whole body shook with fury. Needless to say, the two men left cash on the table and speed walked out of the store. My body went into a cold sweat and I knew Duncan would probably be firing me. I started walking toward the door when the overly-plump couple caught my attention.

"Excuse me," said the wife gently.

"Is there something I can do for you?" I said with a shaky voice.

"I wanted to say thank you."

"For what?"

"I saw that customer sexually harassing you and most waitresses would have taken it, but you stood up for yourself. If you wouldn't have said anything I would have spoke for you."

"Thank you."

From the beginning, I thought the plump couple wasn't nice solely because they had had an unfortunate accident. They ended up being really kind and protective even though they didn't know me. Honestly, I was too quick to judge their character because it said a lot about them that they wanted to stand up to protect me. I decided I needed

a little breather and headed outside followed by my shocked boss. I expected him to start scolding me like I was a five-year old kid for throwing a tantrum.

“I didn’t know you said bad words,” he said. His smile looked extremely surprised.

All I could do was laugh because I somehow managed to stand up for myself without regret. As the rush slowed down, I collected my tips and found that I had made more tips that night than I ever had before. My goal isn’t to have anymore emotional outbursts at work, but I try to tell the truth when I feel uncomfortable. If someone has a problem with the truth, then I have reason to believe they have the problem.

Every time I hear that overly annoying screeching door, I prepare myself for a new adventure. If you think about it, it’s exciting because I don’t know if I will have a really nice customer, or a big grouch. I learn to take what life throws at me. People are like obstacle courses, you just have to find out what you are in for. I’ve learned to appreciate the screeching door. What’s crawling in today?

