

Working Lives

Volume 1
A Hell of a Good Job!
Finding Work that Matters

A Project of the
Writers' Alliance of
Newfoundland and Labrador

In This Series:

Volume 1. A Hell of a Good Job! Finding Work that Matters

Volume 2. New Realities in Health Care and Job Safety

Volume 3. To Every Work a Season: Adapting to Change

Volume 4. Chance and Luck: Making a Job

Working Lives A Hell Of A Good Job! Finding Work that Matters

**A Hell of a Good Job!
Finding Work that Matters**

**An Adult Basic Education Project of
The Writers' Alliance of
Newfoundland and Labrador
1998**

Book 1: A Hell of a Good Job! Finding Work that Matters

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St. John's, Newfoundland

A1C 5M5

Layout and Design: Darmonkow & Associates Inc.

Thanks to the National Literacy Secretariat

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

A Hell of a Good Job!

(Working Lives ; 1)

ISBN 1-896858-10-4

1. Readers for new literates 2. Readers (Adult) 3. Vocational guidance. 4. Occupations - Newfoundland I. Winter, Kathleen II. Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. III. Series

PE1126.N43H44 1998 428.6'2 C98-950200-7

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Foreward

Working Lives is the third in a series of literacy materials projects undertaken by the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador. The project was produced in conjunction with the Educational Resource Development Cooperative. As with our previous projects, *Newfoundland Books on Tape* and *The Newfoundland and Labrador Adult Basic Education Social History Series* (both produced in conjunction with the College of the North Atlantic), the aim is to create relevant and engaging literacy materials that speak directly to the concerns and interests of adult learners.

Working Lives is geared towards students in the ABE Level I category. Due to subject matter, however, there is some slight variance in the degree of reading difficulty. All essays are accompanied by questions for discussion and, where deemed necessary, word lists and follow-up notes and activities.

The groupings of the essays into each of the four volumes of *Working Lives* were designed to reflect general themes such as health care, starting a small business and workers' injuries. It should be stressed, however, that these groupings are not meant to imply more than slight thematic connections. In all instances, the essays can stand on their own. Neither are the groupings meant to suggest incremental reading difficulty. Teachers should feel free to dip into all volumes of the series and mix and match essays to suit their particular needs.

As with the *Social History Series*, *Working Lives* will also appeal to high school and university students, as well as the general public.

The writers and editors of *Working Lives* found the creation of the essays to be politically, socially and spiritually stimulating. If we can inspire the same enthusiasm in adult learners, improvement to their overall literacy skills will be assured.

Acknowledgements

The essays and accompanying notes and questions in *Working Lives* were researched and written by Ed Kavanagh, Carmelita McGrath, Kathryn Welbourn, Marian Frances White, Kathleen Winter and Michael Winter. The series was edited by Janet McNaughton. Overall coordination was provided by Ed Kavanagh. Workshopping and professional consultation services were provided by Marion Cheeks and Deanne Hulett of the Educational Resource Development Cooperative. Funding for *Working Lives* was provided by the National Literacy Secretariat.

The Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Educational Resource Development Cooperative would like to thank the following for help in the production of *Working Lives*: Jane Bums, Darmonkow & Associates, Susan Hoddinott, Donna Kavanagh and students at the Waterford Bridge Road Centre (College of the North Atlantic), Garry Leyte and students at the Education Centre (Salmonier Correctional Institute), the National Literacy Secretariat, Bill Smith and students at Her Majesty's Penitentiary Learning Centre (College of the North Atlantic) and Patricia Warren of the Writers' Alliance. We would especially like to thank all of those who kindly consented to be interviewed for *Working Lives*.

Introduction

It may be argued that, as a title, *Working Lives* is somewhat redundant. Is it possible to live a life without working? Most people would agree that it isn't. Work and our relationship with it—no matter how tenuous or ambivalent—helps to define who we are. It gives a face and texture to our communities. Like death and taxes, it is something from which there is no escape.

But what exactly is work? *Webster's* offers a full page of definitions dealing with the many permutations and nuances of the word. Clearly, work is a complicated matter. It is, of course, much more than this nutshell dictionary offering: "Action involving effort or exertion, especially as a means of gaining a livelihood." Work is certainly that. The people profiled in *Working Lives* know all about effort and exertion. For them, gaining a livelihood is always a struggle. But work and the pursuit of work casts a wide net. In the effort to improve our working lives, to make our work more meaningful, or in merely attempting to put bread on the table, there are stories to be found: stories of triumph and defeat, new beginnings, courage, adversity, confusion—the whole gamut of human emotion. It is this larger vision of work which *Working Lives* seeks to explore.

Work has never been a simple matter. Stories about the good old days when everyone had jobs—and presumably were happy with them—are fantasy. But in the late 1990s work has taken on a multitude of guises which our ancestors could never have envisioned. The traditional work scenario of a person toiling at one steady job for his or her entire working life is rapidly becoming out of date. The modern era is marked by job sharing, contracting out and increasingly stiff competition for the few available jobs. In addition, technology and the global economy are providing new challenges. Some traditional jobs are becoming extinct or highly mechanized. For many, the clunk of the axe is being replaced by the click of the keyboard.

While the pursuit of meaningful, financially rewarding work is a concern for everyone, it poses special challenges for people with low literacy skills. It is our hope that adult learners who, like all of us, are concerned about job prospects, out-migration and the myriad of factors that affect job markets, will be drawn in and, in some cases, inspired by the compelling stories collected in *Working Lives*.

There are many kinds of stories here. Kathleen Winter's "Creek Crossing Tragedy" details an injured worker's search for justice and spiritual healing. In "Chance and Luck: Two Stories of the Working Disabled" Ed Kavanagh profiles two people who overcame severe physical disabilities to build rich and rewarding lives. "Inside Health Care" by Carmelita McGrath explores the deteriorating working conditions and accompanying stresses of our health care professionals. In "Shoot" Michael Winter goes behind the scenes to explore, in a humorous way, some of the less glamorous jobs in the making of a feature film. Marian Frances White's "Cutting Trees on the Rock: Logging in the 1990s in Newfoundland" details the tensions that arise when money and job interests meet environmental concerns. "Quitting Time" by Kathryn Welbourn proves that even in an age when jobs can be as hard to find as a doctor in an emergency room, the time can come when enough is enough, and even the spectre of a long unemployment line can have its appeal.

Working Lives A Hell Of A Good Job! Finding Work that Matters

Throughout *Working Lives* the reader will meet a gallery of unique and vibrant personalities. Gerard Hamilton turned from the uncertainty of the fishery to the uncertainty of the music business; Phonse Tucker considers the woods his warehouse; Karen Pottle is putting a new spin on the fashion business. There are all sorts of people here: boat tour operators, artists, IT workers, domestics, recyclers and fisheries observers. Their stories, slices of their working lives, will lead readers to examine their own attitudes about the activity that occupies so much of our precious time and, ultimately, tells us who we are.

A Hell of a Good Job!

Carmelita McGrath

Word List

Public sector: Governments, their agencies and companies.

Private sector: Companies, industry and business owned by individuals and groups.

Contract work: Work at certain tasks for a time period set down in a contract, or agreement. When the contract work is finished, the job ends.

Crown Corporation: A company set up by government and not run for profit.

Downsizing: Cutting back or making smaller. In work places, it usually means cutting costs and having fewer workers.

Bumping: Replacing someone at work who has less seniority than you do.

The Lucky Ones

A while ago, a man called in to VOXM's Open Line show. He was angry. He said a lot of working people were complaining about their jobs. They were upset because they had not had a pay raise in years. Some people complained of having no job security. He was sick of listening to them.

"They don't know they are the lucky ones," the man said. "If I had a job—any job—I would not complain."

Newfoundland has the highest rate of unemployment in Canada. When there is high unemployment, many people may feel that anyone with a job has no right to complain. People with jobs may have different feelings. They may have started their jobs expecting things to turn out a certain way. Over time, they may find that things are very different from what they expected.

Many things affect how people feel about their jobs. Sometimes, a pay cheque is not enough to keep a person happy.

This essay is about a workplace in the public sector. The story takes place in the early 1990s, when many public sector workers lost their jobs. Others kept their jobs, but worried all the time about losing them.

As you read the story of one worker in one place and time, you might ask yourself some questions.

What do people expect from their work?

Is a pay cheque enough?

Are people who want to be happy in their work expecting too much?

If you were not happy in a job, would you leave?

Lisa's Story

Starting Over

Lisa is planting tulip bulbs. It's a cold fall day, a bit windy. But she has to get as much work done as she can. If the ground freezes hard, it will be too late to plant. She thinks about how the bright flowers will look in the spring. She loves spring and summer, and she loves her garden. When her hands are in the earth, she is most happy.

Lisa looks at her watch. She has to hurry. In two hours, she has a class at the university. She is taking courses in psychology.

Gardening and being a student are two types of work that Lisa does. Both are unpaid work. Lisa does not have a paid job now. She had a steady, paid job for seven years. She left that job six months ago. She was happy to be laid off. This is because the job started off good, and got worse over time.

Lisa is on EI—Employment Insurance. She knows it will run out in six months. She knows that at some time she must return to paid work. But she is not sure what kind of work it should be. She is thinking of becoming a counsellor. But she also knows that working with plants makes her at least as happy as working with people.

Years ago, Lisa thought she had it all figured out. At 25, she got a “permanent” job with chances to “move up.” As it turned out, the job was not really permanent. And there were few chances to move up. Here is what happened.

A Really Good Job

When Lisa saw the job ad in the paper, everything about it looked good. It was a job working with records and organizing information. This was something she was trained to do. She had done this kind of work on contract for three years. The contract jobs were short-term: when she finished the work she agreed to do in the contract, the job ended.

In the new job, she would start at the bottom of the pay scale, but she could move up. She would coordinate the work. Others would be hired to help her. She would be fairly independent. She would get to make decisions, and report to only one person. The job was with a Crown Corporation, a company set up by government.

Lisa applied for the job. The interview went well. It made her even more excited about the job. Then she got the call—the job was hers. She thought about the changes the job would bring. She could pay off her student loan. She could relax and not worry about where the next contract was coming from. The future looked bright.

At first the job was as exciting as Lisa had hoped it would be. She was asked to set up a way for the whole office to manage its records. This challenge would use all her skills. She did research and made plans, and wrote a first report on what needed to be done. She wondered when the people who were going to help her would be hired. She soon found out they would not be hired at all. Three months after Lisa was hired, the provincial government announced a job freeze. No new people would be hired. The ones already working would have to make do.

Lisa talked about the job freeze to other workers. Some of them who worked with information and technology were in the same position. They would not get the help they had expected. They would all have to do more than they were hired to do. Okay, Lisa thought, I can cope with that.



Better Pay

Lisa was a bit surprised when she opened her first pay cheque. She had thought she would be making a lot more money. But there were deductions for union dues and a health care plan, things she had never paid before. She had to pay more taxes now. Really, her take-home pay was not much higher than before.

Oh well, Lisa thought, it's only a matter of time. She could move up the pay scale. For the first two years she got pay increases. These were only for new employees. Then the increases stopped. Government had not only frozen hiring. They had also frozen wages.

Lisa was doing the extra work that was supposed to be done by an assistant. She thought she could ask her employer to reclassify her job. This means giving a job a new title and salary to deal with a change in a person's duties or workload. But she didn't get far with this. She talked to a director in Human Resources.

He said she didn't have much of a chance—she was as high as she could go.

Who Gets to Move Up?

Lisa thought a lot about being as high as she could go. Why couldn't she move higher? How did people move up? What made them different from her? She took a close look around her. It didn't take her long to notice that the ones who did move up were almost all men.

Men, Women and the Glass Ceiling

"Gender was a big issue," Lisa recalls. She noticed that men and women had very different types of jobs. There were very few women managers. A woman could only supervise secretaries or other workers in "female jobs." The Board of Directors was all men, except for a short time when there was one woman on it. Senior managers were also all male. A lot depended on how these senior people saw your job. Lisa felt they would only move you up if they saw your job as administrative. If they saw your job as clerical, you couldn't move up. Most jobs women had were seen as clerical.

Lisa didn't think of her job as clerical. She had to design a system and put it in place. But how she saw her job and how others saw it were very different. Lisa had to report to the Board of Directors. They had to approve her plans before she moved ahead. So she presented her plans to them in meetings. Once, after a meeting, a manager spoke to her. He said, "The Board does not want to be bothered with these details. What you are doing is clerical work: they don't want to hear about this anymore."

Lisa tried to explain. She said she had to make reports to the Board. She tried to explain what her job was. But the manager got angry. This made her feel that she was not supposed to disagree with him.

Lisa wasn't the only woman having this kind of trouble. Marie worked in the accounting department. Marie had one degree in business and was working on another. But she could not move higher than accounting clerk.

Both Marie and Lisa had hit what is known as the “glass ceiling.” It happens to many women. They can only rise to a certain level in their workplace. They can’t see the thing that stops them. It is like a ceiling made of glass.

