

Work as We Have Known It

Reflections on Working

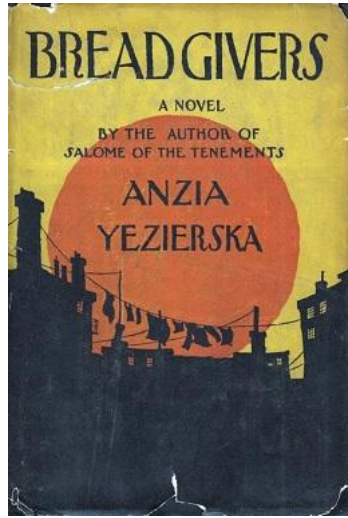


"I will sweep as I go, I will sweep as I go"
Jo Hanson

Editor: Karen Petersen

The Sitting Room Library
June 2025

ANZIA YESIERSKA, 1885-1970



Anzia Yesierska, who was she?
And why is this anthology on Work dedicated to her?
Susan Miller will tell you why:

Anzia Yezierska worked from an early age with her mother and sisters to contribute to family expenses. Their father, a Rabbi, dictated the family's rules, but earned not a penny. It was below him to work. He studied Torah and worshiped morning and evening at the local synagogue. Each sister worked in the garment factories, sold herring in pushcarts, cleaned homes, did anything to make the expenses and put food on the table. Anzia went to public school and shifted to night school, when working by day as a peddler of pushcarts, ironer, shirtwaist seamstress, pieceworker, canner in a canning factory, housecleaner, always willing to do any odd job to bring in pennies toward the family's needs.

She left home at 17 years when she could no longer abide by her father's rules. Anzia's goal was to become a teacher, to save money toward teacher's college. Her father felt each daughter should marry. Education was for boys. It is fitting we are dedicating our SITTING ROOM publication to Anzia Yesierska, who worked so many hard manual jobs to realize her goal of becoming a teacher. And she went on to become a popular writer, now sadly neglected.

Bread Givers. a novel by Anzia Yesierska (originally published in 1925).

Anzia Yesierska: a Writer's Life (1988). Louise Levitas Henriksen (Louise is Anzia's daughter).

Introduction

J.J. Wilson

In this introduction I decided to focus on women's work -- be it routine chores, maintenance, or a job with a pay check, or a career with a corner office—because the contributions to the annual SR anthology not surprisingly wrestle with the contradictions connected with that too-inclusive word “WORK”.

Until Karen Petersen chose the topic of work for this year's anthology, I had never thought much about it, except for railing against unequal pay and not being listened to in meetings and whoopitydo!, how great to get a paycheck, and such like banalities.

In all my readings on feminism, I never picked that topic to read up on; in the novels written by women I don't remember coming across many memorable scenes of working.

Do you?

I think not, because when reading the so diverse entries coming in for this year's anthology, I am getting the feeling of reading fresh material, writing territory that has not been explored all that much. And there are more interviews and self-accounts than discussions of work as portrayed in literature. Not an appetizing topic for fiction? Do we read books to get away from work? Or is work just hard to write thoughtfully about?

You will find plenty to think about in these essays: the differences between soul work and soulless work. There are testimonies of gratitude to supportive mothers AND husbands. There are unapologetic accounts of eschewing traditional work patterns and one horrifyingly unappetizing job described by Barbara Sapienza along with, in nice contrast, accounts of work that did not even feel like work.

And then the sum up by Sharon Bard: “My work is telling this story.”

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How to Gain Respect for One Another's Work

Anon

A couple I knew had made a deal to swap out one day every week, or at intervals anyway, when they did one another's jobs: yes, the wife went off to the husband's landscaping job on the hot summer days whilst he stayed home in the airconditioned house and cooked and cleaned while taking care of a baby and a toddler, with two older kids coming home after school. The older kids often needed to be driven to various sports/rehearsals/sleep overs which mean loading the baby and the toddler into their clothes and car seats ... you parents know the drill.

When the wife came in about 5:30 or 6, all sweaty and muddy, she needed a shower before she could embrace the kids and she was, of course, ready for supper – had he had a chance to get it ready?

Well, you get the picture: both of them respected one another's regular work day much more in detail. A good idea!

Babysitting

A note on “Babysitting”, so prevalent a job that it has become a word of its own.

Just Another Babysitter

Not surprisingly, “Babysitting” is mentioned as the first paid “job” in many of these accounts, but without much analysis of what was learned while looking after other people’s kids; “looking after” is itself a curiously imprecise job description, isn’t it?

The job is nearly always trusted to girls. Are we supposed to be born knowing such a tricky set of skills? Or at least willing to take the low pay? The parents must have really needed to get away for a while and so were willing to take a risk on the judgement of teenagers. Beverly Tyson was just 11 or 12 when she was given that responsibility.

I did it while I was in college and indeed found it filling such a need that I had to farm out my requests to my friends and dorm mates, ending up with a business that taught me more about being an entrepreneur than a baby sitter.

I did learn a lot, however, from going into all those houses of people living such different lives from mine – one house I remember had NO books or magazines or newspapers except for the Bible and one cookbook!

A middle-class book desert – I know, I know I should have brought my homework but...

Any adventures or learning experiences from these early “jobs”? I bet they would fill another book, but it is telling, isn’t it, that so many of us got these “previews” of the demands of parenting, and the tendernesses also.

My Name is Frida Kahlo

Barbara Ann Abbott

and my occupation is Painter.
When I was a child, I was disabled by polio.
It weakened my limbs and robbed me of vitality.
It also shaped my resilience and determination
in ways I did not fully understand at the time.
Inspired by my childhood struggle,
I later entered medical school
to become a doctor, to heal the sick and infirm.
But in 1925, at the age of 18, my life took a tragic turn.
I endured a catastrophic accident
that altered the course of my life forever,
leaving me emotionally and physically scarred
with shattered bones and a deeply wounded will.

In the face of adversity, I could have succumbed to despair.
Instead, I summoned my inner strength
and fought hard through relentless pain.
I utilized my artistic talent
to forge a career as a Painter,
a challenging goal for a woman
in an era dominated by men.

With hard work, I became recognized as a realist artist
who painted images with haunting interpretations,
inspired by the natural beauty and artifacts of Mexico.
At first, selling my art was challenging,
sometimes discouraging.
My ambition was strong, and I persevered,
determined to be self-sufficient and self-reliant.
I vowed never to rely on a man for financial support.

Painting was also my salvation.
I poured my pain onto the thirsty canvas,
soothing and satisfying me like a healing magic potion.
It quelled my hunger for self-expression,
and calmed my suffering of my ravaged, fractured body,
and a broken heart, ripped apart
by the hurtful philandering of my husband, Diego Rivera.

One of my paintings was titled "Two Fridas."
It shows two contrasting versions of my existence
painted on the day of my divorce from Diego.
The two Fridas hold hands with each other in solidarity,

a mixture of my two cultures, Europe and Mexico
One weak and one strong
In the painting, one heart is open, cut, and bleeding
Its vein fills my Mexican heart with the blood of life
It provides me the strength to endure
my physical misery and mental anguish.
Together, we are one.

I was 22 when I met Diego,
an older man whose name already echoed in the world of art,
far more famous than me, a mere woman.
I loved him desperately and unconditionally!
We shared great passion, an intense roaring fire
that burned through our bodies.
I felt cherished and adored by him, despite my afflictions,
except when he wandered into the arms of his muses,
more radiant and unblemished than me,
unburdened with infertility,
which I suffered from in silence.

After ten years, my marriage ruptured into pieces
like a collapsed bridge
that crumbled under its own weight.
My emotions lay raw,
a torrent of feelings, sharp and stinging
like salt on an open wound.
Emptiness overwhelmed me.
I summoned every ounce of resilience
from the deep roots of my diverse heritage,
a blend of strength and endurance.
It helped me navigate this excruciating chapter in my life
a path paved with heartache and profound loss.

In the end, I managed to survive the ordeal!
Empowered by my unwavering independence and self-reliance,
my vibrant and deeply expressive paintings
became as famous as Diego's monumental murals,
The income I derived from my art remained steadfast and secure.
No man would ever strip that autonomy away from me.

A year later, Diego and I reunited, still in love.
I spent the rest of my days intertwined with him,
both in life and in art.
I continued to paint with intense fervor
with the independent spirit
that defined me throughout my life.

Shades of Gray

Sharon Bard

When Lina Volkas was pulled from her home in Kaunas, Lithuania, at the age of 15, she worked to stay alive. It was June 1941. Her father had disappeared and now Lina, her mother and younger brother were arrested and transported via trucks, trains, and ships, to the edges of Siberia. Early on, there is a scene where she looks into a mirror and did not see her reflection again for a decade. For 12 years she worked to stay alive. She hauled bags of grain. She moved crates of food. She was a beet farmer. She chopped and carried wood. She dug dirt. She built a coffin to lower her mother into the frozen tundra. She tended to her younger brother, who was very ill with scurvy. She traded things; she stole food. “Have you ever wondered what a human life is worth?” she asks. “That morning my brother’s was worth a pocket watch.”

When she was able, Lina drew pictures for her father in the hopes they would reconnect. Her first drawing was done on a handkerchief and passed from person to person among the prisoners. She learned where he was being held. She mixed snow with ashes to create gray water for her drawings.

Her work was not a career and not a choice. Her work was to stay alive and to help her brother stay alive. Lina’s story was told by Ruth Sepetys in *Between Shades of Gray*, published in 2011. A follow-up graphic novel was published in 2021.

The most impactful part of this story for me is that I actually met Lina. She returned to Kaunas and set up a little stand in a trailer with maps, pictures and stories of her journey to the Arctic Circle. When I met her, the Baltics had already joined the European Union and were part of NATO. There was independence and excitement. Lina’s work was to educate the new generation to the horrors of Soviet Occupation.

We bonded immediately, communicating through my Estonian guide whose work was translating from Russian to English. Lina had a droll, feisty sense of humor which amazed me because of what she had endured. Her brother had died. She married the boy she met through her detainment. She had lost track of him but they found one another again. Miina, the tour guide, told me there was a book about Lina. I didn’t know the full story until I returned to the U.S. and found the novel. In researching more about the events, I read that Ruth created a composite of characters and sold the story as fiction because the victims returned as war

criminals and needed to keep their identities secret. Did I really meet Lina, who identified as such, or did I meet another person whose name could not be revealed? What ultimately mattered was the connection.



This photo of Lina and me was taken on October 6, 2017, two days before the Tubbs fire in Sonoma County wiped out my home and neighborhood. This brief but poignant connection with a woman halfway around the world inspired and encouraged me. Lina, my guide star, could survive and so could I.

My work is telling this story. It is to discriminate between rising threats of a totalitarian government and unnecessary paranoia. My work is to respect the cycles of nature and our ancestors and to hold hope for the future.

For Tillie Olsen

Ilanthe Brautigan-Swensen

As a child reader, and a very serious one at that, I wasn't sure how to enter the world of authorship or even the kind of work that was required. How did one become a writer? Although I grew up amidst many male writers—and it was clear to me that often women enabled a lot of the behind-the-scenes labor. This wasn't talked about openly, nor do I know now how much they contributed to their husband's writing, but I knew that part of the story was omitted. For the most part my own father, other than during a brief marriage to my mother who gave him tangible support—he began his career as his own typist and improbable cheerleader—and ended it that way. He gave me a portable typewriter for my 9th birthday, and I began my own quest.

Years later, it was at Sonoma State University that I first heard a woman writer talk about the work and that was Amy Tan. She said something that changed my life. *The Joy Luck Club* was about to come out—and she was being interviewed on stage; the male interviewer asked her why, at that time, there were not more coming-of-age novels written by women. Her reply was, “Oh, there are, they are mostly regarded as juvenile fiction.” It was as if the room split in two. Before and After. The *before* was that, of course, I had read many coming-of-age novels as a young person, and then had moved onto biographies about women, yet they tended to be skimpy about the nitty gritty of the writing life of a woman. And not many people were asking for this information. The *after* that began on that particular summer afternoon continued; Amy Tan was generous, outlining her journey as a writer. Her stories began my search for more examples of how the work was accomplished. Not the finished product, but what it actually took to engage in the work that created a book. The world opened up. One of her mentors, Anne Lamott, wrote brilliantly and hilariously about a writer's life in her formative book: *Bird by Bird*. She, unlike some of the women writers who I had met and admired (they prided themselves on having succeeded at keeping the world at bay), lived a more messy—yet realistic life from my perspective. My father also set a good example as one kind of writer—having friends and interacting with the world around him—yet not so great in the parenting department. Loved and cherished I was, taken care of in practical ways, not so much. The *after* also began a search for different ways to enter the work of being a writer.

As an extrovert, who had a child and friends, I was hungry for the stories of women who wrote and had a life—yet I understood the inherent dangers for one's health of getting up in the wee hours to write before the dawn. And how quickly time could slip away due to distractions. For myself, teaching has been its own rewarding, yet serious distraction. There were also the super-hero women writers who could lift cars off kittens and write prolifically. That wasn't me either.

The image of Toni Morrison writing at her kitchen table on a yellow pad stained with her children's breakfast is burned in my memory. I understood that writing was its own work and having a nine-to-five job made it difficult to have the energy to create at the end of the day. Tillie Olson wrote powerfully about this. At a reading organized by J.J. Wilson via The Sitting Room, I listened to Olsen talk about her work. She was wearing the most beautiful, soft velvet jacket. After the reading, I asked her questions about her writing life, she answered thoughtfully—and then she embraced me. I'll never forget the feeling of velvet on my cheek and her arms holding me close. Sometimes the answers to questions come in this form. She also wrote me an inscription in her book, which I never could decipher, yet just seeing her handwritten words—like a delicate etching, carefully chosen just for me seemed all I needed to continue my work. Then and now.

Thank you to my husband Paul Swensen for being my first reader and creating a room for me.

“Following What I Love Gets Me Where I Am”

An Interview with Fatima Roldan, Latinx Leader – October 2, 2024

Sarah Broderick

Fatima Roldan spoke with me and others at the South Novato Library branch about what it means to be a Program Coordinator in the County of Marin Probation Department as well as a member of the North Bay Latinx community. Over the course of our hour together, she spoke of growing up, what she has learned in her life that speaks to the work with youth she does today, and her drive. More than once, she reiterated how important it is to find work that fuels her purpose, not her paycheck.

Born and raised in Santa Rosa, Roldan is the first of eight children to Mexican parents and is first generation. Growing up, she was relied upon by her parents as an example and guide for her younger siblings. Instead of being resentful of a lost childhood, she voiced gratitude for having the opportunity to become someone younger people could count on and look up to. In fact, she considers this experience a large reason why she works as a mentor to youth today.

“I enjoy being there for people and being a support.”

But Roldan is more than simply a supportive figure. She’s a motivator. And she uses her own life lessons to inspire those she meets in her work. One main motivational lesson she offers to youth is that to know what they are capable of they first must try.

It wasn’t until college at University of California – Riverside that Roldan gave herself permission to try a sport that she had always wanted to try: boxing. When asked what took her until then, she said that it had to do with where she came from and the perspectives her family had about gender roles. Men, not women, were boxers. This notion never sat right with her.

Little by little, she tried experiences she had denied herself previously. And, during the COVID-19 lockdowns, she found herself reflecting and asking what sort of person she wanted to be. She wanted to be a person who put herself first, took risks, and tried new things. Upon her return to the on-campus classroom, she enrolled in an economics class taught by a professor who was also a boxing coach. When he encouraged students to visit the gym, she took it as a sign, enrolled, and loved it.

“Go for it. Just do it,” she says to youth. “¡Eres podoroso/a!”

Graduating with a degree in psychology, Roldan moved back to her hometown and found a job at Verity – Sonoma County Rape Crisis, Trauma & Healing Center where she quickly gained experience working with youth, healthcare workers, and incarcerated individuals. There, as a bilingual specialist, she advocated for increased programs related to consent in schools in

Roseland and other predominantly Latinx Santa Rosa neighborhoods. Roldan said that they never talked about consent growing up and knew from experience that these communities perhaps needed to have the conversations the most. Those conversations often needed to occur in Spanish, not English. “You don’t take an English-language class and learn about human trafficking,” she said. To truly serve and educate individuals in such tough subjects, she says that their first language is often the best.

No matter what the subject matter, she reminds youth that they are capable, but they must first try to know the extent of their abilities. One day, while leading a workshop in career preparedness, a youth approached her after the meeting and asked for additional help and guidance. “That might not sound like a big deal,” she said, “but [his asking for more help] is everything.” The youth was taking charge of his education and destiny.

“I like to empower youth to use their voice and know what that looks and feels like.”

Her current work in the Probation Department as a Program Coordinator offers her a central role in the Career Explorers education program. Through the program, youth aged 15-22 intern within various departments across the County of Marin as well as non-profit and education partners beyond in order to prepare them for working life, the program’s main goal. However, Roldan stresses that Career Explorers is not about “busy” work. Instead, the program strives to offer rewarding on-the-job scenarios that place youth at the center of initiatives that inspire them. While some internship positions are alongside professionals with the District Attorney’s Office or the Marin County Free Library, youth also have the opportunity to work with Parks & Rec and other departments away from traditional offices.

Roldan joined the team prior to the summer 2024 program. After receiving two-hundred thirty applications (their largest number yet), they placed seventy-five youth in internships. What is particularly rewarding for Roldan is that the majority of participating youth came from backgrounds described as having at least one employment barrier such as living in at-risk communities, being unhoused, or having individualized education plans. Over the summer, the youth participated in workshops such as interview prep, resume writing, and other job readiness workshops. Roldan got to know them and witnessed their progress. Their communication skills in writing and over email improved, and they learned tangible job skills like Microsoft Excel and how to fill in a timesheet; but perhaps most important of all, she saw so many of them with improved confidence.

“And I guess that goes back to my goal: to empower people. I have to have a purpose to go to work every day. I love it.”

No matter whether leading workshops on consent or resume writing, Roldan’s goal is to inspire and empower youth. She looks forward to the future of Career Explorers and her work as a mentor in the Probation Department.

In Training

Lin Marie DeVincent

Sleeping with sweetness
I dream of “women’s work.”
On a train filled with passengers
asking me in one voice:
“Why don’t you iron?”
Hilarity hangs in the air as I avoid their eyes
consider the consequences of being branded
a woman who doesn’t iron.
I take my iron, I think to myself,
have to, these days of perimenopausal
red seas that don’t part for anyone
no matter how much I pray.
I ponder if the iron pills I’m swallowing
for my anemia are made from the old irons
women don’t use anymore.
Whump, whump, whump.
Heavy as Granny’s heart
as she pressed out the wrinkles
of her family’s clothes.
Whump, whump, whump.
Hard irons in women’s hands
warmed by the dense solid heat
pulling their bodies down over the tables.
Not tools like hammer or axe.
Only a weight dug from the earth
to satisfy peacock preening
somebody’s idea of “women’s work.”
Looking up to the half-smiling faces
in the train, I answer:
“I’m inventing a fabric that doesn’t wrinkle.”
Loud applause, cheering rocks the car.
I am pleased - consider the challenge ahead of me -
 inventing.
Now that’s women’s work!

Sky Fishing, 2007, Running Wolf Press

Score Keeping

Karen FitzGerald

Is score keeping women's work? Ask men. They think women are always keeping score about this or that slight, about the betrayals served upon us, about the infidelities they can't seem to avoid—especially since the discovery of Viagra.

OK. I'm just being snarky here. The fact is I always wanted to be a score keeper, just like my mom back in the 20's—the Roaring 20's, the Jazz Age.

Mom's first job was pounding out scores to silent films. She was 14 years old when she landed the job of pit pianist in her one movie-house town of Delano, California. Not exactly the career choice her parents had in mind for their child prodigy.

Gramps was regaling me in the 1960's about Mom in the 1920's when she went through the equivalent of a hippie phase. “She was just your age, Karen, only her rebellion included gin and jazz, not drugs and rock ‘n roll.”

Like I said, Mom was a child prodigy; string instruments were her thing and piano her first instrument. She began playing at three years old and apparently mastered much of Chopin by six. At twelve, having accomplished her Hayden, Mozart, Bach and ‘Rach’ she was finding church choir accompaniment tedious. Her flirtation with Ragtime had become a five-alarm flame, and at fourteen, when it was discovered she was playing hooky from school to play matinees in the piano pit at the movie house – I think they called it ‘apple poxy’ is what Grandma suffered? According to gramps, anyway, who told the story like this:

The town's theater owner, John Panero, recognizing Mom as a cost-effective solution to the expensive men musicians (who were, at the time, unionizing around the emergence of movie scores being played by full orchestras) asked Gramps if he could hire his daughter to play.

“At the movie house?”

“Exactly. All she has to do is play musical passages that fit the action and emotions playing in the scene on screen.”

So, Gramps asked Mom if she wanted to give it a try, thinking maybe the activity would be a healthy distraction from the very intense training she was undergoing three days a week up at Stanford University. “Oh yes, yes, yes, *pull-eeeeze!*” she begged, but Grandma, who happened to be Delano’s grammar school Principal, said absolutely not!

“She’s being groomed for the concert stage, for God’s sake. I don’t want her exposed to the sinful behavior of Fatty Arbuckle and his ilk! What in heaven’s name are you thinking?!”

And so, Mom did what any healthy, gifted, rebellious young high-school girl might do. She cut school, snuck out nights, lied about her comings and goings when in fact she was hunkered down in the pit of the Delano Theater *playin’ piana’*. But of course word got back to the town’s school Principal.