“Can You Get Me a Coffee?”

Because men’s and women’s jobs were seen as different where Lisa worked, women were expected to do things that men were not. Once a director asked Lisa if she could get him a coffee. He was a nice guy. Lisa thought he didn’t know he should not ask her to do this. She told him, sorry, but getting coffee was not in her job description. He apologized.

But women were expected to make coffee and do photocopying, no matter what job they had. After meetings, secretaries went into the meeting room to tidy up, wipe the table, wash the mugs. Some men would ask secretaries to open their letters for them.



I can’t believe this, Lisa thought. I thought this kind of stuff went out years ago. Women had different ways of dealing with these tasks. Some were really bothered and upset. Some spoke up and refused. Others felt they had to do whatever a supervisor asked. Lisa noticed that some women were like housekeepers for the office. "They ran around all day watering the flowers, cleaning the kitchen, cleaning the fridge," she says.

Lisa learned a lot about how people get set in their ways. She noticed that most of the men who thought women should do housekeeping tasks were older. They had begun their working lives when women were often treated this way in the workplace. The younger men were different. Whether they were managers or coworkers, they did not expect women to make coffee and clean up.

The Workplace Generation Gap

A generation gap is a difference in how people of different ages think and act. Usually, we talk about a generation gap between parents and children, but there was a gap where Lisa worked.

Most of the senior people had worked with government for 15 to 20 years. Some would soon retire. They had set ideas about who got to do what, and how the workplace should be run. Many of them did not like change.

There was another group of younger workers. They had less job experience, and more formal training and education. They liked change, because they felt change would help them move ahead. Many worked with technology, where change is a big part of the work itself.

Between these two groups there was a line that few could cross. Lisa was part of the younger group. After a couple of years, she realized that gender and age would both make it hard for her to cross the line that divided workers.

The Old Boys' Network

Lisa had heard people talk about "the old boys' network"—a group of people who have known each other a long time and who help each other out. But she had never seen it anywhere she worked before. It seemed to be a big part of where she worked now. When the Corporation was set up, senior managers brought people to the new workplace who had worked with them before. Lisa thought it was almost like a club. She wondered: if it is a club, how do people get in?

There seemed to be rules for getting into the club. You had to make sure you did not disagree with anyone in an important job. You had to learn which issues you should discuss. It seemed that you also had to make the office part of your social life. You had to get the coffee if you were asked, go for drinks or meals with senior staff, maybe invite them to your house for dinner. You had to learn to "cover for" someone who made a mistake. This is what Lisa calls being "the friend at work." Lisa watched people try to move through this system. Out of them all, only one woman made it to a top job.

Like many of her co-workers, Lisa was not very good at using this system to move up. She said what she really thought. She kept her social life separate from her work. She was not used to the rules. In the past, when she did contracts, every new job depended on how fast and well she did the one before. She thought that was the way to get ahead. People like her were lost in the old boys' network.

Change?—Not in My Department"

Lisa's job was to change things. She would organize things so that all records would be kept on a computer system. To do this, she needed to work with the files and records of every department. At first, most managers seemed interested in what she was trying to do. She told them she could help save them money. "That was their big interest, anything to do with money," Lisa says. But what people said about her plans and what they would do to change things were very different.

After one meeting, a manager said to Lisa, "I really support what you are doing."

"Thank you," Lisa said, "I would like to try this system in your department first."

The manager looked like he was sorry he had said anything at all. "No, no, no," he said quickly, "that's fine. I'm going to keep things the way they are. You go somewhere else and do it."



This kind of thing happened often. Lisa began to learn how hard it is to change the way people think. She began to see that if people do not understand what your job is, it can be pretty hard to do that job. Some people made it hard for her to do her job simply because they were afraid of change.

What Am I Doing Here?

Lisa started her job with high hopes. If she did well, it would help both her employer and her career. After two or three years, her feelings had changed. She felt that her work did not matter. She didn't know why her job was still there. She felt that she could come in every day and just close her office door. Would anyone in management know if she came in or not?

She thought maybe lots of other people didn't know what they were doing there either. One day she went to see a manager. His door was open. "Come in," he said. He was playing blackjack on his computer. Other people stretched their legs out on their desks and read the papers. "Maybe it was okay," Lisa says, "maybe they were reading the business report."

Lisa got help, support and interest from the secretaries and other clerical staff, and the people who worked with information. They seemed to understand best how her work fit into the big picture. She kept making presentations to the Board. Lisa had to keep doing this, even though it was clear they were not interested. Her biggest supporter, her first supervisor, had gone. He told her it was not a good idea to try to make a career of any one job. He said: "Stay long enough to do your work, but not long enough to get trapped."

Lisa thought about his words a lot. She did not think she could go on working at her job for much longer. Maybe the Corporation had decided it didn't need her. Maybe she would be laid off soon. There were lots of layoffs. In the 1990s, the provincial government laid off many people each year. Downsizing was in full swing. Maybe it would be Lisa's turn soon. After all, why would they want her to stay?

The Downsizing Years

Through most of the 1980s and 1990s, the government of this province kept trying to reduce the number of people who worked for it. Everyone talked about "downsizing" — making things smaller. Many people lost their jobs. After each year's budget, workers got letters telling them they no longer had work. Many layoffs came just after budget time. Others came later in the year. One year, many workers were laid off just before Christmas.

Everyone wondered who would be next. Fear of job loss made people tense and worried. "It was very bad for morale;" Lisa says. "Morale" is the overall feeling people bring to work. If they feel happy and useful in their jobs, we say morale is high. If they are angry and frustrated, their morale is low. During downsizing, morale got lower and lower.

Downsizing at Lisa's workplace began very soon after the Corporation was set up. Lisa says it happened because the Corporation started out too big. "It was way too big. It had to fail," she says. Too many people were hired at the start. There was no room to create jobs when

they were needed. There were too many people at the top. There was no room for anyone to move up. The only way to move was down and out.

Who Goes? Who Stays?

As the layoffs went on, year after year, Lisa says you could place bets on who would be the next to go. She and some co-workers made up lists of who would lose their jobs. Most of the time they were right.

They also noticed the kinds of jobs that were lost. Most of the clerical staff went. Only senior managers kept secretaries. People who worked with information and technology lost jobs.



In the top jobs, few people were let go. On paper, it looked like an equal number of unionized workers and managers would lose jobs. But this didn't happen. Most of the managers on the list were people ready to retire. At its peak, the Corporation had about 130 staff. Over half were in management.

As downsizing went on, there were areas where there was a manager for every one or two unionized workers. At the end, there were "directors of nobody" and "managers of nobody." All their junior staff were gone. The managers often did the jobs of the laid-off workers, but they kept their job titles and high salaries.

It was hard to find out what was going on. There were lots of meetings behind closed doors. After a meeting, a worker might be told, "Please be in your office at two o'clock tomorrow."

This usually meant you would be getting a layoff notice.

Red-Circled

"I kept waiting for a layoff notice, but I didn't get one," Lisa says. "But I got red-circled." This meant she would be moved into a lower job, but she would not get a pay cut right away. But someone with more seniority could "bump" her, and then she would have to take the lower salary. She could only bump someone in the lower-paying job. Her pay could go down \$6,000 a year. Some other workers would lose as much as \$10,000 or \$15,000.

Lisa was upset. The job title she was offered was clerical. It was a job she never would have applied for. After years of trying to explain she wasn't a clerical worker, she was about to become one anyway.

Some workers did not worry so much. Max had two years left before he retired. "Who can bump me?" Max said. "I think I'm pretty safe."

But Lisa knew there were many years before she could feel the way Max did. She wrote to her union and to her employer. Her message was: If you can't let me do the work I was hired to do, then let me go. Tell me my services are no longer needed. It would be a long time before she got an answer to her request.

Answer the Phones, Please

The front desk receptionist lost her job. Workers were told they now had to answer the phones for each other, and make sure messages got passed on. Sometimes this didn't work. Messages got lost. People got angry e-mail messages when they were not able to return calls. With the receptionist gone, the office doors were locked. People would arrive to find a sign on the door. The sign said to please go to another floor and have the receptionist there buzz up, so someone could let you in.

Lisa remembers a fisherman who could not believe what was going on. He had been to another building, then Lisa's. There he found the locked door. He went down to another floor, then up again. "I'm only trying to pay them back some money," he said.

Dying Days of A Work Place

Behind the locked doors, employees knew that their workplace would soon close. It would be joined to a department of government. It would move to a new space. Some of the workers who still had jobs would move with it.

In these last months, Lisa and her co-workers talked a lot about what would happen to them. Many felt that they were not doing a real job anymore, and they were ready to leave and move on with their lives. Others hoped they could hang on to a job. With houses and cars to pay for, some were afraid that losing a job would mean losing everything.

Some people decided to take the risk anyway. Cathy told Lisa she was leaving her job in payroll. She had two young children, and her husband was unemployed. She was the sole earner in the family. But she "wasn't going to take a slap in the face after working 12 years." She and her family packed up and moved to Alberta. They became one family among the many leaving Newfoundland to look for better jobs somewhere else.

Rick left his job in information technology for a job in the private sector. The company was new. It might succeed or fail, and Rick might be laid off. But he felt he had to try something new. He had started to think that no job is secure.

Lisa hung on. She did not have another job to go to. If she quit, she would not be able to get EI. Having no income at all was just too big a risk for her.

Getting Out

It took nine months for Lisa to find out that she would be leaving her job after all. She would get some money, what people often call a "package," and a layoff notice which meant she could get EI. Lisa had lived so long with the stress of not knowing what would happen, all she could feel was relief. She had already started to take courses at night, and to think about a different kind of future.

Thinking about the Past and Future

"When you're young and starting out," Lisa says, "you never think about what you really want, and whether you'll be happy. You just think—a job, a regular cheque, I'm so lucky to be working!"

These days she thinks a lot about why people work and what they get out of it. She also believes now that maybe it is not good to think about building a career, working in one area and moving up the ladder. Maybe it is better to think of working at a number of things, and changing what you do several times during your life.

Lisa also thinks about her career choices. She says she once felt under pressure to get a certain kind of job. She grew up in a family where there was never much money. Her parents wanted her to do "better than they had." This meant making money and having a job with prestige. When she hears people at social events ask each other what do you do? she thinks about how some jobs have a higher status than others. Some jobs—and some people—are looked at as important. These and other things affect the choices people make about work, jobs and careers.

Before she gets another job, Lisa will try to figure out what might make her happy in her work. "If someone had asked me that in high school," she says, "I might have become a gardener." She works some fertilizer into the new holes she has dug in her garden. She places the tulip bulbs in the holes and covers them gently with earth.

Sources:

This article was based on an interview with a former public sector worker. "Lisa" is not her real name. The author also read government documents and newspaper accounts of downsizing covering the years 1988-1996.

A Hell of a Good Job: Questions for Discussion

A Really Good Job

1. When Lisa was 25, she got a job she thought she really wanted.
 - a. What was this job?
 - b. List some ways in which this job was different from the jobs she had had before.
2. Just after Lisa was hired, the government announced a job freeze.
 - a. What is a job freeze?
 - b. How did the job freeze affect Lisa's job?

Better Pay

1. What kinds of deductions came out of Lisa's pay? Why was her take-home pay not much more than in her other jobs?

Men, Women and the Glass Ceiling

1. Lisa feels that men and women were treated differently in her workplace. What are some of the differences?

The Old Boys' Network

1. Lisa says there was an "old boys' network" where she worked. What does she mean by this?

"Change—Not in My Department"

1. Part of Lisa's job was to make changes.
 - a. What kinds of changes was she supposed to make?
 - b. Why did Lisa find it hard to make changes?

What Am I Doing Here?

1. After two or three years, Lisa felt disappointed with her job. Why was she disappointed?

The Downsizing Years

1. What is downsizing?
2. Do you know anyone who lost their job because of downsizing?

Who Goes? Who Stays?

1. When downsizing happened at Lisa's workplace, what kinds of workers lost their jobs?

Red-Circled

1. What does it mean to be red-circled?
2. What is bumping?
3. Lisa did not want to be moved into another kind of work.
 - a. Why?
 - b. What did she do about it?

Answer the Phones Please/Dying Days of a Workplace

1. What was it like at Lisa's workplace just before she left it?
2. (a) Why were some of Lisa's co-workers ready to leave?
(b) Why was it hard for some other workers to leave?

Getting Out/Thinking about the Past and Future

1. What did Lisa do when her job ended?
2. When Lisa got her job, she felt lucky just to have a job. How did her thinking change?
3. Before Lisa gets another job, she will try to find out what might make her happy in her work.
 - a. After reading her story, what kinds of things do you think might make her happy?
 - b. What do you expect out of a job (i.e. money, security, enjoyment)?

Shoot

Michael Winter

This essay tries to capture a slice of the work that goes into making a film. The interviews with cast and crew all revolve around one particular day in the life of a film shoot.

Word List

Illusion: When a pretend thing looks real.

Audience: The people who watch a movie.

Script: The written text of a story or film.

Extraordinary: Something which is great.

Props: Objects in a movie that surround an actor.

Aperture: The opening in a camera which lets in light.

Filmstock: The roll of film on which the movie is photographed.

Watching a Movie

We love watching movies. When we see a good movie we are taken, for a time, into another world.

The first movies ever made were all about movement. One movie showed how a horse ran. Another had a train racing out towards the audience. People weren't used to movies and they were scared and entertained by this movement of light. Now we understand the illusion.

These days, a good movie reveals a beautiful or shocking event to the world for the first time. The word "movie" comes from the idea of a "moving picture."

What Goes On Behind Making a Movie

Watching a film should be easy. The audience should not see the hard work that goes into making a film. Often, over 50 people are working behind the set. These people work hard to make the scene appear real and life-like. Each crew member knows exactly what is expected of him or her during that day's shooting.

Making a Movie in Newfoundland

We all tell stories about the work we do. Often, we work with others to make one thing. This is how a film is made. A film grows out of an idea and is made from light. To make this idea real, many people have to work together.

First, a writer creates a script. Then, a producer raises money to make the movie. A cast is picked to act in the film and a crew is hired to work behind the scenes. The phase of shooting the film is called the Production Phase.

Production Phase

There are many specific jobs during the Production Phase of filmmaking. These jobs include lighting, wardrobe, makeup, costume, prop design, carpentry, photography, camera operation, locations scouting, catering, sound recording, and production assistants. Even on a small film, over 50 people can be employed at any one time.

Some of these jobs require little training. Others, like the camera operator, require certain skills. These skills can be taught at places like the Newfoundland Independent Filmmaker's Co-op in St. John's. A new group, called FilmCAN, holds regular workshops for all the crew positions. These workshops can last from a few days to several weeks.

Extraordinary Visitor

Recently, a feature film, "Extraordinary Visitor," was shot on location in Newfoundland. The following are some accounts from cast and crew about the work they did on this film shoot. The "cast" are the actors. The "crew" are the people working behind the scenes.

CAST

Andy: All Day to Deliver One Line

Andy gets into his costume. The costume is a suit and tie. All day Andy waits to deliver one line. At noon he has a lovely dinner. Andy watches out he doesn't spill anything on the suit. Wardrobe puts a bib over him. Then he waits all afternoon.

He eats his supper and waits.

Finally, at 11 p.m., Andy gets on the set.

"I walk on and there's 200 people, a party scene and they've been there all day."

Outside there are three electrical trucks. Andy has one line. He is choking to get it right because, if he doesn't, there's overtime. The production will have to pay everyone time and a half. This means their regular pay plus half as much again.



Actors Andy Jones and Raoul Bhaneja play a scene.

"It'll cost a lot of money if I flub it."

Driving Blind

Raoul is one of the stars. He has to hang off a transmitter tower at 150 feet. Except it only looks like that. A stunt man does it.

They've brought in the stunt man from Toronto. The stunt man had just been in a big Hollywood movie. In that movie he had to crash through two car windshields. He said it was his hardest stunt ever.

Today Raoul and Andy drive around in a van. There is a camera mounted onto the passenger door. Andy is driving. He has to drive and talk. Police have blocked traffic on Prescott Street. Andy's character doesn't wear glasses, so he's a little blind. Raoul thinks about the stunt driver going through the windshield.

"Andy has the glasses on during breaks and then when 'action' happens, I have to remind him to take off the glasses." Andy takes the glasses off and folds them on the dash. Andy has to act and drive the van at the same time. Raoul can see that Andy is driving blind.

Then it begins to rain. They have to wait for the rain to stop — it's too hard for the camera to see the actors when there's rain on the windshield.

First Time in Newfoundland

Raoul is playing the role of John the Baptist. His first day of shooting was on top of Signal Hill. The cast and crew were up there at sunrise. Raoul had to stand there and look out over the ocean. Then, in the second shot, he turns to look back at the city. The first shot is at sunrise, but then they have to wait an hour for the second shot. They have to wait because the city is still dark.

So they wait. In the cold. The movie is supposed to look like summer, even though they are shooting in the winter.

"I'm hoping," Raoul says, "that when the rushes come back, it doesn't just look like I'm freezing to death." The rushes are the scenes that have been filmed and sent to the lab for developing. The director looks at the rushes to see if he likes the acting, the lighting and the camera work. Sometimes a scene has to be shot again.

It's Raoul's first time in Newfoundland. He's not used to the cold.



Raoul Bhaneja (John the Baptist) prepares for a scene on Signal Hill.

CREW

Renee: I Walk Dogs and Close Doors

Renee is a Production Assistant, or PA. This job is the lowest of the low.

"We were downtown doing a regular indoor shot," Renee says. "It was my job to keep the door closed. That's it. When someone opens the door, I close it."

It was cold outside and the actors inside were in their shirts and had to stay warm. All day Renee closed the door.

The director came over and pretended he was Renee. "Oh I'm a PA," he said. "I walk dogs and I open and close doors."

He was making fun of Renee.

"This ticked me off," Renee says. She said to him, "If you have something more challenging, I'll do it."

The director laughed in a way that said he understood her point.

"It was a twelve hour day and we were all under strain," she says. Renee realized the director didn't mean anything by the laugh. They were all under a lot of pressure.

Closing Down the Set

That night they had to strike the set. Striking means they close down the set for good. They packed up lighting gear and sound gear and hauled out everything that belonged to the production. Renee asked Barb if she could help with the camera guys. Barb said okay. The camera guys said Renee could carry the yellow boxes.

The yellow boxes contain exposed film, \$50,000 lenses, filters and all sorts of expensive gear.

"They let me carry it. Barb saw me and was concerned, but then she saw the camera guys and she knew they had asked me."

They went into the electrical van and the camera operator wrote in his log. The log is a record of all the film that has been shot, and a list of what has to be sent away to be developed.

Albert is the camera operator. He sticks the camera up on a shelf and shows Renee how it works. He opens up the camera and Renee can see where the film passes the aperture. It's here that the film gets exposed to the light.

Albert explains why film is 35 millimetres wide. The inventor, Edison, was making filmstock for Eastman way back at the beginning of making movies. Eastman was the founder of Kodak. Edison asked, "How wide do you want me to make that filmstock?"

Eastman said, "About this wide."

Eastman had his finger and thumb apart. The distance between Eastman's thumb and finger was 35 millimetres.

Renee is interested in being a camera operator. Being a PA is the first step, she figures.

Gerry: Sunrise is Never Behind Schedule

Gerry is an assistant to the director. She gets up at 3:30 a.m., when it's still dark. She likes to have a shower and a coffee. She has two alarm clocks that are battery-operated.

"You never know when there might be a power outage during the night," she says. There's a phone by her bed in case someone from the Set has to contact her.

Gerry has to be on Signal Hill for sunrise. But if it's a cloudy day, they go to a 'Cover Day'.

A Cover Day is when they shoot indoors because the weather isn't good for an outdoor shoot.

Gerry leaves the house at 4:30 a.m. There's been snow. She has to shovel out the rental van. She's two minutes late. She flicks on her headlights and pulls out into the night.

She has to pick up the first actor at 4:50 a.m. She waits five minutes outside his door. Then she knocks and pounds. He comes out in his pyjamas. "Oh no," he says. "I must have set my alarm for p.m., not a.m."

"I have to decide," she says, "if I'm going to wait for him, or pick up my next actor and return for him."

She has to handle this delicately. He's an actor and she knows she shouldn't make him feel bad for waking late. He has to act soon in front of a camera and he'll be under a lot of pressure.

"I don't want to add to that pressure."

He promises he'll be down in four minutes. So she waits. He's down in six minutes.

"If I'm late, actors are late, then Wardrobe and Make-up will be late, and we'll miss the sunrise."

The shot for today requires a sunrise. The sunrise is never behind schedule.

Gerry calls the First Assistant Director on the walkie to tell him they're late, but his walkie isn't on.

Gerry picks up the rest of the actors. Now they are ten minutes late.

"I get them into Wardrobe and Make-up. I call the Set on a cell phone. They say that I have to hurry Wardrobe, they can't wait. I pull aside the head of Wardrobe and tell her. The head of Wardrobe is not pleased."

"We won't be rushed," Wardrobe says.

Gerry tries to have this conversation out of earshot of the actors.

"If we don't get them on Set soon," she says, "they'll miss the sunrise and the shot won't happen."

Wardrobe says, "If I rush, it'll look like I've done a bad job."

Gerry tells her that they understand it's not Wardrobe's fault.

Gerry can see that the actors are a little grumpy, so she gets donuts and coffee from Tim Horton's. She notices the weather isn't very clear.

"I get everyone in the van and we rush up to Signal Hill. Everyone is waiting. But someone has forgotten the cane."

Wardrobe says, "The cane is part of Props, not Wardrobe."

Props says, "We don't have the cane, the cane is Wardrobe's responsibility."

"No, it's not," says Wardrobe.

Sometimes, even when you break every task down into smaller jobs, little things are forgotten.

Gerry tracks down the cane and gets it sent up the Hill.

Meanwhile, it's overcast and cloudy. You can't see the sun for the clouds.

The director wants the sun. So they wait. The shot has to be changed. The sun slips between clouds and they get a new shot that will have to do. It's not the shot they had imagined.

"I got everyone here on time, but they can't get the shot."

The actors are freezing and there are no warm-up blankets. So Gerry uses sound blankets.

"Sound blankets are used to muffle sound around the microphones. I find ones that are not too dirty and wrap up the actors."

While they are shooting the scene with the new sun Gerry is preparing to get them all to the next location.

"We're now an hour behind schedule," Gerry says, "because of the sun."

Two Dogs and an Actor in a Linen Suit

I'm in Continuity. I make sure that an actor looks the same from scene to scene. If his shirt collar is sticking up in one scene, it should still be sticking up in the next. So, I take a lot of polaroid photographs. It may be a week between scenes that appear together in the movie. Sometimes hair will have to be trimmed. When there is a long time between shots, I'll look at the actor and compare him to his look in the photograph. They have to be identical.

The scene today is in the Battery. A car has to pass an actor who is walking. Two dogs trot up to meet the walking actor. In real life, the actor is afraid of dogs, but he says he'll be brave. It's the middle of winter and yet we're pretending it's summer. The actor is wearing a linen suit and white shoes and he's not supposed to look cold. He's freezing. We clear the streets. We hold back traffic. We were supposed to do this scene an hour earlier, but we're behind schedule. It's 8:30 in the morning and everyone in the Battery is trying to get to work. I'm making sure the shadows don't move too much. If, in one scene, the shadow of the hill is strong and dark across the actor, and in the next it's overcast and there's no shadow, then it will look strange.

We do a rehearsal. The car passes, the dogs run up to the actor. The dogs jump all over him. This is not supposed to happen. The actor is in a panic. The dogs get muddy paw prints all over the white linen suit. The actor runs away. He is frozen with cold and fear. We run after him. Wardrobe takes the muddy suit off him. There is only one suit.

"Why" the director asks, "is there only one suit?"

Traffic is allowed through. There's a woman pedestrian who has been waiting to get through.

"I have to attend my husband's funeral," she says apologetically. We let her through.

Wardrobe manages to get the mud out of the suit and I make sure it's hanging the right way on the actor. I check the suit against the one I have in the photograph. "Okay," I say. "The suit looks good." The cameras are set to roll. They let the dogs go and they jump on him again.

A Hungry Mob is an Angry Mob

Rod feeds the crew and cast. This is called "craft services." This business is new to him. It's the last day before Christmas. Rod figures it's going to be like the last day of school — everything will be slack.

"I thought I'd save on the budget. I wasn't buying too much food because it would just get wasted."

Usually you buy more than enough and then if there's anything left over you can keep it for the next day. But this was the last day of the shoot.

"I figured I had enough for the day. I thought they'd wrap early."

Rod thinks "wrap" means they take the film out of the camera and seal it in a tin. They wrap the tin with tape.

"All I know is, when the director says, 'That's a wrap,' the shooting day is over and I better be ready to feed them."

At 8 p.m. it starts. The actors want bottled water on set. Rod doesn't have any water left. There's a delay because the star won't get on set without some water.

"The Producer himself comes down to get the water. The Producer. I can see he's in a panic."

"We're in overtime," the Producer says. "Give me some water."

All Rod has left is a big Discovery Springs water cooler. So he pours off two glasses, except the glasses have cracks in them. The Producer holds them away from himself and walks back on set. They leak water all the way.

"You've got to keep the stars happy. But there are other big people on set too, like the Director of Photography. He calls for a cappuccino. This is a special coffee he likes with skimmed milk. Well, I'd just thrown out the skimmed milk! So I got a PA to run off to the corner store to get some more. Then, somebody wanted gum and I had to jump off a truck and go into a store and buy gum."

The stars wanted lemon zinger tea. "Like a regular cup of tea wasn't good enough. So we had to go and track down some herbal tea."