Mom loved playing for the “flickers”, loved improvising to the overly made up, exaggerated emotional expressions of Lillian Gish, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton. Thankfully, Gramps convinced Grams that (in today’s lexicon) the work was at least concert adjacent. Additionally, it was preferred that Mom move through her years of rebellion closer to home so they could keep an eye on her. Too much parental authority might find her running off to Cole Porter territory! Besides, Mom got plenty of scolding from the priests and nuns whenever caught rattling off a rag during choir practice. Also, there was that very serious Scott Joplin crush that needed to be outgrown.

Anyway, Mom was so good at the work of a pit pianist that the theater owner installed a Wurlitzer Wonder and Mom went to town improvising the sound of an entire orchestra thereby causing a twenty-seven percent increase in ticket sales.

And then one day “talkies” happened. With that technological advancement, the sound of music and flicker of films was forever synchronized and embedded in film-making. Movie house pit musicians became a thing of the past. Overnight—a thing of the past. Made Grandma very happy.

Sadly though, when it came time for Mom to take to the concert stage, the Great Depression was underway. No symphony orchestra would even bother to audition a female pianist. Men needed the few jobs available to pianists in those days “because men need the

work” she was told, along with other advice symphony conductors dished out about what women should be doing during “these hard times.”

I’m happy to report, there’s a wonderful Coda to this story about my Mom. It’s my GO TO story whenever a door gets slammed in my face.

Mom’s disappoint was overwhelming. She knew it would be a death-bed regret if she went through life never playing the concert stage. So, there came a point in her newly-wed life that she told Dad she was going to drop everything and prepare to audition for a small town symphony orchestra. With Dad’s blessing, Mom moved into a small town motel for one month and taught herself how to play the bass fiddle. She no longer had the confidence she’d make it to the stage as a pianist, and she knew she didn’t have what she needed to accomplish the skill of a symphony violinist. However, a bass fiddle? She believed she might possibly master the instrument in 30 days. “Absolutely, you must try,” said Dad.

And so, with hard work, determination, talent and Dad cheering her on, she landed a job on her very first audition. She played one season with the Bakersfield symphony. It’s all she wanted. Just the one season, after which she reentered newly-wed life and proceeded to have kids in 4/4 time.

Incidentally, Mom created a thematic rif for each one of her kids. Every time a kid entered her music room she’d lapse into their theme. Mine was the dramatic phrasing that accompanies the on-coming train speeding towards an inevitable wreck.

Circle

Robin Gabbert

Typical office romance they said...
hard working colleagues
running at a dash from one meeting
to the next, seeing the boss's too
smiling face on every 101 billboard.

Both part of the same competition—
it couldn't last.
They were galloping in a vicious circle
where winning was their only staple,
the food on which they both thrived.

That's what *they* thought.
But *they* weren't part of the other circle,
when our bodies lay flattened in exhausted repose,
thinking only of one another, wondering how
much longer we'd have to endure
this two-bit job.

The Work of Labor, A Tribute

Julia Hawkins

Hannah Arendt, in her *Human Condition*, points out that our common world "can survive only to the extent it appears in public and make shine through the centuries what we want to save from the ruin of time," and the word **common** is crucial, the word **survive** imperative. (The emphasis throughout this essay is mine.) We live in the world **in common** and cannot either survive or thrive isolated or individually. And yet what we want to save from time's ruin has been excluded. The elephant in history's room is the absence of women's experiences, thoughts, and achievements. And this is because of history's skewed evaluation: women **labor** and men **work**.

That is, the ceaseless, repetitive chores and actions women and slaves have performed for millennia to keep our species alive, our dwellings livable, our families functional produce no product history has considered worthy of inclusion. The daily laboring to keep the world clean and prevent decay is simply not noteworthy. In contrast, men's actions are valued because they are products of work. Men make objects that last, including making war. This is what gets accepted into history and its books.

In her forward to *Working it Out: 23 Women Artists, Scholars, and Scientists Talk about Their Lives and Work*, Adrienne Rich augments Arendt's insight. "Women are not described [by political philosophers] as **working** but as acting out of love, instinct, or devotion to some higher cause." This is because **labor** as a noun never designates a finished product which the word **work** does, she states, an evaluation derived chiefly from male contempt for labor.

Wars have been waged to capture the slaves whose labor liberates men to participate in the public world. Thus, enslaved and confined by marriage or captured for their labor, women have been excluded from the common world they maintain and whose achievements it would nourish. This is what we want saved from time's ruin; its absence is corroborated by past and present-day common-world calamities.

The Sitting Room, by assembling a library and archive of women's enduring works that document overlooked and denigrated experiences and achievements, places into the hands of the common world what we want preserved from time's ruin in order that we may survive.

The Sitting Room is an achievement of on-going informal formal discussions and classes, its annual publication of stories, its constant support and advocacy for women's public events, its art and book exhibits, its writing nooks where women draft and finish Ph.D. dissertations, write poetry, novels, stories, essays, and every other literary form.

It is a space that is itself the product of women's invisible paid and volunteered labor: the rooms cleaned, the coffee and tea machines primed, the rows of bright coffee mugs and boxes of every variety of excellent tea maintained, the plates of cookies and crackers, the chocolates and fresh fruit on offer. Every comfort is provided, including couches and a chaise longue in a separate wing for napping or daydreaming, intimate conversations, and dipping into one of the thousands of books displayed and filling the shelves. This achievement frees creative women to join the common world.

My participation in The Sitting Room's events and introduction to its founders, sustainers, volunteers, friends, and other writers has magnified and enriched my life so profoundly it feels like a dispensation. The Sitting Room lured me out of my cocoon of introversion, solitude, and creative sluggishness at a crucial time of my life. This is what The Sitting Room does. It seduces into productivity and achievement the faint-hearted, the timorous, the insecure, the isolated, the quiet-and-space-deprived. Creative and unstintingly generous women have *labored* to achieve this product, this *work* that is The Sitting Room.

The Sweep of Time

Bridget Hayes

They sweep the morning away. Women in front of houses, huts, shacks, and apartments. On their patches of porch, sidewalk, and street. Brooms made of grass or plastic; crunchy bristles scratch against the texture of the pavement. Leaves rustle, pebbles scatter, dirt disintegrates. The cadence of swinging bodies harmonizes with the swishing - a soft song flutters down the street. Amidst wars, grief, pain, and suffering, their troubles dissipate. Elbows bent, backs hunched, minds still, they move in the dance of time.

Working in the Face of Heartbreak

Catherine Anne Held

This week I interviewed a woman who helps rescue young people from being trafficked for sex. I learn that most at risk are 12 to 14 year-olds, especially girls, gay kids, runaways, and youth in the foster system. My heart breaks a little more with each story—a girl with fantasies of true love is plied with makeup and new clothes by a man she thinks is her boyfriend. A young boy is lured into a private game room online. A police sting advertising sex with a 15-year-old girl in an online post nabs 250 men in one hour in the middle of a work week. I discover that trafficking young people has become more profitable for gangs than guns or drugs. That it is big business—with \$230 billion annual revenues globally.

And I hear good news. I learn that California law states, “there is no such thing as a child prostitute.” Before 2017, minors were charged with the crime of prostitution while the “Johns” got fines and went on their way. I meet people who go to homeless encampments to deliver condoms and hygienic wipes and numbers to call. I see a short video of a young woman who now trains others how to spot the signs of exploitation. I meet people who sit with young people without judgement, affirming their strengths, offering them practical support—a ride, some food, a safe place to stay for the night. Therapists and social workers tell me that they must be very patient, especially for those not ready to “leave the life” or their “boyfriend.” The depth of trauma and lack of trust in adults of these survivors require slow, consistent care. With help, many build new lives. I’m reminded of deeply traumatized rescue horses I’ve seen. They arrive at the rescue center with deadened eyes, afraid of humans, until one day their eyes shine.

I am Eric Carle’s *The Hungry Caterpillar*, gobbling up stories, stuffing myself with bits of data. There is a stage in a butterfly’s lifecycle where it is liquified before it takes the form of a butterfly. As I contemplate my work—to produce a winning proposal for the funds that will provide support to these young Persephones dragged into the Underworld—and to educate professionals and parents and foster parents to prevent these crimes, my brain is liquified.

I go for a walk in my neighborhood to clear my mind and prepare myself for the task, but it is not a respite. As I approach Petaluma City Hall, I see the statue dedicated to Georgia Lee Moses, a twelve-year-old Black girl who disappeared one summer day, her body found nine days later on the side of the freeway under a grove of trees. Across the street is the Polly Klaas

Community Theater—named for the young girl who was kidnapped from her bedroom while her friends were over for a sleepover. The brick red former church previously housed the foundation established by her parents to help other families find their children. Two girls the same age—a White girl whose abduction engaged the whole community and set new standards for finding missing children—and a Black girl whose disappearance raised little notice at the time.

I think of them often on my walks. I say prayers for their spirits and am grateful that they are remembered. The performing arts center memorializes Polly Klaas's love of theater. The Georgia Moses sculpture, an angel, once marked the spot where she was found. Visitors bring shells and pretty rocks, candles and flowers. I look online to find out Georgia's age and discover that she was likely a victim of sex trafficking and that her sister is still searching for her killer.

I question the professionals that I interview. How do you take care of yourself? How do you do this work in the face of such heartbreak? How do you keep fighting the good fight? We are all asking these same questions now. I find myself using the same trauma-based mind-body tools that will help these young people build new lives. I breathe in and out to regulate my disturbed nervous system while reminding myself that I am safe. And then, inspired by stories of healing and hope and people working on the frontlines, I pour everything I have into this grant proposal hoping that it will keep other Georgia Lee Moseses and Polly Klaases safe.

The Work of Caring for a Loved One

Nan Koontz

When my husband, Dale fell twice in June of 2023, I woke up to the fact that he needed “watching”. His gait had slowed somewhat over the past few years and his head, always pointing downward when he walked, had slumped forward to a noticeably odd level. The second time he fell, just two weeks after the first fall, I knew it could not be blamed on uneven pavement as I had done earlier. His left foot was dragging. In order to be safe, he would have to pay close attention to every step, making sure he compensated for the lazy left foot. And because he had attention deficit disorder, I felt I should watch him walk, reminding him to pick up his feet and warning him of hazards on the pavement. This was my return to the workforce, as caregiver to my husband. No pay, just a strong sense of purpose which thankfully helped me through the next year and a half.

My job description was: evaluate all of Dale’s activities for safety and address potential hazards, reassign chores that he could no longer perform to either me or find other solutions (for instance, when vacuuming was removed from his chore list, I bought a robot vacuum instead of pushing our old monster around!), learn how to handle our finances, assist him with balancing his checkbook and paying bills, make sure he got enough exercise daily without falling (which meant that I followed him around and as his body became less cooperative, encouraged him to use a cane, then a walker), plan daily activities to keep both our spirits up, drive us out to meals, movies and occasionally to the coast, where he would wait in the car while I walked our dog.

The dragging foot progressed to several ER visits (one for some kind of seizure-like episode and another for his inability to stand, even with my assistance) to a five-week admission to a skilled nursing facility to returning home to a hospital bed, daily caregivers, three kinds of therapy, a special diet to aide swallowing issues, daily helpers and equipment to get him from bed to wheelchair and wheelchair to recliner chair and back to bed. For one year and five months. I was his caregiver at night, getting up to turn him in bed as he could not do this on his own, every three hours. I also spent several hours with him before bedtime, after the daytime caregiver left, watching TV and snacking in his bedroom, holding hands like we always did in the movie theater.

Time flew by as I oversaw Dale’s care, ordered supplies, made modifications to our home to accommodate his needs, shopped and prepared meals, accompanied him to medical

appointments and participated in his therapy sessions. I had such great help, both from paid caregivers and neighbors who generously reached out to lend a hand. Our son visited often and brought good food that he prepared specially for his dad. Friends and neighbors visited. And then, in early November, 2024, the decline began. Dale lost interest in eating and his difficulty swallowing became severe. He could barely hold his head up high enough to take sips of thickened water. Hospice was brought in mid-November. After two days of not being able to get out of bed on November 27, my dear, sweet husband of 38 years was gone.

My work rapidly shifted from Dale's care to making phone calls and completing paperwork to sort out our shared income from Dale's income that would not continue. I had made arrangements for Dale's cremation shortly before he passed. I wrote his obituary. With Thanksgiving and Christmas so close to his passing I decided to postpone any plans for a celebration of life until Spring, 2025.

Next, I needed to clear some of the large pieces of equipment I had purchased to help Dale get from place to place within the house. I knew how to use a Hoyer lift that Kaiser provided but it lifted Dale in a sling like a sack of potatoes and was very difficult to move over our carpet. That would be a last resort that we thankfully did not have to use. I was lucky to be able to sell two of the three pieces of equipment for almost the same amount of money I had paid for them. And my house began a return to looking like a home instead of a rehab facility.

Once my house was a bit more organized, I focused on making Christmas lovely for my two sons. I made sure that we kept all of our holiday traditions and included Dale by sharing fond memories of how he liked each activity. Diving into decorating and preparing holiday foods delayed my grieving process, but not for long.

Before Dale got sick, my daily life was a comfortable mixture of fun, socializing with friends and helping neighbors in our community, a senior mobile home subdivision. There was always a balance between chores and relaxation. Now, after Dale's passing and with my grieving in full bloom, I am doing the emotional work of letting go, with the hope that I will eventually find my new self, riding solo and going wherever life takes me. One thing I am working on now is getting trained to work in the Adult Literacy League at the Sonoma County Library. I hope to drum up the courage to host a celebration of Dale's life some time this year. Beyond that, I am not sure and that is all right with me.

The Worth of a Woman's Work

Jane Lott

On every death certificate form there is a short blank to fill in the decedent's occupation -- as if, like the name, the birthdate, and the date of death, work is simply one immutable fact, unchanging and solid as a headstone, by which to identify a person's life. As I get closer to the time when this blank will be filled in on my own parting piece of paper, I wonder what it should say. Who am I? How do I want to be identified? What was the most important part of my life?

Like Jack London, I had an adventuring mind, though unlike him I had not the adventuring skills. Also unlike him, I don't yet have a bestseller or two that will mark me as a writer/author. Nor did I stick with a profession -- I'm thinking the years endured as an accountant -- long enough to brand me as a money-making bean counter, the lack of which devalues my blank form.

In fact, the occupations I've loved and cherished would be scoffed at by our current society that measures worth by wealth, whether that wealth is earned, stolen, or virtual fantasy. These include being a mother of two generations, being a volunteer equestrian, a spontaneous poet, a deadline-driven journalist, a gourmet acquirer of books, a wandering hiker, a martial artist, and a hedonist in Thoreau's transcendental idealism sense of the word. All of this required money, of which I still have little. But I have been rich in all the desires that cost little: the ability to rise early to see the stardust brushed from the trees, to hear the waking birdsong; the good fortune to have grown up under dark and dancing skies uncontaminated by lamplight; the enjoyment of my own company and thoughts. In addition, aside from collecting books and experiences, my life has not been marred by a desire for things. I do not collect plates or figurines or houses. I don't yearn for the vicarious entertainment of cruises or postcards from a new country each year. I can appreciate the ocean in a single seashell.

Of course, this idyllic obverse has a flip side. The converse is angst and suffering. But having read the Bible more than once, with Ecclesiastes as my favorite book, I knew that this, too, would pass away. And yet it doesn't. It burrows deep inside your cells where it waits much like a sequoia cone for the fire to burst its cover. That is why I write.

But how do you explain that in the short blank line of Occupation on the death certificate? What do you call a person who wallows in the scent of sunshine yellow daffodils, whose body thrums and tingles and resonates with the cold wind white-capping the waves, who draws a line from the pincher bug in the mud, slow and blind, to the cheetah-speed wings of the hummingbird to the keening geese on their way home?

What is the occupation of this person who counts the angels on the head of a pin? Who strives to envision the end of the universe and what comes between here and there?

And what is that person's value to the world?

When it comes time to fill out my death certificate form, in that blank marked for "Occupation," please say that I was a philosopher. It is up to the future to determine its worth.

Two Poems

Mary Mackey

Whenever I Feel Like Complaining

I remember my Great Aunt Ebbie
who 3 days before she turned 76
hand-shucked 40 acres of corn
after it was beaten down by a
hail storm

standing on one leg
because the other
had been eaten off
by a hog

which also had also eaten
off one of her arms
meaning she did it
one-legged and
one-handed
in the pouring rain

The Martyrdom of Carmen Miranda

If you want to look like the quintessential hoochie coochie girl, there is no better costume to have than the Ultimate Collection Carmen Miranda Outfit.

—Rubie's Costume Company, Advertisement

in that foreign land
you were always a joke
the fruit basket hats
the crippling high heels
the bare midriff
the broken English
the carnival mask smile

done up in pompoms like a pet poodle
wearing your past on the inside
like a hair shirt
the Brazilian Bombshell
who could only say *hot dog*
moneey moneey moneey
does you like me?

never mentioning
the long hours you worked in the hat shop
to buy medicine for your tubercular sister
the bad marriage to the man who beat you
the miscarriages, depression, pills
the pain you felt when at last you came home
and discovered your own people despised you
for selling out to Uncle Sam

when your gay composer protested
your betrayal of Brazil by swallowing rat poison
you danced on like a frantic puppet
singing of the Afro-Brazilian gods
in a language no one understood

Chica Chica Boom Chic

Chica Chica Boom Chic

Carmen like you we are all travelers
who set out believing we can bring back
something to make it worth the trip
money, love, hammocks, fame
something that will make us happy and whole
something that will heal our wounds
and give us peace

Our Work for Peace

Leslie Marks

“Our work for peace begins within the private world of each of us.”
Dag Hammarskjöld, UN, 1961

I remember when my first niece was born.
I was in sixth grade, eleven years old.
I remember her hanging on to the crib railing,
her tongue sticking out a little to make a sputtering sound
grinning.

This innate joy in discovering our world
and each other, how do we lose it?
How do we become separate?

I take a breath.
Sadness comes up.
Tenderness. Strength. Grief.
True in this moment.

I remember times
when I felt connected, deep in my body,
to the warm weight
of a child sleeping in my arms,
to the ocean, in dreams,
all the way out to the stars,
to another -
tears in our eyes,
awareness.

Generation upon generation,
mother and child, father and child:
love flows forward,
meets hard, hurt places,
a possibility for healing.

In a big circle on the playground
I hold the Montessori ribbon
with my First Graders.
Each era is shown by a different color,
billions of years, then millions of years,
the cooling planet, the warm oceans,
the first stirring of life in the water
and then on land, dinosaurs,
the first birds, and mammals.



Mother and Child – Kathe Kollwitz

Here we are: humans,
the last inch of the ribbon.
We are so young on this planet.
Fire, the wheel, language,
tools and weapons.

Jane Goodall with her husband and child,
safe in their wire enclosure,
recorded the chimpanzees fighting,
tooth and claw, group vs. outgroup.

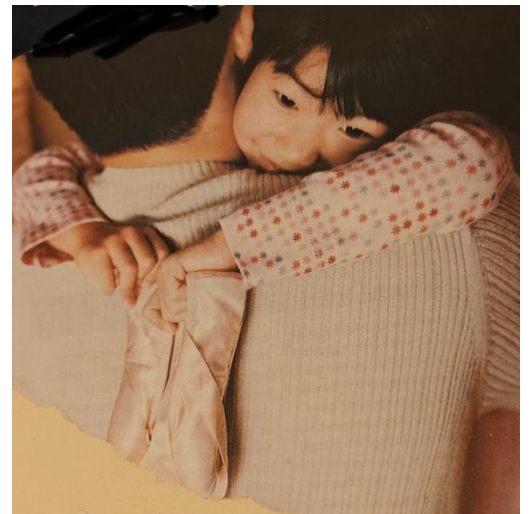
The concept of hourly work
began with slave owners counting
how much a slave could accomplish
in a given time.

To feel my own sorrow, fear, and rage,
opens my heart to our grieving together
for the shadow side of being human:
the ignorance, greed, and cruelty in the world,
generation upon generation.
We are so young on this planet.

The children teach me,
within the flow of the day, each moment new.
They decide on the rules:
“No hitting, no kicking, no biting.”
“Use your words.” “Share.”
They make friends.
They want their loved ones
to be proud of them.

I feel my mother, my father,
my lineage in support behind me.

Quick-tempered Nick
writes about dinosaurs
learning to “use their words,”
something he was really working on.
The children and their families teach me:
We are not separate. We are all learning.
We are so young on this planet.
Love flows forward.



How to Overturn a Stereotype

Molly Martin

The culture of the construction site was manmade. No women had been involved in its creation and so we had to negotiate the best we could. Every new job, each with a new group of guys, held new challenges.

I quickly learned that my coworkers thought women were incapable of doing the physically challenging work of construction. They brought to work a stereotype of women as stupid, whiny, useless, money-grubbing weaklings who needed a man to give them worth in the world. They repeated to me an old saying: If this work was easy, women and kids could do it. When they repeated it to each other, the word they used was not women. Their worth was predicated on our worthlessness. You are only as tall as the person you are stepping on.

I went to work each day with the objective of overturning the old stereotype. I was usually the only female on the job, and very conscious that I would embody a new improved stereotype. I worked hard, but not so hard that I'd be accused of brown-nosing the employer. I tried to work just as fast as they did, but not faster. I was not afraid of heights, but if I had been, I never would have admitted it. I never cried, even when I felt like it.

As soon as you walked onto the job you were typecast and none of us minorities were exempt. Race and ethnicity as well as gender were called out with jokes and put-downs. If I didn't object in the beginning, my nickname would be Girl. I objected, but not to every slight. You had to pick your battles.

On one job I had a Jewish foreman. I knew he was Jewish when others on the job started making gas chamber and oven jokes. This guy was a skilled mechanic and a competent crew boss with an upbeat attitude. He let the jokes slide off.