The Producer Hates Processed Cheese

They are shooting downtown and Rod is feeding them burgers for supper. Rod knows the Producer hates processed cheese. The PA says, "At least put the cheese slices on the tray." That way they can decide if they want cheese on their burgers or not. Rod says, "Okay, but you're bringing the tray on set."

Rod doesn't want to be blamed for the cheese.

The PA brings out the tray and the Producer has one look at it. He grabs up a handful of the sliced cheese and throws it in a corner. He says, "That cheese is banned from the set!"

When they're shooting indoors they drink a lot more water and orange juice, and outdoors it's coffee and tea and hot chocolate.

"That's common sense," Rod says, "but it's something you have to learn." Rod bought six cases of water for the first week of shooting and they went through all six cases in one day.

To feed 45 people is strenuous. You please half of them one day, and the other half the next.

"If you're half-way personable you'll meet a lot of fine people."

Rod was telling the head carpenter, who is a vegetarian, about the stress, and the carpenter said, "A hungry mob is an angry mob."

"That about sums up Craft Services," Rod says, smiling.

He says you have to have good, hot coffee ready in the morning. "The production can work on coffee. It's coffee-driven for the first three hours. In the run of a day they drink ten gallons of coffee."

The money is excellent, although the days are long. When there's overtime Rod makes more money. Some days he can make \$360.

A movie is a living, breathing thing, like an animal. It swarms in and takes over.

Anne: Turning a Sheep Into a Cardinal

Anne works in Wardrobe. In one scene this actor dressed as a Cardinal gets turned into a sheep. It's a magical scene. So Anne has to dress the sheep to look like the Cardinal.

"I hadn't seen the sheep. I called up the sheep's owner and asked him to measure the sheep for me."

This is difficult because, with all the wool, you can get a lot of variety in size with the tape measure. But the owner measured the sheep and passed on the numbers to Anne and she made up a size chart.

"I sewed up a little cardinal's outfit for the sheep."

The sheep arrived on the back of a truck. The sheep was very relaxed and easy to work with. Anne had no trouble shoving its legs into black and red cuffs.

"We had a little beanie for the sheep's head. The robe was difficult — a sheep's shoulders are much different than a human's. But in the end the sheep looked beautiful. I have a very nice photograph of the actor and the sheep dressed as Cardinals."

John: A Pack of Sled Dogs

John wrote the script and he's directing the film. Usually, a director doesn't mind changing someone else's script to meet the practical needs of shooting a movie.

"A script is like a recipe," John explains. "If the recipe calls for red peppers and you've only got green peppers in the fridge, you don't mind substituting. But when it's your script and you've written 'red peppers', then it's hard to see things change. So, tension arises."

There was a scene where Andy has to shout out, "If I see you around here again, I'll set a pack of sled dogs on you." When Andy was reading it he said it didn't sound right. Could he just say, "What are you like — get out of here."

"Well, I wrote that line about the sled dogs," John says. "So, I think it's a good line. I've been working with that line for a couple of years. If I hadn't written it, I probably wouldn't mind so much if Andy changed it. But, instead of arguing with him, I decide that he can change the line if he wants."

When they do the scene, with cameras rolling, John can see Andy's adrenalin is beginning to flow. He's motivated. Andy yells out, "If I see you around here again, I'll set a pack of sled dogs on you."

He said the line.

John asked Andy what happened. Andy said, "It felt right when I was in the scene."

So, the line was right after all.

A New Idea

The last scene of the film is set on New Year's Eve. The family is setting off fireworks from their backyard. Andy suggests they all wear safety goggles for the scene. This isn't in the script, but, as Andy points out, his character is obsessed with safety.

John says, "But I don't want the actors wearing goggles." He's pictured the scene in his mind for years. "It's the last scene and I want to see your eyes."

But Andy and others resist. They think it will offer humour to a scene and undercut the sentimentality.

John decides on a compromise: they can wear the goggles while the fireworks go off, but when Raoul (playing John the Baptist) appears in the smoke, they lift off the goggles.

They agree with this.

"So, a PA runs off to buy three pairs of goggles. The actors put them on and we do the scene and it's beautiful. The goggles work. The scene is better than what I had imagined.

For years while I was working on the script there were never goggles in the scene, but at the last minute we put them in and it works."

The point is, when you make a film, the ideas come from many people who are all working together. You have to listen to what other people bring to your vision.



Director John Doyle, discusses a scene
with Rick Boland

John says nothing is impossible in making a film. You're at the mall and you want it to rain,

When they were shooting in Pippy Park, they were interrupted by noise from airplanes landing and taking off at the airport. So, John sent someone to the airport to phone them when a plane was coming in or taking off. That was the idea, to warn them.

Instead, the control tower rerouted air traffic from where they were filming. If someone from Locations had said, "I'll go and get the airplanes rerouted," John would have thought he was crazy.

"You realize people like to cooperate with filmmakers. A film is a magical thing in many people's minds, and they want to be a part of it."

The Newfoundland Independent Filmmaker's Co-op (NIFCO) is located at 40 King's Road, St. John's, NE Their telephone number is (709) 753-6121.

Shoot: Questions for Discussion

1. What were the first movies about?
2. Andy feels pressure to get his one line right. What happens if he flubs it?
3. What was the stunt man's hardest stunt?
4. Why does Raoul hope it doesn't look like he's freezing?
5. What reason does Albert give Renee for why film is 35 millimetres wide?
6. What job would you like to have on a film shoot?
7. They say "time is money." How is this saying appropriate to making a film?
8. Describe some of the tensions that can arise on a film shoot.
9. What is your favourite movie? Why do you like it?

Sources:

This essay is based on telephone interviews and kitchen conversations I had with Andy Jones, Renee Pilgrim, Gerry Rodgers, Rod Batten, Anne Troake, and John Doyle. They all worked on the feature film, "Extraordinary Visitor." In some cases I have shortened things people told me. Other times I put new words into their mouths. If anyone I've quoted gets into trouble, please blame me for it.

Going into Service

Kathryn Welbourn

Before You Read

1. Have you ever worked in the service industry?
2. Were you good at serving people?
3. Do you think the service industry is a good place to find work?
4. Do you think tourism will help replace the fishery in Newfoundland?

Introduction

Jobs have almost always been hard to come by in Newfoundland, especially for women in rural areas. In the 1920s and 1930s their best bet for work was to go into service — in a rich person’s house in St. John’s, or in an outport home where the women were busy working in the fishery.

The newspapers of that time were full of ads for cooks, washer women, maids and housekeepers.

These jobs didn’t pay very much. Some women weren’t paid at all. They worked for their food and a place to sleep. They all worked long hours and had very little time off.

Milley Johnson worked as a domestic in the 1930s. She was 16 years old. Milley says she was lucky because she worked for a merchant family in Bonavista near her home. They were not “fancy” people. So they treated her like one of their own.

Many of her friends went to St. John’s as domestics where they felt they were looked down on. They even had to call the children “sir.” No matter how hard they tried they just couldn’t please their bosses. They had no choice though. If they needed the money they had to work. The only way to find work was to go into service.

Newfoundlanders are being told the service industry is a good place for them to find work today — not as domestics in people’s homes, but as employees serving the public. Colleges offer courses in everything from waitressing to tourism. Even high schools encourage students to think about the service industry by offering courses in tourism.

But what kind of work is it really? Many service industry jobs pay minimum wage. Most are not unionized. Not everyone has the right personality to “serve” the public.

Here are two stories about women who work in the service industry. These women were asked to talk about their jobs and what it feels like to work serving other people’s needs. Working in the service industry was not something either of these woman dreamed of doing. Going into service is what happened to them along the way.

Help Wanted.

WANTED—Immediately, a Good Cook, young woman able to hustle, references required; start immediately; good pay and liberal outings given to the right person; apply in person to A. E. Holmes, Manager, King George V. Seaman’s Institute.

Domestic Help Girls Wanted

— Experienced general maids and cooks. Gold chain and locket given to each girl FREE. Office hours 3 to 6, also Tuesday and Thursday nights 8 to 8:30. RELIABLE AGENCIES and DOMESTIC HELP BUREAU, Gear Building, 3rd floor, Water Street.

WANTED — A Nurse-Housemaid, another maid kept, references required, **also a Country Washer-woman**; apply to MRS. E. S. PIN-SENT, 78 Circular Road.

These ads were taken from The Evening Telegram, March 6, 1924.

Marg A Waitress's Story

I didn't mean to be a waitress. But I'm 31 now and I've been doing it since I was 16. So, I guess that's what I am. I used to say I was just waitressing to pay for college. I took art courses and then I took business courses. I even took some courses about looking after old people. I never finished any of them. I always ran short of money and none of the courses were really right for me.

I've never known what I wanted to do with my life. The only thing I ever really cared about was having a little house and a couple of kids. But you need money for that. I'm supposed to save my tips. But I hardly ever do. Something always comes up. And I think, *I can make more money tomorrow.*

Right now I'm working in a restaurant that has a bar. I don't know how long I'll stay here. Until I get sick of it I guess. I've worked in banquet halls, bars, pubs, fine dining rooms, cafes and hotels. They're all different kinds of work. You have to wear a different costume (that's what I call the uniforms) in each of those places.

Working as a waitress is like being in a soap opera. It's very dramatic and personal. Your body works hard but your mind is left free. So there's lots of time for fooling around and gossip. The cook is sleeping with this girl. The boss has the hots for that one. One day someone comes into work crying about their kids. Another day someone is angry at their boyfriend. This waitress is mad at that one. And everyone makes cracks at the dishwasher. He's usually the lowest one in the place, unless there's a busboy. And even a busboy gets a share of the tips.

Then there's the customers. After a while you get to know them. Even if you don't know them, they fall into types. There's the good tipper. There's the one who tries to grab your ass. There's always one that has special instructions every time they order — brown toast lightly buttered and a garden salad with no tomatoes if you please.

We make fun of them in the back as we pass on through to pick up our orders. The ones we like, we treat like family. You know, ask them about their kids, their love lives, or their work. It all depends on how much they want to talk. That's part of the skill of being a waitress. You've got to understand right away how much people want to hear from you.



Credit: Kathryn Welbourn, 1998.

Some people want to be served in a formal way. Those are the *What can I get you, sir?* kind of people. Sometimes I like having those kind of customers. Because the ones that want to talk, always want to talk. And you have to talk to them even if you're really busy, or don't feel well, or are upset about something in your own life. They don't think about those things. They just see you as their waitress. It's part of the service they expect.

Some customers like to tease you and joke around with you. They comment on your hair or whatever. Sometimes they go too far and it feels like they're coming on to you. That happens a lot. There's always a hint of sex in the air when you're waitressing. It's depressing. I don't let people do that to me in my own life. But on the job, well, it's part of the job.

I've learned a lot of really useless things from those jobs. Like how to fold linen napkins into those fancy flowers you see at weddings. And how to carry a tray of beers over my head. I can balance four dinner plates at one time. I can make small talk with anyone.

Working in nightclubs is something I won't do again. You make great money. But you have to put up with a lot of crap from people — men and women. Not being harassed in a club is the exception. A lot of people are going there to find someone to sleep with, or to show off to their friends. The waitress is always right there on the floor in the middle of it. The only job to have in a club is bartender. Everyone treats the bartender right. If they don't, they're cut off and that's it.

There's a real trick to waitressing. You have to be able to do twenty things at once. It's a kind of rhythm. Every time you start a new waitressing job it takes a couple of days to pick it up. Then it just kicks in.

It starts with the first customer of the day. You take their order. Bring it to the kitchen. Go back and pour their coffee. Bring them an ashtray. Serve their food. You give them their bill and take their money. If there's no busboy you clean their table and set it. In between you check on how they're doing. You build on this one person as more people come in. Until you're in constant motion.

Sometimes there's a little gap in that motion. You just happen to have everyone taken care of at once. Then it's time for a quick smoke and back you go. It just kind of swallows you up until your shift is over.

If anything disturbs this rhythm, you're dead. You start dropping plates or you forget someone's coffee. And the whole thing goes to hell. I hate slow days for the same reason. You get lazy and resentful when you're just sitting around waiting for people to show up. When they do, you don't want to serve them. You feel like they are imposing on you. Well, nobody likes serving people all the time. If it's your job, it's better not to think about it.

Waitresses usually get paid minimum wage. You almost never get a raise from that. That's because we are supposed to get tips all the time. Fifteen percent is what everyone is supposed to give. But they don't.

The worst tippers are civil servants and teachers. They just feel like they don't need to tip you. You can always hear them whining and complaining about how hard they work. And they demand a lot of attention, no matter how busy you are. Rich people tip the regular amount. The best tips are from young couples and young families. They have the least money. But I think they notice that you're working. They see that you're working. Being served is not something they're used to in their lives.

Waitressing in bars is different. When people start getting drunk, their tips get bigger and bigger. Sometimes they do this by accident. I usually tell them they've given me a ten dollar tip for two drinks. But if they've been rude or aggressive with me, well, sometimes I take that tip. I keep it as revenge.

I'm really sick of being a waitress. And I'm a little worried about how I'm going to get out of it. I'm really good at it now. I can always get a job doing it. But it catches up with you. During really busy seasons you work all the time. And if you're not working you're on call. I've worked seven days a week for weeks.

I have spider veins running up and down my legs. How long until those are varicose veins? I get sick a lot, I think from exhaustion. I cry after work many nights. I'm so tired and frustrated. Plus, what is the future of an older waitress?

How long can you do it? Tell me this, how many plain women have you seen waitressing? Not very many. Some family restaurants and hotels don't care. But in general you have to be nice looking. It helps you get a job.

I'd like to start my own business. Maybe a little store or a small pub. I know a lot about working with people now. And children. It's time I started doing some fl thing about that. I waitressed while my husband was finishing school. I waitressed while he was trying to break into his field. I'm waitressing now while he's on contract. I've told him now, I've got to get out.

It's getting harder and harder to smile and be pleasant. I think I've just been doing it for too long. I don't want to put up with angry customers. They always blame the waitress. If the food is bad, it's your fault. If it's cold or it's taking too long, it's the waitresses fault. Sometimes I feel like asking them if they butt their cigarettes in their dinner plates at home. I feel like telling them to stop whining about their soup. It's only soup, for God's sake. And the bosses are demanding. It's their place. They want you to shine every day. I'm tired of shining.

Author's Note

I had some questions about Marg's working life. Why did she work seven days a week some times? Why didn't she get paid overtime? There are job rules for other workers. I thought there must be some rules for waitresses. When I asked Marg about this she just shrugged. She told me she wasn't sure what the rules were but that it didn't matter anyway. If she complained her boss might give her bad shifts, or even no shifts. If she tried to do anything she might get fired. If she got fired or caused her boss trouble, word about her would go around. She might find it hard to get another job. There are lots of good waitresses. No one wants to hire a trouble maker.

I called the Newfoundland labour department. An official there told me that most waitresses don't belong to unions. He said they are usually paid minimum wage. But if they work more than forty hours in one week they have to be paid \$7.88 for every extra hour. He said waitresses are supposed to get one day off a week.

I told him about Marg. He said her attitude and working life were typical. The service industry can be a hard place to work. Most waitresses don't make much money so they can't risk losing their jobs by complaining. They can't afford to risk getting a bad reference from their bosses.

I told him I thought that was sad and unfair. He said "Yes, it is. But there you have it. They don't want to come to us with their complaints. There's nothing we can do."

Tour Guide: Karen's Story

I didn't start out in tourism. I wanted to be a teacher first. I graduated with my education degree in 1989. I looked for a job in teaching for years.

I did everything you're supposed to do to get a job. I met principals and teachers. I taught after school programs and lunchtime programs in the schools. I substituted for about five years. I never made enough money. Substituting was so sparse. I only got called in once a week or even less. There's just too many teachers out there.

I didn't like substituting anyway — one day in a class and then gone. That wasn't really for me. I loved teaching. I loved it. But I wanted a class of my own.

When I realized that teaching didn't look like it was going to pan out, I thought, "I'm not going to stick around and wait for nothing." Tourism was something I had an interest in.

My father grew up in the city. I grew up hearing his stories about the way St. John's used to be. I remember one story he told me about seeing a plane when he was a boy. Of course that was a big deal for kids back then — seeing an airplane flying over the city. A crowd of them started running after the flight of the plane. They wanted to see up close when it

landed. Dad said they ran to the harbour. But when they got there everybody said, "No, no it's headed up by Mundy Pond." So they ran to Mundy Pond and there it had landed. It turned out the pilot didn't mean to land there. He was supposed to land by Quidi Vidi Lake. But he was given the wrong instructions about where to go. He was lucky to see that field at Mundy Pond. There's a Sobeys there now.



Tourists love icebergs. Credit: Brian Jones 1996.

So I grew up hearing stories like that. I had a summer job once as a tour guide. I showed people around one of the historic houses in the city. It was a great job. Really interesting and fun because I love old buildings and stories about the past. That's what I did there — tell stories and find out more about the city. So when I gave up on teaching I decided to try my luck there, in tourism.

I took a two-year course in tourism management — the business side of tourism — at one of those private colleges. It cost me about \$10,000. That's a lot of student loan to pay back. I'm still not sure if it was worth it.

Most of the other students in the course were on TAGS. It's nothing against them, but I found that really frustrating. Most of them had no interest in what they were doing. But they were told that they had to retrain or they wouldn't get TAGS.

It was frustrating for me having to get a student loan and being no different than those people. I mean, I was out of a job because of economic conditions and so were they. But they were having everything funded. I was paying though the nose for it.

There were fifteen people in the class. Only three or four of us got jobs in the industry. All of those jobs were seasonal. You know, hired in the summer during the tourist season and then laid off in the late fall. Sounds like fishing doesn't it? So I guess they didn't really gain much. Neither did I.

Part of the course was a 10-week work term. That was good because it gives you experience. But it was in January. So you can figure out that there were not a lot of good tourism jobs around at that time of the year.

A few did a work term at City Hall, others at hotel desks, and places like Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador. *The Downhomer* magazine qualified as being part of tourism.

In fact, anything from a tour guide to a gas pump attendant could be considered a tourism job.

I was happy with my placement. It was at a new tour guiding and planning company. I worked there for the ten weeks for free. And then I worked there for another month free

while the company looked for funding to pay my salary. I couldn't really afford it. But I wanted that job. I just hoped they'd come through with some money.

The first day I found out I was the only employee there. The office was absolutely empty except for two desks and a chair. There wasn't even a filing cabinet.

It turned out my job was everything from answering the phone to advertising. I organized the office, and learned about what the company did. By March I was getting calls about tours. That was more my cup of tea.

I organized tours. I booked rooms. I helped people set up wonderful vacations on the island. I did all this for free.

The company never paid me anything until they got a federal graduate employment grant. The government paid sixty percent of my wages and the company had to put in forty percent. I was paid \$7.50 an hour. It wasn't very much when you think I was running everything.

In the summer I took people on tours of the city. I loved that. As long as I wasn't gone more than half the day it was okay. I had to be there to answer the phone and take care of the business. I'd rent a van and drive it. If it was a large group of people I'd hire a city bus for a few hours.

My favorite tour was when all the choirs were here for the big music festival. An Italian men's choir called me up in the morning. They wanted to see the city that afternoon. I only had half a day to arrange a tour for fifty of them. So I booked a bus and a driver. And off we went.

They wanted to see the Cabot statue. Then they said, "Take us where you want." We did that tour on the fly. That's part of being a tour guide. You've got to be creative on the spur of the moment.

We went to Cape Spear. We went to Signal Hill. It was a gray day. But they wanted to enjoy themselves. They were ready to have a good time. When we got up to Cape Spear they brought out bottles of wine and sat around on the picnic tables. Then they said to me, it's your turn to sit down and relax. And the whole choir sang to me — in Italian. It was wonderful.

The hardest tours are the ones where you've got a big bus load of people, because it's really hard to please everyone. That's part of my job. You have to be an ambassador for the province. A lot of people come here for only a day or two and then they're off somewhere else. If they come and do just that one tour, that's their impression of the whole province. There's an awful lot to see and often the weather isn't the greatest. So you really do try to please them as best you can.

But sometimes you can't. Sometimes you get some really miserable people. They've seen every other place. They come here with all these expectations of what to see and the service they're going to get. And it's not what they want at all.

A lot of these people are used to staying in big, fancy hotels, and that's a problem. When they come to some of the smaller communities there is no big, posh hotel. And there can't be one. There are beautiful hospitality homes and heritage inns run by amazing people. But that's not what they want. They want a private room with a washroom and room service. For one night they may just have to share a room with a friend. They don't want to do that.

I try to book people into places where I know the owners will handle this well. But sometimes there's nothing they can do. In some places there is just an old motel. In other places there are really nice inns. But they're run down or they have tacky seventies wallpaper. This offends some tourists. There's not much you can do about that either.

Every once in a while I get a postcard from someone I thought had a terrible time. They write to say they really enjoyed themselves. So you never really know. Some people just like to complain.

Most tourists are interested in the culture here and the scenery. They really enjoy the people they meet. They say everyone is so helpful here. And they're not afraid to look people in the eye and ask a question. You can't imagine how much that means to people who come here from New York and places like that.

If you want to be a tour guide, you've got to handle surprises. There was one tour I did where the bus broke down between St. John's and St. Mary's. These people were here for a conference. They had meetings they had to be back for.

They were getting a little nervous being stranded in a tiny community. But it turned out not too bad — more nerve wracking for me. One of the old guys in the community just happened to have an old van. And he just happened to have a bus driver's license. He also owned a little restaurant. So the tourists had their lunch while he got ready to go. This old man drove us to the bird sanctuary and then he drove us to St. John's.

They were from Ontario, so they couldn't understand a word the man said to them. The old man thought there must be something wrong with them. But they really got a good dose of Newfoundland hospitality that day.

Everybody who does tours hears a lot of weird things. Like the time a tourist asked if the icebergs at Cape Spear were put there just for tourists to see. Or the tourists from the States who asked when the next whale show was going to start at Cape Spear. They just couldn't believe that these were real whales that weren't in a pen. They thought there was a big enclosure out there under the sea. They thought the whales were trained to perform whenever they were told to. You have to try to be polite. It's part of your job not to make fun of the tourists.

I worked in that job for two years. In the summer and fall I never took lunch breaks or coffee breaks. I worked all kinds of overtime without getting paid for it. I never took any holidays. They laid me off at the end of the Cabot 500 summer — the day the grant ran out. Now I'm on EI.

The government is always talking about tourism as if it's going to replace the fishery or save us all or something. But it's not the be all and end all. Only a limited number of tourists will come here. And really, most tourism jobs are very seasonal.

Lots of people are taking tourism training. Well, I suppose it's the same as anything. The university pumps out three hundred teachers per term and there are not enough jobs for them, either.

I liked my job, but the pay was pretty lousy. I won't say that they took advantage of me, exactly. But I'm really not interested in a minimum wage job anymore. I think I'm past that. With my training and my skills and experience I think I deserve to make a decent living. I'm looking around now for something better. Maybe at one of the tourist chalets.

Conclusion

Karen is back working for the tour company — this time for minimum wage. The company called her back to work. She had to go or lose her EI. The job is not even in the tourism side of the company. Karen is doing bookkeeping in the accounting department.

Sources:

1. Interview with Marg, February, 1998.
2. Tape recorded interview with Karen, March 1988.
3. Telephone interview with Newfoundland department of labour official, April 1988.

Going into Service: Questions for Discussion

Introduction

1. What kind of jobs could you get in the service industry in the 1920s and 1930s?
2. Milley Johnson worked as a domestic near her home in Bonavista. Why does she say she was lucky?
3. How are Newfoundlanders being encouraged to work in the service industry today?

Marg: A Waitress's Story

1. What does Marg really want to do with her life?
2. Why doesn't she do it?
3. Why does Marg say working as a waitress is like being in a soap opera?
4. What are her customers like?
5. Marg says there is a rhythm to waitressing. Describe her job.
6. Tips are important to a waitress. Does Marg's description of who tips well and who is cheap surprise you?
7. Why is Marg worried about getting older?

Author's Note

1. Why doesn't Marg try to change her working conditions?
2. What are the working rules for waitresses?
3. Why doesn't the department of labour make sure they are followed?

Tour Guide: Karen's Story

1. What did Karen do to try and get a job as a teacher?
2. Why did she finally give up teaching?
3. Most of the other students in Karen's tourism course were on TAGS. Why did she find this frustrating? What do you think about her feelings?
4. Karen says the people in the tourism class didn't gain much. What does she mean?
5. Describe Karen's favorite tour.
6. Why does Karen say it's part of her job not to make fun of the tourists?
7. What does Karen think about the tourism industry?
8. Do you think she is right?

A Monk's Life: the Work of a Fisheries Observer

Michael Winter

Introduction

Susan and Todd work as fisheries observers. They monitor, on behalf of the Canadian government, what trawlers are catching in their nets. The observers live on board with the fishermen, and yet they are not part of the crew. This essay describes the work Susan and Todd do, and the feelings they have about this strange life at sea.

Word List

Grenadier: A deep sea fish with a long tapering body and a pointed tail.

Meal: Fish that has been ground to a powder.

Mess: A place to go and eat, a canteen.

Baguette: A long loaf of bread.

Nostalgia: Remembering the past and feeling both pain and love.

Susan: Strange Fish

Susan is a fisheries observer. She has to watch how much fish a trawler catches. She lives on board with the fishermen. She notes where the boat fishes, and what kind of fish it hauls up.

Susan says it's hard to watch other people working hard when you are not. She feels like she sticks out. She finds herself sometimes deciding to gut fish alongside the fishermen.