The job was an interior remodel of the Hyatt Regency hotel in San Francisco's Embarcadero Center. Cozy and insulated, we worked on an upper floor of the high-rise, piping in the ceiling, running up and down ladders. The construction crew would assemble in the basement in the mornings and ride the service elevator up to our floor together. The hotel pastry chef, a stern Austrian, came to work at the same time and rode the elevator with us. He never spoke to us, we figured, because he thought himself better than a bunch of construction workers. An

unflattering stereotype of Austrians immediately took root in my mind. Austrians equal Nazis. Our crew began to refer to him as Herr Pastry. The crew boss always spoke to him. Good morning or how are you this morning. The pastry chef may have nodded but he never spoke or smiled. It became a game. The Jew would force the Nazi to acknowledge us lower class plebes (the irony was that we union workers probably made way more money than he did).

Our union contract gave us a half-hour lunch break 12 to 12:30 and one ten-minute coffee break, which we took at 10 am. This job was a bit looser. Coffee break might last 15 minutes.

“Break time,” someone yelled, and I looked down from my ladder to see coffee being served in a fancy silver service with a huge plate of pastries beside it. The gift had come from the pastry chef, and for the rest of that job we had complimentary coffee and pastries at 10 am, thanks to the persistent civility of our crew boss.

My own stereotype of Austrians bit the dust. I hope I helped my coworkers readjust their stereotype of women.

Sexual Harassment and Tradeswomen

Molly Martin

In 1980 I worked as the only female electrician on a big construction job in San Francisco. I would go to work, dressed in boots, hardhat, and work clothes just like the men, looking over my shoulder anticipating violence and hostility. In the porta potties amidst the ubiquitous dicks drawn on the walls would be my name underneath the sentiment “I WANT TO FUCK YOU.” I was “the cunt.”

Two other women worked on that site and we sought each other out at lunch breaks. Cece, a black woman, was one of the very first of us to make it into the elevator constructor trade. She told me stories about her relationship with her violent white supremacist journeyman that made me fear for her life. Juanita, a carpenter, was Mexican-American. I saw comments about her written in the porta potties. “The little woman carpenter takes it in the ass.” Then others had crossed out ass and written in other orifices. It was a game with the men and it appeared they all participated.

As the weeks went on, both these women began having health problems. Cece disappeared from the job and I learned she had fallen ill with some undiagnosable stomach ailment and landed in the hospital. Then Juanita didn’t come to work one day. Other tradeswomen told similar stories and we began to view some of these journeyman-apprentice relationships in the context of domestic violence theory.

I spent my working life in what we now call a hostile work environment. We had no word for it in 1980. There was no recourse. You could complain to your crew boss or your union rep but they would tell you that the harassment was your own fault and if you couldn’t take it you should leave the job. I loved the work, I loved the paycheck and so I kept quiet and kept my head down. And I depended on male allies. My tool buddy on that job—the only guy who would work with me—was a Hispanic/native man whose family had been in California since it was still part of Mexico. He had my back. But one day he decided to drag up—to quit the job—and I was left on my own. Without my protector, I too became ill and had to leave the job.

All three of us women had worked hard to get into our trades and we were proud of our status as the first women. We were determined to succeed. But even though our minds told us we

had to go to work, our bodies rebelled. We were forced to leave in spite of our commitment to stay.

I made a great career in the construction trades and I spent my adult life as an activist working to open the trades to other women. Now, four decades later, I can look back at the achievements of the Tradeswomen Movement. Some things have not changed. We are still less than four percent of union construction workers. But some things have changed and the most important change for us is that sexual harassment is now against the law. We have recourse and employers understand that allowing a hostile work environment to thrive hurts their bottom line. Our working conditions have improved.

Women in male-dominated occupations have been on the front lines of the feminist movement for decades defending our sisters, supporting legislation to protect women against sexual harassment and helping employers and unions see their responsibility on this issue. Still, we persist.

WOMEN and WORK

Susan L. Miller

Women who are firefighters, handywomen, construction workers, truck drivers, bus drivers, teachers, baby nurses and travel writers draw me in to their world of work. Moyra, a fellow nurse, began her career being a florist outside of San Francisco in a tiny shop in Colma. The shop was situated 10 minutes on her bicycle from SF. She did not mind being in a cemetery. She also worked in a ticket booth on the street outside a theatre on California Street. She was enclosed in a plastic booth. Rambunctious kids would place firecrackers on top to frighten her. She thought she wanted to work and travel the world. Maybe an anthropologist with National Geographic. She lost interest, in the schooling but continued to travel. She Became a nurse.

One of her favorite places was small villages in Mexico. She loved the village folk. In a small place, a few huts. She began a project with the villagers. She noticed the babies were not crawling and walking when they should for their age. The moms were bundling the babies in so many wrappings they could not crawl freely. Once the moms were convinced to unbundle the babies, they began to walk and crawl. Simple steps can make big changes.

Moyra's special talents were working with moms and newborn babies. She hired herself out as a nurse and would join mom and baby and help for weeks and months until mom felt comfortable. She drove to San Francisco, was told to park in a specific area, a limousine would pick her up and deliver her to her case. Moms were nervous and anxious to care for their little ones or had plans to raise their babies with nannies.

One of my most interesting jobs was working with men and women in correctional facilities as a Forensic Nurse. One morning I was called late to work passing medication at San Quentin Prison. I arrived, never having worked in the Unit. The nurse thrust a circle of keys at me and left me to pass meds. The medication room was old and full of nooks and crannies. All locked with keys. I stepped out of the room and an older prisoner walked up to me. One of my colleagues had worked there and began a relationship with this inmate. The inmate said he could help me. He walked into the medication room and showed me which keys opened which areas, where all the meds were. I was able to pass the medications that morning. Later that day I put my key in the lock of a patient's room. The lock jammed and I could not remove the key. The patient was bedridden, in traction, had broken limbs, and an IV. The officers did not care. It was a

Saturday, they said it could wait until Monday. The inmate was cut off from any help for two or three days. In recent weeks there had been an officer stabbing and there was increased tension between inmates and the officers.

When I worked in county jail I encountered some amazing times. My shift was 3 to 11pm. One night there was a Jailbreak. The inmates had been exercising on the roof and over time created an opening. Three escaped. I was on shift and I became the designated speaker with the escaped inmates. Somehow the custody officials tracked down one inmate and I was asked to find out their location. I think they were happy to be free, but at the same time scared to be caught. After a few days they were all returned to custody.

A Journey Home

Josefa Molina

After 40 years of work as a mental health professional and professor of psychology I retired about a year and a half ago. Really, I had two careers—ten years as a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) working with children and families and then as a psychologist working with adults.

Going back to school when I was in a good job was a leap of faith. I was 28 and had been hired managing a new adolescent mental health clinic in a Latino agency in Oakland. It was exciting, I supervised mental health, HIV and social services in the teen clinic and saw a handful of teens as their mental health provider. But I jumped anyway. Getting my PhD was a dream I had held on to since I began work in the field at age 19. It felt like I was jumping into a “great abyss.” No guarantees. A lot of excitement.

The process of achieving a doctorate was a grueling six-year journey. I imagined that, like Coyolxāuhqui, I was being torn apart and put back together in the image of a mainstream “psychologist.” I resisted this, as it negated the way that culture and history shapes both mental wellness and healing, and how those factors shaped me. I dedicated my education to learning about cross-cultural approaches to healing. I searched out practicum and internship placements in local LGBT, African-American and Latino agencies. Because it was the early 1990’s, HIV and AIDS was a prominent concern. Additionally, there was a growing awareness of the need to recruit culturally competent mental health providers who understood the real-life experience of the clients we served.

As Training Director, I found this recruitment difficult. Not enough potential students were interested in the mental health profession, which was seen as a white, middle-class endeavor. I decided to pursue work in a graduate mental health program to counter these stereotypes. It was one way I could contribute to the changing needs served by community mental health. I helped a white woman from a poor background graduate. She told me that she had never attended a graduation before, but this time, she walked the stage for her degree. I helped a Chicana lesbian gain greater trust in herself as a competent student and another Latina as she developed her skills in academic writing in a second language. Another student from the

Middle East was overcome with emotion as she learned about the histories impacting African Americans in this country. It was thrilling to see these successes. It also brought tears to my eyes. My work has taken me from the inner cities of Oakland and San Francisco to a tribal reservation in Arizona to local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) in Sonoma County. I retired from this work after nearly 30 years as a psychologist and 10 years as an MFT before that. I was lost at first, used to the daily multitasking involved in a management position. I didn't know who I was or where I was going. It was very difficult those first six months, but after that transition period, I began my third career.

I started to write. I began to immerse myself in the stories that I had put away as I focused on my career. But by engaging in my five senses, I was able to drop into vignettes that I developed into short stories. These disparate chapters wove together, and a memoir began to emerge. I am not sure where this new work will take me, only that I am enjoying re-entering the world of the Sonoran Desert, the loving arms of my mother and tías, the sometimes-scary events that occurred there, and the way that culture, family and living through the sixties and seventies shaped my worldview.

Jo Hanson

Karen Petersen



“I will sweep as I go, I will sweep as I go”

This is the story of a house, a neighborhood, a city and an artist.

In 1970 Jo Hanson moved to San Francisco. She settled into Nightingale House, a rundown Victorian in the Lower Haight at the corner of Buchanan and Waller <https://noehill.com/sf/landmarks/sf047.asp> In the process of restoration she began sweeping the street in front of her house:

Street discards flowed like the ocean, instantly renewed after each removal: very personal notes and letters (some appearing at intervals, like continued stories), parking tickets, photos and negatives, bills, collection letters, canceled checks and bounced checks, grocery lists with creative spellings, religious tracts, ZigZag papers for rolling joints, drug paraphernalia, rock posters, advertising, cigarette packages, food packaging, newspapers, books, political and social protest, anti-war artifacts (the demonstration route was only two blocks away), prison discharge papers, medical records, clothing, and much, much more. One could not find a more striking demonstration of the waste society, consumerism, ecological ignorance, irresponsible industry and commerce, materials waste through irresponsible design. (Jo Hanson, “My Adventures as an Eco Artist”)

Jo’s street sweeping became her artistic process and ultimately led to engaging organizations, government officials and the media. She compiled over 40 volumes of urban detritus that were exhibited in City Hall and the Museum of Modern Art. She expanded her advocacy to the street sweepers themselves and grew to be a very effective voice for work linking social concerns with art. [see Maintenance Art in Notes below]

“Art That’s Sweeping the City” led Jo to grow her environmental and social activism. She joined the San Francisco Arts Commission and advocated for the inclusion of women and artists of color in the city’s projects. She campaigned to save the murals of Coit Tower and the Golden Gate Park’s Beach Chalet. Her most enduring project was the development of the Artist-in-Residence program at Recology, the Department of Sanitation. This was the first program of its kind in the nation and enabled artists to collect and incorporate recycled materials in their art as well as to raise public consciousness about recycling <https://www.recology.com/recology-san-francisco/artist-in-residence-program/> .