In the deep sea fishery, boats fish in waters a thousand metres deep. At this depth, a net can haul in a lot of fish you've never seen before. The grenadier fishery is like this.

"I love jumping into the hold," Susan says. The hold is the place on deck where they dump the net full of fish. "I like to poke through the catch looking for odd fish. Sometimes we catch anglerfish."



Credit: Jason Byrne.

Anglerfish have a strange glob of flesh that hangs out in front of the mouth. The glob is a fishing lure: the anglerfish uses it to attract smaller fish. The anglerfish eats these small fish.

"A lot of the fish from down that deep are all black. I have a large book which identifies fish. This is a guaranteed conversation starter — to be on deck with a strange fish in one hand and the book in the other."

Home Away From Home

Factory freezer trawlers are huge. You can get lost on one. Susan loves to take the winding path down to the fish meal plant. The plant is at the far end of a long chain of machinery. There is a man there filling one bag after another with warm, sweet-smelling fish meal.

"My favourite trips are on the Russian boats," Susan says. "They are large boats with all kinds of people on them. They are at sea for as long as six months at a time. So, they make efforts to create a home on board."

Some people have plants in their cabins. One captain has a radish garden on the roof of his cabin. The captain grows tomatoes in his cabin. Another captain keeps a little dog. There are chess tournaments, and a game like backgammon is played a lot. They make back scrubbers out of onion bags.

One time near New Years, a woman with a hand-crank sewing machine made costumes. The band started practising in early December. Moonshine was brewing in nooks and crannies. At midnight, at the end of the year, the whole ship lit up with festivities.

"They were always drinking tea. They call it 'chay'. You hear that word constantly. The only other word heard as often is "ribka", which means fish."

There are always some musical instruments on the Russian boats.

"I was in a cabin one day. People were packed in like sardines. We were drinking tea, and watching costumes being made for New Year's. Then someone brought in a guitar. The guitar was passed around the room and everyone produced a song on it. Until it came to me."

A Sinking Feeling

Steaming through pack ice is one of the most beautiful times. But the sound of the ice hitting the bow is nerve-wracking. That's what Susan loves about the experience: it's beautiful and sinister at the same time.

"We were among a group of vessels that responded to a shrimp boat that was sinking from an ice puncture. It was a gorgeous day. When we arrived at the scene the nine crew members had been taken aboard another boat. There were two other shrimp boats along with our boat. We floated there and watched a huge whirlpool of water where the sinking ship had been only moments before."

They watch odds and ends, like loose lifejackets, begin to pop up on the surface. Susan found this disturbing to see.

"It could have been us," she says.

Zhenya's Story

Aboard one Russia boat there was a male steward named Zhenya. Zhenya waited on the tables in the mess where Susan ate. There were two messes: one was for the bulk of the crew and the other was an officers' mess. This is where the officers and the observer ate. The officers' mess was nicer. The table had a white cloth on it, the room was smaller and more intimate. There was a piano in the officers' mess.



Credit: Jason Byrne.

"Breakfast was served at 5 a.m.," says Susan, "so I always ate later on by myself. I enjoyed eating alone. I'd take my Russian language book to breakfast with me and study while I sipped my tea."

This man, Zhenya, was odd looking: six feet tall, young, with long black hair in a ponytail. At the time, long hair on a man was uncommon. Zhenya had a great sense of humour. He used to spontaneously tell Susan funny stories.

"One story was about when Zhenya was a small boy. In the woods and fields near where he lived there were a lot of dead bodies. These were corpses of soldiers from the war. Zhenya collected buttons off the skeletons. He had a great collection of buttons which his mother eventually threw out. This upset him a lot."

The kids, Thenya told her, used the skulls as footballs.

This image, for Susan, stuck in her mind. Zhenya's childhood had been so different from her own.

Thenya said some money was provided to bury the corpses — but only the Russian skeletons were buried.

Bread and Butter for Breakfast

Susan says, "On a Russian boat, bread is a staple food. Bread with butter."

This is significant because butter was only served at breakfast and teatime and not at other meals. The crew used the butter like cheese, cutting off huge slabs of it.

"The longer I spent on Russian boats," Susan says, "the more butter I put on my bread. Usually, bread and butter and tea was all I ate."

The bread was a kind of rye baked on board the vessel. The dough was mixed by a huge industrial dough mixer that was probably working overtime.

There was no coffee served in the officers' mess on Russian boats. Coffee was rare. Once in a while there was some sweet bread made as a treat.

"I don't remember anything else," Susan says, "but that seems kind of odd. It's possible I just don't remember other food because I only ate the bread and butter. Sometimes there was a hard white cheese."

I ask Susan to compare the food on the different boats. "Well," she says, "the Newfoundland boats are the best. You get everything: eggs, bacon, cereal, milk, toast with jam, tea and coffee. On a French dragger they serve baguettes with butter. Coffee was served once a week with a fresh croissant."

She remembers her Russian boat getting fresh supplies. All the meat was either wieners or liver.

"Maybe that's why I've forgotten the food."

Todd: A Refugee from society

Todd says a life at sea is an experience many people would not want to have. Todd recently met a man who lived his whole life on the boats. The man was living out in Vancouver and had spent much of his time in Asia. Now he was injured. He went to see a counsellor at Workmen's Compensation. The counsellor wanted this man to do something else after his injury. The man said, "As a seaman, I belong to a special class of people. There are only 15,000 of us in all of Canada. I am very proud of a profession that admits only so few to its ranks."

That's a different take on the life of a seaman, Todd says. Many different types of people become fisheries observers, but lots of them can be seen as refugees from society. They are trying to get away from ordinary life.

A Monk's Life

Todd says, "It's like living a monk's life. There's a purity of living with the elements."

This purity attracts a certain character. For Todd, a lot of images come to mind. He thinks of the 19th century whaling boats out of New England that voyaged for two or three years at a time. Scientists spent years on vessels, discovering new species of life. Captain Bob Bartlett, Newfoundland's greatest sea captain, chose not to marry. What did these people see in the sea life? Why did they prefer it over living on land? These are questions Todd likes to think about.

He thinks it's no wonder that seamen themselves describe their lives as a "prison with dignity," or their situation as a "ship of fools."

Todd, when I ask him about his time on the water, is not sure if he wants to remember.

"It's a bit like those who have spent time in a war," he says. "Now they have this life that seems normal, but they always carry around with them this other experience."

I tell Todd about the story of Zhenya. He thinks the experience of observing is a bit like this Zhenya's childhood. "It's like living a previous life," Todd says. "Now it's full of fuzzy and shadowy pictures, feelings, and sometimes a little nostalgia."



Credit: Jason Byrne.

Todd shakes his head and smiles. He doesn't want to remember the work.

A Monk's Life: Questions for Discussion

1. What does Susan do when she jumps into the hold?
2. What are some of the things the seamen do to make their ship a "home away from home?"
3. Why was Susan disturbed by the whirlpool left from the sinking ship?
4. How was Thenya's childhood different from Susan's?
5. What kind of food did Susan eat on board the Russian boats?
6. Why is Todd proud to be a fisheries observer?
7. Tom isn't sure he wants to remember his time as a fisheries observer. Why do you think this is?
8. Do you think the life of a fisheries observer is a lonely one?

Sources:

Todd and Susan are based on two fisheries observers I interviewed by electronic mail. Both wished to remain anonymous, and so I changed their names. Todd and Susan now have jobs on dry land.

Sharon's Story

Kathryn Welbourn

Introduction

Everyone is talking about computers and technology. And if you believe what everyone — colleges, government and the media — is saying you'll run right out and take a general computer course. Then your future will be set. Then you'll be able to get a good job. Then you can make big money. Working with computers is supposed to be the next big way to find excellent jobs.

But maybe it's not that simple. Maybe, it's just as important to find out what you like to do and what you are good at.

Sharon is at the top of the computer technology world. She is on what is called the cutting edge of technology. That means she knows how to use all the latest computer stuff. Sharon likes working with computers. But she only uses computers because they help her do the kind of work she really loves. Sharon makes three-D models of ships on computers. She makes training videos that let people practice steering ships into ports and through dangers, all on computers. Her models and videos are like very, very, detailed and realistic video games. She is probably one of ten or twenty people in North America who know how to do this.

It was not easy for Sharon to get the training she needed to do this kind of work. It was not easy for her to find the job she has now. I interviewed Sharon and her husband at a restaurant in St. John's. This is her story.

Pregnant Women Should Go Home

Sharon has always been good at math and science. In high school she got A's in these subjects. After high school, she took some university courses in math because she thought she might want to be an economics teacher. She never finished those courses. Sharon got married and had two children instead. Her husband didn't work. So she found a job as a bartender at a private club. She liked this job. It was not very busy. She made good money in tips. It helped her support her two children. She really needed the job after she divorced her husband. He never paid any child support.

When she was twenty-four, Sharon married another man. She got pregnant right away. That's when she decided it was time to retrain. Sharon had been out of school for five years. But she felt a mother of two — and soon to be three — children should not work behind a bar at night. She signed up for a college architecture program — a course to learn how to design buildings. She thought she would like the



program because there was a lot of math and science involved. Sharon told the school she would have to leave in the middle of the year for a few months to have her baby. The school said that would be fine.

Sharon kept working at the club five nights a week. She didn't feel like she could just go to school and expect her new husband to support her and the children. Besides, she could do some of her homework during slow times at her job. Sharon was very tired, but very excited about what she was doing.

When she was seven months pregnant Sharon was told to leave the college. They told her to come back after the baby was born. Sharon's grades were good and her assignments were always in on time. "So, I guess I didn't fit their image of a college student," she says.

When she went back to school six months later the times of all the classes had changed. With three children to look after Sharon couldn't fit into the new class times. Since she had already paid \$3,000 for one year, the school let her stay. Sharon was put in a room by herself. She was given some books about her course. If she needed help, Sharon had to search the halls for a teacher.

"I'm smart, but nobody's that smart" Sharon says. She quit the program and went back to bartending.

No One With Children Has Ever Completed This Course

One year later Sharon decided to try retraining again. This time she signed up for an architectural engineering technology course— a course to design buildings plumbing systems, heating systems and other industrial things. Part of the course was about how to make 3-D models of these designs on computers. This is called CAD, or Computer Assisted Design. When she finished this program Sharon knew she could find work doing a wide range of things, from becoming a building inspector to becoming a computer design specialist.

There were not many women in the course. Sharon also knew that if she did well in her first year, she might get some special government funding for women in non-traditional trades in her second year.

Her mother looked after the children during the day. Sharon and her husband traded off looking after the children when they weren't working or Sharon wasn't studying. They were unbelievably busy.

"My husband and I met in the doorway, kissed and said goodbye," says Sharon. "It wasn't very romantic. But we did what everyone does. We just kept it all going. There was a future there somewhere down the road."

The course was really demanding. The instructors were always telling the students that only a few of them would make it to the end of the year. It was very competitive and most of the people there were younger than Sharon.



One day she had to miss a class to bartend at a wedding. She went to tell the instructor why she wouldn't be there. This is what Sharon says happened.

"He said to me, 'You have a job?' And I said, yes, I work 35 hours a week. And he said, 'You'll have to give up your job because nobody has ever completed this course with a job.' And I said, well, I can't. I have three children to feed. He just looked at me. Then he said, 'Well you don't have to worry about quitting your job then, nobody has ever completed this course with children.' I found out after that he was lying. What he meant was no women with children had ever finished. Lots of men with children had gone right through. Most of them had wives at home watching the kids." Sharon did finish the year. In fact, she won a scholarship.

Babysitting and Other Jobs

In the last year of the course, Sharon got pregnant again. She became ill and her doctor said she would have to stay home until the baby was born. Sharon knew it would be hard to get back into the course. She knew it would be even harder to finish it while nursing a new baby. But she did what the doctor said and hoped for the best. This is what she says about leaving the school.

"Well, I knew I'd get back sooner or later. I got my beautiful baby girl safe and healthy by staying home. I was young. I had time to do what I wanted later."

After Sharon had the baby, she realized she couldn't work full time, raise four children and go to school. She took a job looking after four other children. She cooked and cleaned and put all the babies into her car everyday when it was time to pick up her own children from school. The woman she was working for was going to school. When she finished her course, Sharon looked for another job.

She found one working for the city. She was helping to design ramps for people in wheelchairs. While she was working at this job, she applied for another job she saw in the paper. The job was for a junior architectural draftsman. It offered on-the-job training. Sharon was surprised when she got the job.

Her new boss had hired a woman so he could get Job Bridges funding. This is a government program which pays sixty percent of the wages if you hire a woman to do work usually done by a man. It's supposed to help women get involved in technology work.

Sharon's boss made a mistake. He applied for the money after he hired Sharon. You are supposed to apply for the funding first. He didn't get it. So he hired a young man and laid

Sharon off two weeks later. Sharon's old job had been filled. Her husband had just been laid off. They had just bought a little house — their first house and a second-hand car. This is what Sharon says about the rest of that year.

"We survived the same way we always have. We got in debt, big debt. We had to declare bankruptcy eventually. We had a hard time. You try to feed four children on Unemployment Insurance."

Sharon's Husband Can't Take Anymore

At this point in the interview, Sharon's husband puts his head in his hands.

"I don't want to hear any more of this," he says. "I don't want to relive this again. It makes me so angry, so depressed. There are not many people who have the guts Sharon has. Most people would have given up at that point."

Sharon's husband leaves the interview. Sharon's story has too many bitter memories for him.

Sharon laughs. She keeps on telling her story.

Success At Last

Sharon's husband got a job. Sharon got back into her course. Her mother boked after the children. The instructor who told Sharon she couldn't do it was still at the college. But when Sharon went back the college had changed. The instructors were more supportive of women. They paid attention to what female students needed to do well in their courses. For example, many men know basic things about construction because they helped their fathers do repairs at home. Before, the instructors didn't teach those basic skills because most of the students were men. That made it hard for Sharon. Her father had never taught her anything about building or house repairs. She had no way of finding out those things. Now the school explained everything to make sure women like Sharon would be able to understand the work. Sharon graduated top in her class.



She got a job right out of school making 3-D models on computers for people who design houses. She learned a lot. But the job was in the basement of her boss's house. Her boss expected her to do things Sharon didn't want to do. She had to pick up her boss's dry cleaning and drive her boss's children back and forth to school. Her boss treated her like a skilled employee, but also like a housekeeper. Sharon worked there for a year. Then her boss laid her off.

That's when Sharon got her lucky break. She applied for and got the job she has now. The perfect job for her. She loves making models of ships. She loves the challenge of creating

training videos. Sharon is now at the top of her field. She makes good money. She understands and uses all the newest computer design technology. It was a long way to go, but here she is, just where she wants to be.

The Cutting Edge

Sharon should be able to relax now. But the computer technology world doesn't let you feel safe. Sharon has to keep retraining so she keeps up with the latest computer programs and technology. She travels to Norway for training. She travels to British Columbia for training. She has to make sure she keeps her place as one of only a few people who know how to use the newest technology.

Recently Sharon was told she would have to move to the United States if she wants to keep her job. Computers and the internet and technology are supposed to mean you can work anywhere for anyone. But they don't mean that unless your boss wants them to. Sharon's boss wants to move to the States and he wants his staff to move with him. Sharon doesn't know what to do.

She probably won't move. She may start up her own business or look for another job. She should be able to find one. But it may not be using computers. Sharon may go to work in construction. She could become a buildings inspector. If all else fails, there's always bartending.

Sources:

Taped interview with Sharon and her husband, April 1998.

Sharon's Story: Questions for Discussion

Introduction

1. The author of this essay wonders if it's important to find out what you like to do and what you're good at before deciding what kind of training courses to take. What do you think?
2. What kind of work does Sharon do?
3. Why does she use computers?

Pregnant Women Should Go Home

1. Why did Sharon decide to go back to school?
2. Why do you think the college told Sharon to stay home until her baby was born?
3. What do you think about their decision?
4. Why did Sharon finally quit the course?

No One With Children Has Ever Completed This Course

1. What is CAD?
2. What do you think about Sharon's instructors remarks to her when she had to miss a class to work?
3. Why does Sharon say he was lying?

Babysitting and Other Jobs

1. Why did Sharon decide not to go back to school?
2. Why did Sharon get laid off from her new job?

Sharon's Husband Can't Take Anymore

1. Why did Sharon's husband leave the interview?
2. Are you surprised at his reaction?

Success At Last

1. How had the college changed?
2. Describe Sharon's job after she graduated.
3. Why does Sharon love her new job?

The Cutting Edge

1. What is the cutting edge?
2. Why can't Sharon relax?
3. It took a long time to get to where she is. But she has a large family and other responsibilities in Newfoundland. What would you do if you were Sharon?

I Call The Woods “The Warehouse”

Michael Winter

Word List

Watershed: An area of land that contains the brooks and rivers that feed into a town’s water supply.

Culvert: A piece of pipe used in drains.

Lease: A loan of land or property for money.

Hangashore: A person who doesn’t like being on the water.

Terrain: Land, the surface of the earth.

Concrete: Solid.

Motto: A saying that sums up how one looks at life.

Paunch: To gut an animal.

Studious: Occupied with learning.

Contradiction: Two things held to be true, yet they seem to oppose each other.

Phonse Tucker

Phonse Tucker lives in Mount Moriah, on the west coast of Newfoundland. He is married to Maisie and they have two children. Phonse's father lives next door in a new bungalow built by Phonse.



The warehouse.

Phonse Tucker is 52. He doesn't have steady work. His work changes with the seasons. In the fall Phonse loads barrels of herring on board Russian trawlers. During the winter he works in the woods. In summer he grows potatoes and sells chips, or french fries, from a mobile truck.

Phonse keeps himself busy doing many different things during the year. He enjoys this work. He feels a freedom to do what he likes, yet he worries about his own security as he gets older.

Phonse Works in the Woods

Phonse Tucker works in the woods, but he calls it the warehouse. "Because you can get everything you want in there," he says.

Phonse hunts for moose and rabbits, and he grows his own vegetables. He can get saw logs to build things and he cuts birch and fir to heat his house. "The only thing you can't get in the woods is a pension."

Phonse's father is on the old age pension now, but it's not much to live on.

"I built Pop a new house next to our old one. I built it out of wood from the warehouse."

Phonse's father wanted a house that made it easy for him to get on the roof.

"Pop thinks if you can get on the roof, you can fix anything. So, I built him a bungalow."

The Tuckers' Land

Phonse and his family live on five acres of land that the Tuckers own. The land is on the town watershed, so Phonse has to watch where he builds. "Council doesn't want anyone fooling up the water supply."

Phonse knows the value of land.

"I'll never sell it" he says. "I don't buy much and I don't sell much. One thing I will buy is a load of gravel."

Buying Gravel

Phonse needs the gravel to cross a brook that is on the land. Phonse likes to get things for free. I tell him he could get the gravel for free by sneaking it off a walking trail they're building at the park. "And break my back?" Phonse says. "Shovelling up a load of gravel? It's not worth my time, son. That's something my own son might do, but that's what I call foolhardy."

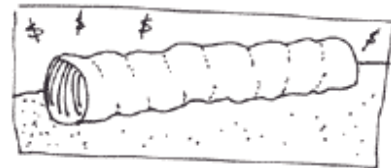
Phonse says he can go down to Lundrigans and have a young man load up his pick-up with gravel.

"I can watch him through the rear view mirror. I can hand him ten dollars and I'll get back a loonie through the window. Nine dollars for a load of gravel. Now that's getting your money's worth."

Stealing a Culvert

A culvert is a different matter. Phonse needs a culvert to put down in the brook. In spring the brook is going to swell, so he needs a 24-inch diameter pipe.

"A pipe like that will cost \$100 down at Chester Dawe's. I've priced them. So where they're widening the road over at Deer Lake there is a lot of culvert. I'll get my son to come with me on Labour Day weekend to pick that up. I'll take the tailgate off so it's easier to load on. Culvert is just lying there at the side of the woods. A hundred dollar bill."



A hundred dollare bill.

Cutting Wood

Phonse's five acres are on a slope and there are trees there that are as old as the land.

"The pulp mill couldn't get in there because it's too steep," he says. "You'd have to be crazy to try it on skidoo. Well, call me crazy."

Phonse's neighbour complained that Phonse was leaving tops in the woods. "Tops" are the tops of trees. You're supposed to take out any wood that is more than three inches across the stump.

Phonse said to his neighbour, "You got a problem with my tops?" and the neighbour only shrugged his shoulders. Phonse's tops were more like five and six inches across. "There's not much lumber in a five inch saw log. It's not worth it to me to drag it out."



Cutting wood.

Pulp Mills

Phonse has about 3000 board feet of lumber drying in his driveway. This is seasoned lumber. He's had it stacked there so the wood can air out.

"You don't find hardwood in the woods now," he says. "It's all been junked up for stoves. You've got to go in to the centre of the island to get good birch."

The pulp mills only plant spruce, if they plant at all. "To be honest," Phonse says, "in all my years I've never seen anyone planting trees. The mill hates to see a stick of birch growing on their hills. And that's how they look at it too, their hills. All they want growing there is spruce, spruce, spruce."

Phonse found out the pulp mills only get leases on the land, but they act as if they own it. "But the people own it," he says. "We do. You and me."

Phonse knows a lot about how pulp mills work. When he was a boy, his father brought him into the woods.

Phonse with his Father

As a boy, Phonse learned about horses and hauling wood.

"I learned it all from scratch up. They were terrific animals. So I worked in the woods from a young age, hauling wood to Deer Lake."

They would haul the logs to the lake and roll them in. A tug collected the logs in booms and towed them down to the head of the Humber River. Phonse's father took care of him, and now Phonse is taking care of his father.

"They don't have tug boats on the lakes any more. They have the Deer Lake tug working in St. John's harbour now I hear. These days, they load the logs onto flatbed trucks, and use the roads."

A Reasonable Amount

Back when Phonse's father worked, there was only so much wood you could haul out in a day.

"It seemed like we always sawed less than what could grow back. It seemed like a reasonable amount. You'd turn around and the trees would be springing up behind you. You never noticed the difference and the hills seemed to go on forever."

As soon as the power saws came in, all that changed. "It was shocking what you could knock down in a day. And that's when I got out of it. I was sick of it."

Hangashore

Phonse never went out on the water. "I was a hangashore," he says. "My cousin drove me out to Woods Island once, and I was sick as a puppy. I never understood the attraction to hauling fish. And I might be a lunatic in ways, but to be out on the water and not know how to swim, that's what I call foolish."

Phonse loves eating fish, though. He loves a bit of salt fish in the morning. And a herring is good too. He works loading up the Russian boats in fall.

"That will tear your back up. Barrels of herring all day long. You lose your grip. That's the only work I found hard. My fingers turned solid from the brine."

Phonse's Chip Truck

Phonse's first work was on the land and he stuck to the land. He has a thousand pounds of potatoes seeded now. That will do his chip truck.

"I've got the gear now! I sell french fries from my truck. The stove is powered by propane. I dig up a couple of buckets of potatoes in the morning and wash them. Some have the scab, or clubroot. I cut off the scab and I boil up the fat and right now I'm parked on the lot to Employment and Immigration. They love the fries. I tell them, I dug up those spuds this morning, from up on Tucker's Hill. And my name is Phonse Tucker. Well they always come back for the chips. That potato there hasn't been out of the ground an hour. And malt vinegar, they tell me it's addictive."

Next year he'd like to serve hamburgers. Phonse wants to get ground beef through his cousin in the Codroy Valley. He'd like to use moose, but then you're dealing with the Health Department.

Phonse's Cabin

Phonse used to take the train into the Gaff Topsails in summer. He'd pick berries and shoot grouse and get a moose. "I can tell you exactly where there's a moose now on the Yellow Marsh. I could lead you right to him."

Phonse has a cabin in there and, now that the train is gone, he walks in. "You can't miss my cabin. It's shingled," he says, "in real estate signs. Finest kind of roof."

You can see, right across the barrens, this blaze of orange and blue "For Sale" signs.

A lot of people go in to the Gaff now on all terrain vehicles. Phonse prefers to walk. That's what his father did before the train and that's what he'll do now. Phonse has no time for the trikes.

"What I wouldn't mind getting is a pony," he says. "Though I'd have to grow hay then. But yes, next year it might be a pony, a brown one. My wife would like that."

Phonse's Children

Phonse's kids have no time for any of this. They're off to college and working fancy jobs and they won't eat anything their father hauls out of the ground. He'll admit this upsets him.

"They've got this much interest in any of it. I took Jason out moose hunting last fall and he was almost sick. We shot a bull in Lady Slipper Road. It was a good size bull but it had fallen in alders. When they get into alders it's hard to him haul out. But I paunched him and Jason started to go white. I had a hoof tied to a stump and I was working the blade along the stomach. The blood began to leak over the ribcage. Well, I told Jason to go back to the truck and I'd call for him when I needed him. I never saw such a weak stomach. I don't think he ate a piece of meat again. Him or his sister."

Phonse told his kids that, because they grew up here, they each have the right to cut down 6000 board feet of lumber.

"All they have to do is go down to City Hall and buy a permit. The permit costs \$21 and they can start cutting. That's a lot of wood for next to free. But you'd never see them do that. It's sad. My daughter she pinches up her nose at that kind of work. There's nothing concrete about my kids."

Phonse's only hope is that they're only young yet. "They're hardly twenty. So I figure they might change their minds."

You Don't Need Much Money

Phonse still likes to shoot ducks down by the river. It's part of city property now, but the Tuckers have been hunting down at the river for centuries. His freezer is full of duck and turre and moose and caplin and caribou and rabbit.