Jo Hanson’s lifelong commitment to ecological and feminist art lead her to found WEAD, Women’s Eco Artists Dialog in 1976. Together with co-founder Susan Leibovitz Steinman, they developed an international network providing information regarding the ecoart and social justice art fields to over 600 artists, curators, and writers. <https://www.weadartists.org/> .

Jo’s life and work continues to inspire and motivate us all. Thank you.

Notes

“I sweep as I go” is one of many Shaker work songs and it reminds me of Jo. I like to think she would have loved it. A compilation of these songs can be found on the Smithsonian Folkways label, sung by the choirs of Smith and Amherst college <https://folkways.si.edu/music-of-the-shakers/american-folk-gospel/album/smithsonian>

“SWEEP AS I GO”: A ritualistic/work song with uncertain origins

Low, low! Low, low! In this pretty path I will go,
For here Mother leads me and I know it is right.
I will sweep as I go.
For this Mother bids me and it is my delight.

Maintenance Art

Jo Hanson was not the only artist responding to the issue of city streets. Beginning in 1976, Mierle Laderman-Ukeles took on the formidable task of shaking hands and thanking the 8000 sanitation workers in the city of New York. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/arts/design/mierle-laderman-ukeles-new-york-city-sanitation-department.html>

Newsroom Librarian

Karen Pierce Gonzalez
For Carol Ferrand, Marin Independent Journal

Under amber glow of lamplight
on hardwood desk
in a back cubby of the building,
she'd clip, by hand,
daily features and briefs
home delivered before breakfast.

Fingers ink-stained,
she'd pour over every word,
preferred the slow simmer of taking news in
more than she ever would have hashtags.

With precision
she'd catalog-file petty robberies
as police alerts if thieves were not caught,
label diverse holy days as freedom of religion,
and incitement to riot as a crime.

WORK

Sally Privette

The word WORK first came into my life when I heard the words, “Now you know what work is.” My brother and I, as kids, climbed the ladder with Dad at our house in Mc Arthur, California. The need for a new roof called for the removal of the old, wooden shingles. Dad showed us how to pull them off, then throw them to the ground. Half of them gone, I complained to Dad that my hands were hurting. “Keep going!” A while passed, “Daddy, my hands are getting red”, “We have more to do”, My hands are getting blisters”, “We are almost finished”, “Daddy, my hands are bleeding”, “Now, you know what WORK is.”

The many jobs I had gave me money, knowledge, skills, creativity and rewarding relationships. All the years growing up my brother, sister and I were assigned household duties; setting and clearing the dining table; washing, drying, and stacking dishes. We also did laundry and made our beds.

My first paying job was babysitting for neighbors in rural Mc Aurthur at \$.25 an hour. Our family then moved to Redlands, California. Again, a neighbor needed childcare. After months of earning \$.50 an hour the father, an Airforce Pilot treated me to a flight in an F-15 bomber. We circled above San Bernardino County.

Four years later, our family moved to the “Coastside” (now Pacifica). In Linda Mar, my brother, Howard, and I landscaped our newly built “Dolger” home and planted a garden for no pay; lessons learned. Wanting some cash, I took up childcare for \$.75 an hour with the bonus of learning to tailor my own clothes: pedal pushers, skirts, blouses and dresses.

In High School, my writing class assignment was writing and designing the layout for the Westmoor Times Newspaper. During those years, babysitting continued along with working at the Stonestown Emporium. The next phase was attending Chico State College where I learned, and earned money cooking for a fraternity, cleaning houses and doing childcare.

Then came marriage, which I soon learned was both a pleasure and a chore. Ralph and I got married before I graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.A in Education. During that time, I experienced the hardest work ever - - going through childbirth. Joy Meline, my oldest, was very difficult and I almost died. Then came daughters Jody and Thea Anita.

Household chores and gardening were necessary parts of life to keep healthy and to be an example for my daughters and the payout has been lifelong relationships and love.

During this time, I went back to school. This time as an Elementary school teacher. For almost thirty-seven years I was teaching and learning though I never thought of it as WORK, except when dealing with a few contentious parents.

Fortunately, I haven't had to work since retirement. Being in my eighties, I now hire help with the difficult chores, oops, WORK. This is playtime. The variety of jobs in my life gave me money, skills, knowledge, creativity and relationships. Many activities fill my life: singing, drumming, exercising, playing games, coin collecting, art projects, showing and teaching basket weaving, writing letters, poetry and memoirs about WORK. My life is filled with appreciation.

Workin' in the Field

“Cada maestrillo tiene su librillo”

Jonah Raskin

I have done hard physical labor; worked on farms, planting, cultivating and harvesting. And I have put in many hours doing intellectual work. For about a year I worked at Oak Hill Farm in Glen Ellen not for money or to be in the great outdoors but to gather information to write a book about organic farming, wine, food and eating. I interviewed the Mexican field workers mostly from Jalisco, met and befriended Ann Teller, the woman who owned the farm, and engaged with the men and women who grew and sold the crops at the open-air markets in the town of Sonoma. I did some of the selling too.

Early on, I decided that I couldn't write about the farm from the inside unless I got down close to the ground and labored with my hands and in the company of the Mexican men who belonged to the crew. Working at Oak Hill was one of the happiest times of my life. My dear friend, Toby McCarroll, a lay Catholic priest, read my initial account of field work and told me that by getting down close to the ground I had found the shortest and most dependable way to get to Heaven. I had not thought of it that way but I accepted his point of view. I liked being in Heaven and I liked working side by side with men who spoke Spanish and little English and who shared the food their wives and lovers had prepared for them.

Under the blue sky, I ate well at lunch time and in the afternoons when Miguel harvested a ripe melon and shared in the bounty of the earth. We celebrated on the Day of the Dead and Mexican Independence Day when the Mexicans and the California made speeches and expressed how much they appreciated one another and then retreated to opposite wings of the big white barn which sat on the opposite side of the property from the Red Barn where produce was sold.

I never went home empty handed. I ate what I grew and I grew vegetables I grew to love: radishes, cucumbers, beets, and especially corn which took up a lot of space and sucked up huge amounts of water, and from an environmental point of view should not have been cultivated. But freshly picked corn is so sweet that no processed sugar can beat. I also harvested flowers, including eight to ten feet tall sun flowers that towered above me. Jesus taught me how to harvest them. “Cada maestrillo con su librillo,” he said, an expression I learned to treasure. Yes, every master has his own book.

Collateral Damage

How to Get a Proofreader to Quit Her Job

Patricia Falconer Roland

Make sure that the employee in question has more than 1 boss (3 would be preferable)

Consequently, not one of them was obligated to stand up for me.

Let the original department head conduct all future reviews of work

Boss A handled this, even after I was transitioned to departments/bosses B & C.

Give her scathing and inconsistent annual reviews

One year, I was labeled “unassertive.” I took steps to improve on this point. But the next year my review stated that I was a “troublemaker.”

Criticize every aspect of their performance. Leave out no details

Impose stasis. Don’t allow her to move up in her job

Boss B told me I was lucky when awarded a raise of 0.05%. I held the same position for 9 years in a row, and was offered few raises, denied promotions.

Intimidate the employee. Make her fear you, if at all possible

Denigrate her, particularly if

1. She matriculated from a college you don’t like.

Boss A graduated from Forster College; I, from Kirkwood. After years of working at Kirkwood Institute of Technology (KIT) without moving up, I asked Boss A, “Doesn’t KIT honor the degrees of employees who graduated from its’ namesake?”

2. She complains that she is “disappointed” in the trajectory of her job.

Withhold work. Let the staff member sit idle for long periods—weeks or even months

In the office mail, I received an invitation to a luncheon celebrating the fact that the Economics of Chemicals (EC) directory had met a deadline for which it had published an extra 2,000 pages. I hadn’t received any projects during that time!

Hire freelancers to perform the tasks

1. Boss A hired a new, part-time freelancer to do my job during the months when assignments had been withheld from me.

2. Boss A arranged for an employee to have her daughter freelance at home, off the record, and then have the latter’s pay added to her mom’s paycheck.

Access the worker's medical records, and use your findings to justify unfair treatment of her.

Empower an employee to spy on the company woman that you wish to censure. Have the former report to you directly & often, preferably within earshot of the targeted coworker

Boss B hired the sister of one of his staff members to not only perform some of my duties, but note the times of my arrival/departure, and the duration of my absences from the office, including bathroom breaks.

Familiarize yourself with the employee's home and neighborhood, personally

I usually walked back to my flat at lunchtime. Boss A would coincidentally jog past me, just as I arrived at the front gate of the apartment complex.

Shame the staff member in front of her coworkers

Boss A held a publishing department meeting in which she blamed me for making a mistake in the annual update of the 22,000-page International Petrochemicals (IP) set of volumes to which I contributed.

Endanger workers by having dangerous experiments conducted in proximity to common work areas, rather than in proper laboratories

A cold-fusion trial exploded, killing the scientist who conducted it. This took place in a regular room that I walked by 4 times a day, located on the first floor of the main office building, which was open to the public.

Curry favor with select employees

Boss A enjoyed insinuating that she was having affairs with members of both sexes, whether or not they had spouses.

Punish staff if they solicit work from other departments during the staff member's downtime, despite the fact that KIT encourages this practice

Marginalize folks by ensuring that the mission of Human Resources (HR) is to uphold the needs of management

(As opposed to needs of the rank-and-file employees, especially the support staff—word processors, proofreaders, mail deliverers, etc.) However, I did complain to HR when IP's Boss C refused to give me a recommendation.

Coda:

KIT is a pseudonym. I worked there in the eighties and nineties, for a period of 11 years, after which I was laid off. And so, all the above tactics didn't work.

Women's Work, 1961

Barbara Sapienza

My mom and dad talked about the depression when food was scarce, when people waited in line for a brown bag filled with a hunk of butter, maybe cheese, a few eggs, flour, some sugar. Here on my first job I would work in a food plant preparing food that twenty years before was scarce for our community where people had suffered malnutrition.

The first day of work Betty and I met up on the corner of Medford and Maine, chirping with morning birds about how much money we would make. \$3.75 an hour, forty hours a week for eight weeks. Such a way to save money before going off to college.

We boarded the bus to the Mass Transit in Malden Square, heading north to Sullivan Station, one stop before Boston Gardens, where the Celtics, played their magnificent shots. The plant just around the corner. We arrived. No players. No plants as I'd imagined.

A great arc of a building standing tall, hardly any windows — some kind of fort or worse a prison? We walked sandal-toed through a heavy metal door.

A security guard sat at a desk with a list of names. He didn't even look up at us when we introduced ourselves. He coughed. "Yes"

"We're student employees," we said, stuck together. It was cold inside.

I flashed my new Social Security card, feeling pride to be one of the workers.

"Elevator to the right. Fifth floor."

I was shaking in my sandals. *Of course, when we get off at the fifth floor, we'll see a blue sky ceiling over the green meadow with plants where we would begin to gather chicken eggs in a pail and place them in pretty cartons of twelve.*

1-2-3-4-5 —doors open onto a muddy brown hallway with fluorescent lights. In front of us a tall women stood, waiting for us. She wore a long white coat, an apron, and boots. She looked us up and down and then at the time clock behind her. She didn't smile. That's when I noticed a temperature change. It was much colder than the humid summer outside. I shivered, my legs and feet frozen like my mind. She gave us a timecard

"I've been waiting for you. I'll show you around. But first, we'll dress up properly," she said, opening a heavy door into a dressing room, handing us heavyweight coats and pants like

hers to cover our legs, and chest. “Here put these on,” she said, pointing to a line of protective footwear- closed, padded, covered in white gossamer. Not angelic.

I took a deep breath, smelling something bad, “When will we see the chickens, cows, calves, pigs the goats?” I asked.

“You mean, brisket, chipped beef, hot dogs, pork sausage,” she said.

“Hot dogs?”

“Yes, you will fill and tie them,” she said, “follow me.”

Right off the bat, we were in front of an enormous mixer. “The vat room,” she said, “organs and meat that will be encased in intestine for hot dogs.”. The stink of meat parts, mixing, and churning in the big cauldron took my hand over my mouth, stifling a vomit. “This is your work station.” She pointed to Betty.

“What’s that?” I whispered to Betty.

“Shit,” Betty whispered, covering her mouth. We left Betty beside a enormous man, operating the largest mixer I’d ever seen, one fit for a giant.

“Follow me to the brisket room.”

“Brisket? I hate brisket.”

Where in hell are we? Are we entering Dante’s inferno or its ice equivalent? Goose bumps appeared itching under the tough Eskimo pants.

I followed her to a seat in front of a conveyor belt where ten women, sat on stools at the conveyor, five on each side of the moving belt. I watched each pair of hands ride along the belt. Two fingers, on each white-gloved hand, slipped three-inch pieces of red-gray meat into the hollow of shiny six-ounce glass jars held in the other hand. The glasses kept rolling along. I followed one jar, and the many hands padding its insides with meat strips, until it was encircled red-gray meat. At the end of its ride one hand picked up a glob of chipped beef and pushed it down inside the hollow before a mechanical hand came down, picked up the glass, and screwed on a shiny golden cap.

The meat memory mixes with the radiation room where at sixty will sit with other women, wearing white gowns at UC Medical Center, waiting to be radiated for cancer treatment, waiting for the golden cap to come down.

Could I ever have imagined this juxtaposition of memory when I left my teen-age home for one of my first jobs in a meat packing plant?

Epilogue

It was 1966 before graduating from college with six labors under my belt, including one live birth of my first son, before I settled in as a third-grade teacher and a mother. Though I never interviewed the men and women working in a stinking plant, I did see my uneducated mother, imagining her first jobs before I was born in 1945. They included a stint at Jordan Marsh Company in Boston where she worked as a salesgirl in coats—my grandfather worked as a tailor at Jordan Marsh. Then Mom worked as a Red Cross volunteer during the war where she saved a man's life; then, she married and gave birth to me while my dad was in the Philippines fighting in a world war; then six years later she gave birth to her second child. Her work career followed at Raytheon, a major US defense contractor and industrial corporation, manufacturing weapons—military and commercial. After a series of manual jobs, including folding shirts in a laundry factory and selling donuts, she finally came back to her first love, a fine dress shop—she would say the customers trusted her taste; that she dressed them to the nines. After all her father was a tailor who dressed his four daughters to the nines. After all she didn't finish middle school.

Yes, she was uneducated and didn't have the benefits of education like I did. I had education up the gazoo where I attained a BS in ED., two Master's degrees, one in Special Ed, and another in Psychology. Then a Doctoral degree in clinical psychology. She was proud of me.

Maybe I did it for her and my dad, who urged me on. When I first became pregnant in 1965, I didn't want to finish my last year of college with my grand growing belly. He made me go on to the finish line.

Hallelujah!



Illustration titled *Angles*, by Jeannie Jarwin Tilghman

Paddling the Boat

Elise Turner

Cooking, shopping, and cleaning for a family is a lot of work. This is especially true when you are the only adult in the house, and you have a full-time job. It had been four years since I had divorced my first husband, and I decided it was time to try again. I wanted to partner with someone who could become part of my family before my teenage children left home. I had no time or inclination to go to bars to meet people, and fortunately, online dating was just beginning. I went on Yahoo Personals, where I was asked to define the criteria of the person I'd like to meet. The first criteria was age: I typed in a window of three years difference in either direction. This time, I would choose consciously, and be clear about the person I wanted in my life. The older men I knew were still deeply embedded in sexist ways of being in the world, especially those hippy types who thought they had broken free of the patriarchy, but hadn't. I knew I needed to be with someone who not only saw himself as a feminist, but was willing to do the work. Maybe it would be good to find someone who came from a country other than America. My new partner would be a father, because without this experience, I didn't think he could really understand me, as motherhood was central to my sense of self.

Before I had children, I dreamed of a beautiful home, full of the warmth and security I remember feeling as a child. I used to love cooking and even enjoyed cleaning, but as a single mom, I was so tired at the end of the day, as much from fending off disappointment and depression as I was from actual work. Underneath it all, I was angry at having so much of the joy sucked out of that precious phase of young family life.

We ate a lot of macaroni and cheese, take-out burritos, and anything I could douse with pesto sauce. Too often, it was catch-as-catch-can. I loved being a mom, and the idea of keeping house, but I was drowning. After a few uninspiring blind dates, an attempt at recycling a couple of old flames, and one short romance, I met Mark. One of the things I noticed on his profile, in addition to his very cute picture with his kids, was that he said he loved to cook and host parties for friends and family. Entertaining was something I dearly loved but I was always 10 steps behind when my guests arrived. Maybe with some help, I could pull it off!

Mark entered my life with joy and chaos, and my kitchen with gusto and dedication. He was so full of energy, expediency, and skill, that I called him the human Cuisinart. Sometimes he

sliced his own fingers while prepping vegetables, or chipped my dishes while putting them away, but he always seemed so happy to feed us. He cooked holiday meals for my extended family and everyday dinners with my kids, and on half of those days, his two children would join us. At chore time, he would accomplish more in an hour than I would in a day. Whatever uncertainties my children harbored about Mom's new boyfriend were mitigated by deliciousness at the table, a cleaner house, and two very sweet new siblings. So much of family life takes place around the dinner table, and Mark's cooking became a pleasure we all looked forward to. One dinner time, the four of us were just picking up our forks, smelling the aroma of the food on our plates. "Mmmmm, meat!" my son said, anticipating the gratification of a big meal. Although I had been managing to feed them, noodles and frozen peas weren't quite cutting it. Now that I wasn't alone with all of it, I was beginning to feel better about the family life I was giving to my kids.

Living with Mark created its own set of stresses and problems, but without him, I would still be drowning. I don't know how I could've found my way to feeling afloat in the way I do today. We have been together for 18 years, and married for 11. Because my home life is finally manageable, I have the space to fully show up for things that matter deeply to me, and to do good work in the world. Early in our lives together, we were discussing ways to divide the tasks for our gardening project. I was so excited to be creating a design, and shopping for plants, but I felt a little guilty asking him to do the digging. He said, "You can steer the boat. Just tell me where to go, and I'll paddle like a mother-f***er." His colorful language was not exactly an expression of feminist consciousness, but the intent was just perfect. We are still making our way down the river together.

Learning to Work

Godelieve Uyttenhove

I was once a chambermaid in Beaver Creek, Alaska. Busloads of large Americans stopped overnight at the Lodge on the Canadian border. The bathtubs I cleaned there held empty Jack Daniels bottles, dirty towels, cigarette ashes. Night never came that summer of '69. My coworkers lit great fires by the creek bed. We listened to Joe Cocker and killed mosquitoes. They ate us alive. Once I went across the graveled highway to attend mass at the tiny wood cabin that claimed to be a church. Two Indian grandmothers and a young girl in braids were the only parishioners attending. The priest was Dutch and chanted with a familiar accent. He was one of my tribe, almost. I should have been grateful to find him there at the end of the thousand-mile ride over the dusty bumpy Alaskan Highway. Me, fresh out of Belgium, out of my depth. But I didn't need him. The tribe I belonged to was already that of old souls hungry for big sky, wherever they came from.

The worst job I ever had was that of insurance underwriter. We needed money for our honeymoon in Scotland. I answered a January 1973 ad in *La Libre Belgique* and found myself at a desk in a huge room full of desks, downtown Brussels. The people at those desks had the same blank faces people wore on the bus I took to get there. They were bored. We were all bored in a big room with nowhere to hide. Filling forms, pushing stacks of paper around. The days never seemed so long. Without the bait of the Scottish moors, I couldn't have lasted the whole three months that led to my wedding day. The sentence passed on my coworkers who might spend thirty years at their desk was too harsh to contemplate. When I quit, I ran down the pavement to a fountain and let the wind whip up water beads across my face and hands. I was free, even if I never made it to Scotland, even if my marriage turned out to be a different kind of sentence.

I was never a good seamstress. Sewing became my worst nightmare in the summer of '67 when I joined a group of volunteers to work in the slums outside of Paris. The boys did construction work but the girls were put in charge of the clothes donations. All day long we faced mountains of jeans and sweaters, coats and socks. With needle and thread, we were to check for holes and tears and mend them, then iron and fold the patched-up things. I hated it. It is one of the rare times I wished I were a boy. By the end of a week, my brain was sewing everything in sight: I sewed lips shut and closed doors. The tin roofed "igloo" where we slept had no windows. No electricity. During the night, spiders walked across the ceiling above our bunk beds in pitched darkness. Outside, useless refrigerators and television sets sat waiting to be fed by the juice of the world. This was my '67 revolution. I was eighteen when I met Paris from its underbelly. I could never go home again.

The best part about being a barmaid at the Café des Sports in Gouvy, near Bastogne, was the little country train ride between Gouvy and Limerlé where I lived in an old farmhouse for a year. The train was yellow and it ran through green fields lined with purple fireweed, where patches of pine trees had been cut. The Ardennes landscape was

rough and tranquil, underpopulated. Not an echo of war, save for the old tank planted on the market place in Bastogne, and slabs of stone listing dead soldiers' names at the heart of every village, near the church door. Inside the café, it was another story. The ruckus was constant. Jukebox bellowing "O Susie Q", couples' arguments, cash register slamming, glasses clinking. The women in big hair and tight skirts, could be loudest. The smoke was thick. The teasing never stopped. Sometimes I played along. I filled tall glass after tall glass of blond Stella or Pils. Wiped the counter of spill after spill. Later I emptied ashtrays and mopped the rubber tiles. On the train ride back home, I sat by the window, high on the colors and the graceful bending of the spiky wild flowers, reminder of my distant Yukon ride, a couple of years before.

I found my first job in the United States as a new, first-generation, legal immigrant, among the classified ads of the Sebastopol Times. The Gravenstein Convalescent Hospital took me on its payroll as a nurse's aide, promising me training and a certificate. The minimum wage in 1973 was \$4.25. The place was not worse than countless others. The patients were not abused. The staff was overworked but friendly. But the sickly smells, the locked windows forever draped, the enforced promiscuity and the complete abandonment of most residents by their families and friends, their utter dependence on strangers, hardly evoked convalescence. *Con-valere* speaks of getting up and on the road, walking away. No one walked out of that building and its stewed air, except us at the end of the evening shift, anxious for a fragrant bath, a chair under the cold stars, the stroking of a cat. I was 24. This was California, land of sunshine, beaches and oranges. I knew that in Belgium, no matter how old and ill, my parents would never be locked up so. They would be allowed to look at the sky and feel the breeze, through a crack in the window. They would not be treated like children and lied to about convalescence.

For one summer and fall I was a waitress in an old hotel in the Ardennes. The Salm river snaked around the town and I served many plates of trout, fresh from the big holding tank by the front door. *Truite au bleu, truite aux amandes, truite meunière*. Rocky German names suited the cold yellow wine poured in green-stemmed glasses: Gewürztraminer, Liebfraumilch, *vin de Moselle*. I folded starched napkins in accordion fans and bishop's hats, lined heavy silver by sturdy plates, distributed roses and sweet peas, ashtrays and salt shakers, butter dishes, little barrels of toothpicks. I served wide-eyed trout laid across beds of watercress, watched diners struggle to lift the white flesh off the bones. For dessert, I took orders for chocolate mousses, *tarte Tatin*, *Sabayon*, *sorbet aux fruits des bois*. I wiped grease and wine spills, shook off breadcrumbs, stacked up dirty dishes, some with piles of breaded skin and broken spine, some with a perfect skeleton picked clean on the plate, head intact. I rolled up soiled linen and refilled the salt shakers. I handed bills, took money, filed it in the inner pocket of my white apron, said goodbye and come again. At night from the window of my little maid's room under the rooftop, I listened to the river running over rocks, hiding live trout, grey and blue, sleeping with their eyes open, *en route* to somewhere, as I was.

Fashion Designer

Eloise Van Tassle

This was my earliest stated identity. I whiled away rainy afternoons on Grandma's couch, drawing. At first, there were turtles ... I don't remember what came next. At some point I was given a book of paper dolls and a pair of blunt-tipped scissors. One book, from Aunt Mary, was of ballet dancers with an abundant wardrobe of tutus.

A little older, early 1950ties, I sat at the small blue-painted work table that my father had made for me in his basement workshop. More rainy afternoons. I became bored with clothes provided for my store-bought paper dolls. I began to make my own, both the basic doll and her wardrobe, clothes with tabs at the shoulders to fold onto the basic doll figure. Careful scissor work.

Looking at the ads in the *Oregon Journal* or *Oregonian* fueled my ideas. These ads were reproduced for women's boutiques from original drawings by illustrators. Nicholas Unger and Charles F. Berg were the two exclusive women's wear stores in Portland. I knew of them only through their illustrated ads in the newspapers. It was the time when House of Dior's "New Look" – full longer skirts, cinched waistlines, no more padded shoulders – made its way to place like Portland.

When asked that perennial questions, "What do you want to be when you grow up?," I responded with, "Fashion Designer." There were raised eyebrows and indulgent smiles from the adults who asked that question (at least I didn't say "Housewife" or "Teacher" like my mother). The general assumption was that I'd grow out of such a fanciful idea. I did.

At the first reunion of my high school graduating class, I chatted with Judy Dick Schroeder, who had been an occasional playmate from around age 9 or 10. We were 20 years out of high school. I had become a nurse, with R.N. after my name. Judy said rather wistfully, "So you didn't become a Fashion Designer after all."

Work Poems

Isabell VanMerlin

Doesn't everyone work?

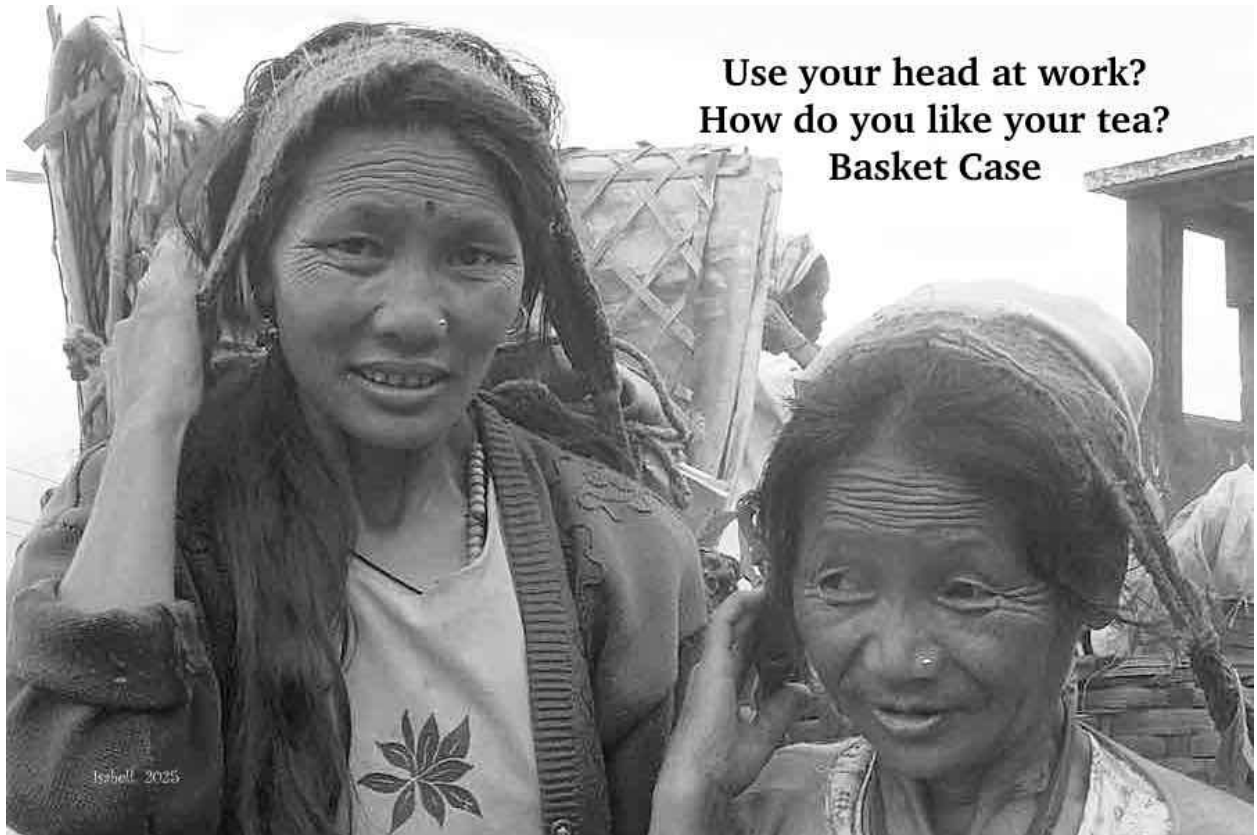
How much work
does it take
for corporate CEOs
to keep
their greed up?

What does
'working class'
mean

If you don't have a job
what class are you in?
Is 'class'
a school?
Do you ever graduate?

What does work
really mean?
Is 'fun work'
an oxymoron?
(What's oxy
and who's the moron?)

**Use your head at work?
How do you like your tea?
Basket Case**



Why I Chose to Interview Beverly Tyson for this Anthology

J.J. Wilson

Well, aside from all the high-flown reasons about her being a success at every position she held, I just like talking with Beverly and also suspected that her story will not otherwise get written down, even in this abbreviated version.

How does it begin? Well, on a wooden box, standing at the sink washing dishes at her step dad's restaurant, with the side job of dipping up ice cream cones for customers – and yes, it was a paying job and yes, she was about 10 years old.

"I grew up knowing I had to work," she said (though her mother wanted her to marry a diplomat and live in Washington, D.C.) Instead, she fell for a cowboy, a born woodsman, and before long she was helping him with deer hunting and wrestling wild boar into the truck to take back and fatten up for food. Oh, and then there was the learning artificial insemination of cows first time I ever got to write that as a subject heading! Ms. Beverly Tyson was sent by her husband to a week's training in the above work; she was, as you might suspect, the only woman in the class but/and thus she succeeded in "fathering" many a calf later on their ranch.

Beverly was doing all of these tasks happily, she assures me, though she had also left college to take a nine-month cosmetology course. Both these areas of expertise were to serve her well, as did her summers spent being a telephone operator for Southern Bell. Notice that all these jobs, except perhaps for the wild boar and insemination, were woman-appropriate in the 1950s and 60s. Indeed, when she had children to raise, she ran a popular Beauty Parlor right out of her garage for 16 years or so.

None of these working experiences prepared her specifically for the next step she took, except in building her confidence: "I always felt I could do some of what anyone else could do, even if not as well."

Financial issues + the need for medical insurance led her to the local post office where before long she was doing the rural postal routes on dirt roads in all weathers and with the occasional rattlesnake to dispatch, to say nothing of numerous flat tires – roads and tires were not as good in those days but it was independent work from which she took retirement in 2002.

End of story, right? Hah! Beverly was fetched out of her so-called retirement to fulfill a series of feel good/do good/ make a difference paid positions (+ she did volunteer work also). People just felt these jobs needed Beverly even if she did not need the jobs – and they kept coming. I wish I had the space to describe each of them (indeed I met Beverly when she was my boss at an after-school program in the Fellsmere library) but I will just mention the last one: introducing the deaf and hard of hearing to special telephones that brought their grandchildren's voices to them; they sat with tears of happiness running down their cheeks. As Beverly said, "that was not work; it was a joy to do."

On More than an Acre of Dried Adobe, I Have a Garden

Chingling Wo

On more than an acre of dried adobe,
wild cherry plums are first to smile
in the early spring breeze,
their pale blossoms promising
gem-like fruit in May.

Soon the bees arrive,
drawn to purple-blue rosemary blooms,
perfuming the air
with fresh memories of many living seasons.

Showy calendula punctuates the calendar,
each month unfurling its festival
of golden cups.

Peach blossoms grace March's soft drizzles,
blushing into fruit that yields
tender sweetness to July's burning hands.

Roses of many kinds and honeysuckle vines,
with their golden and silver bells,
scent the long green breath of summer.

Then—
the Ripgut brome come.
Their sharp, spiky seeds
arched across the land like a scythe—
heralds of the season of death.

Where the earth cracked and shriveled,
wolfberries, raspberries, mulberries,
strawberry fields, and rose thickets
fell to the joint tyranny
of weedy brome, hungry gopher, and unthinking drought.

Yet somehow—somehow—
Saint John's Wort continues its quiet healing,
its yellow stars lighting the dry corners.
Oregano endures,
offering humans fresh greens
gifting honey bees a last summer bloom.

Despite smothering heat,
Goldenrods stand their ground,
upright and unyielding.
And the grapes—
defiant grapes—
offer sweet abundance
against the freezing wind of autumn,
their clustered courage.

On more than an acre of dried adobe,
I have a garden.

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