If you don't buy anything you don't need much money, that's Phonse's motto. So he's getting along all right. He built a bungalow for his father for about \$800. "I had to pay a little for the windows and the wiring. Cement. The rest I traded for or found in the warehouse. My wife, it's her salary what gets us through."

Phonse's Wife, Maisie

If it wasn't for his wife's job, Phonse isn't sure if he could have carried on the way he has. Especially now that they're getting older.

"The wife has a pension. But I don't. I don't want to be a burden to her, but you never know."

Phonse's wife, Maisie, is a nurse. She always wanted to be a nurse, ever since she was a girl. She knew Phonse in school. She found him funny. She says Phonse could always tell a story.

When Maisie Met Phonse

Maisie comes from a family that doesn't talk much. She met Phonse at a dance and Phonse asked her if she liked Johnny Cash. Maisie said she thought Johnny Cash was in jail. Phonse said that wasn't correct. He said Johnny played in a jail but he didn't go to jail, at least not for killing anyone. So they danced to Johnny Cash. Phonse said he had a dog that could pull a load of wood over a frozen lake. Maisie could only imagine this, but when she thought of it, she liked it.

Maisie says Phonse knows all about his family and hers too.

"He gets into all that, who was your father's father. Your mother is a descendent of such and such. Phonse is a very studious man, actually, even though you never see him read a book. He studies by talking to people. He's got the whole history of this place in his head."

Phonse will tell Maisie that her great-grandfather was the man who died frozen in the mast of a schooner off St. Pierre in 1893.

When Phonse tells her that kind of fact, you can see why she loves him.

Phonse's Future

Phonse plans to build a small house right at the end of his five acres. It's at the crest of Tucker's Hill. From it you can look out over the Bay of Islands.

"That's why I want to cross that brook. Why would I want to go to Woods Island when I can see it out my picture window?"

When he builds the new house he'll be able to shoot a moose out the back door and set rabbit slips and cut the finest kind of wood. He'll grow a ton of potatoes and cabbage and turnip. He'll live right in the middle of his work.

"I've got a few other plans in my coat pocket too," he says. "Yes sir, I might be looking forward to that day, but I'm enjoying today too."

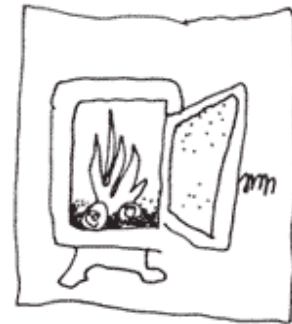
Phonse will heat the new house with wood. Phonse loves to open the door on the Woodchief. "I like to stare at the flame. There's something alive about a fire. A fire works hard to make heat for you, it's alive and happy. A fire doesn't get tired of work."

I Call The Woods “The Warehouse”: Questions for Discussion

1. What does Phonse call the woods? Why does he call it this?
2. Name some of the things Phonse does.
3. Phonse doesn't mind stealing a culvert, but he'll pay for gravel. Discuss this.
4. What does Phonse think of pulp mills?
5. According to Phonse, who owns the land?
6. How does Phonse treat the woods himself? Is there some contradiction here?
7. What is Phonse's motto?
8. Discuss how Phonse's relationship with the land differs from that of his children?
9. What does Maisie love about Phonse?
10. What do you think Phonse means when he says a fire doesn't get tired of work?

Sources

“Phonse Tucker” is based on several people I know who live in and around Corner Brook. Because Phonse admits to stealing culverts and shooting ducks on city property, I had to change his name. The original Phonse did operate a chip truck, and does have a cabin in the Gaff. I know another man who loads herring aboard Russian trawlers. The details about paunching the moose are derived from my own experience. Phonse's wife, Maisie, is based on a woman I interviewed in St. John's.



A fire doesn't get tired of work...

Angels, Bells and Snakes: The Old Craft of Plastering

Kathleen Winter

If a man love the labor of any trade,
apart from any questions of success or fame,
the gods have called him.
Robert Louis Stevenson



The old plaster design at the Anna Templeton Building.
The egg shape in the centre and the snakes around it
all mean something. John Furlong explains
what they mean in the essay.

Have you ever noticed how walls in some old buildings are decorated with plaster borders that look like icing on a wedding cake?

Some borders are plain. Others have details like angels, bells and snakes. Old churches, court houses and museums have this kind of plaster work. Some old houses have it too. This work is called ornamental plastering.

I have a nine-year-old girl called Esther. Last Easter she and I went to a craft sale in one of these old buildings. It was the Anna Templeton textile studies school in downtown St. John's. The building was a bank before the school bought it. At the craft sale you could go upstairs and have soup and rolls and tea. In this tea room all the walls had ornamental plaster.

There were borders of plaster apples, curved snakes, and ovals. We could feel that someone had cared about making the room lovely. Sitting in the room felt good. We felt the way you feel when something old and lovely surrounds you, like beautiful violin music, or old lace.

A lot of plaster work in old buildings needs repair. Plastering is an old craft. Some say it is dying out. But this plaster had been restored like new. My husband told me he knew the

man who had restored it. His name is John Furlong. He lives in Bay Bulls. We went to visit him, to interview him about his work.

John had decorated the outside of his house with stucco. It had swirls and grooves in it. He had made the foundation with stones set in cement. Inside, stucco on the ceilings made little points look meringue. John had decorated his daughter's bedroom with a big plaster butterfly. On the living room wall hung part of the border of apples, snakes and ovals, from the textile school. All through John's home you could see different forms of his craft. You could tell he loved his work.

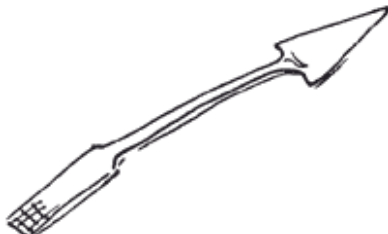
Inside the house, John told me how his work is part of an ancient tradition found all over the world. The mud buildings of Mexico are a form of the craft. The ancient Egyptians made mirrors by rubbing goats' milk on plaster until it became polished and shiny. Even when men used mud and colors to decorate the inside walls of their caves, they were using a Gouging trowel "Duckbill trowel." form of plastering.



Gouging trowel "Duckbill trowel."

John said that when he learned the trade in the early 1960's, a good plaster craftsman knew how to do a lot of different things, both fancy and plain. At that time most indoor walls and ceilings were made by applying layers of plaster over thin strips of wood called laths. That was called hardwall plastering. Today everyone uses gyproc, which is called drywall. John learned the old craft just before drywall started to replace it.

When John learned the craft of plastering, older men would teach young men how to do the craft. The younger men were called apprentices, and had to do everything the older men said. The teaching lasted years. A plastering apprenticeship usually lasted four years. John finished in three. He told me how it was.



Trowel and square "small tool."

He said his uncle Jack was a plasterer. John worked for him after school and in the summers. He mixed plaster and built scaffolds. He carried a home-made tool called a hod. The hod was a three-sided box with a stick for carrying mortar. When John finished school his uncle gave him a trowel and got him a job. Not many young men were learning the trade any more. Here is how John remembers those times:

"I was one of the first apprentices to come along in 20 years. When I was learning my trade, you did not back answer the old fellows. Physically you'd get a duff right up the arse. But every time I turned around one of the veterans would show me something. Alex Martin, Herb Long, George Vaters, Ken White, Frank Corbett, Remy Boudreau, Norman Osborne. All those people I learned different things from."

"... It's all a matter of caring about what you're doing. You do 99 good jobs and no-one knows it. You do one bad job and everyone knows it."

The old craftsman taught how to do every aspect of the trade, from plain work to fancy work. "I could put two wheelbarrows full of plaster on a ceiling in five minutes," he remembered. They also taught him how to cast the flowers, bells and angels in old buildings. John smiled. "The ornamental part of the work has a lot of trade secrets."

When John restored the Anna Templeton building in 1991, he passed some of those secrets on to younger men. The work was done as part of a course he taught to students on TAGS. He showed them how to repair the rooms exactly the way they were made 100 years ago.

They had to beat all the old plaster off the walls and ceilings with shovels. They built a chute through the staircase and lowered the old plaster in five gallon buckets, then put it in a dumpster.

But first they had to study the old plaster carefully, so they could make the new plaster exactly like it. John hired a photographer to take pictures of each part of the antique work. He took special care to document the way sections fit together. He made sketches of the old work, showing the old pattern, angles, curves and measurements.



Leaf and square (French term.)
We call it a "small tool."

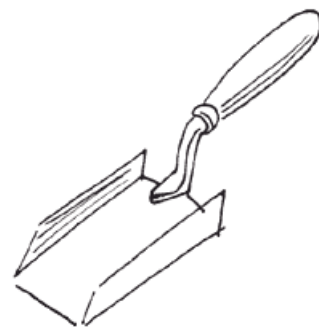
For the fancy work, sketches and photographs were not enough. He had to carefully fully take down sections of the old plaster so he could make new molds to form reproductions of them. These were fragile. They were covered in many coats of paint, so some of the details were lost. He had to uncover them Leaf and square (French term.) We call it a "small tool." again. This is what he told me about it:

"We had to document what was there. We had to put it back realistically. I had to make molds off the old stuff. I had to find piece that was intact, take it down carefully. These are repeating patterns. You have to find the place where they join. You have to get it all."

"Then I had to take off 15 or 20 layers of paint. Just imagine these here, all the little holes, balls and snakes. You could barely see the grooves, there was so much build-up of paint. The best tool I had for that was a dentist's toothpick. I sat for days with that, scraping away the old paint."

John said the students were amazed at what had been covered up. They were even more amazed that they could reproduce it. It seemed like magic.

Once they had removed all the old paint from a piece of ornamental plaster and repaired any faults, John had to make a mold from it. Here are the steps he took.

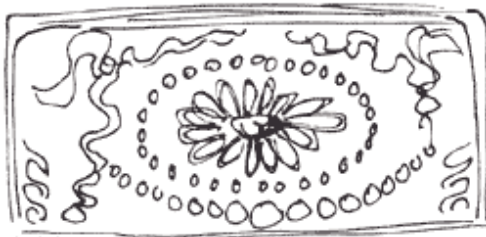


Angle trowel or twicher
"angle paddle."

1. He made a wooden box to fit the plaster, and put the plaster in it.
2. He sprayed or brushed the plaster with ordinary cooking oil.
3. He filled the box with synthetic rubber and waited for it to set. (He says the older men used plaster of Paris, and some even bronzed their casts to last for generations.)
4. When the rubber set, it had an imprint in it of the design on the old plaster. The imprint showed the design in reverse. This was the new mold.
5. To make a replica of the old plaster, he brushed the rubber mold with oil, then filled it with new plaster. When it set, he took it out. The design was reversed again back to the original one.

These were all things John had learned through years of working with older craftsmen. A few of his students caught the thrill of it. Even in this age of mass production, plastering is the same careful craft it always was. But there is not as much work for these craftsmen as there used to be.

John says this happened for several reasons. Builders started using drywall or gyproc around the mid 1970's, because it was faster and cheaper. You did not need skilled craftsmen to use it. Young men were not learning the craft, and the older men were retiring. Some builders wanted craftsmen to apply a finish coat of plaster over a drywall base. Craftsmen in charge of the plasterers' union refused. They felt they were losing work. But they lost the work anyway. Builders started using drywall for everything.



Drawing of the moulding John reproduced restoring the Anna Templeton building.

Now John says even the old plaster work in Newfoundland is disappearing because people will not spend the time and money needed to restore it. He says many government buildings were made with hardwall plaster, but today government covers up holes with gyproc. He told me, "I know places where there was one hole in the wall, and they covered the whole wall with gyproc."

Even work on the Anna Templeton building was cut short before John and his men could finish. The main floor lobby has hardwall plaster, but does not have the fancy work found on the upper floors. John told me he figured that might happen. Here is how he put it:

"They wanted me to start from the lobby and work up. I knew if I did that they'd maybe finish the top with gyproc. I said if you bring a sheet of gyproc in here, I'm out. I didn't take this on to show students a cheap shortcut."

"So I figured if I started on top and had everything completed there, they'd have to do the lobby. And they did. They hired seven or eight of my students while I was working in Bull

Arm. But they were told to get it done as quick as possible, and do away with the fine work."

John showed me his drawing of the original ceiling in the lobby. It was intricate and beautiful. "The students had the knowledge and the materials to do it," he said. Now his drawing is all that is left of it. He looked at the drawing and said, "This is the one that broke my heart."

There is more to the old craft of plastering than just making walls. A craftsman like John Furlong sees a lot of meaning in his work. When John looks at the patterns in the fancy plaster, he can tell you stories about what they mean. The plaster Esther and I saw at the craft school had stories in it. John held one of the old pieces and showed us the meaning.

The pattern started off with an egg shape. He said the egg is the beginning of life. The egg has rays coming from it, and the rays show all the different directions a life can take. There are snakes around the egg and the rays. The snakes show how life is always surrounded by evil that you have to fight. And over the whole picture is an arc of small circles. The arc shows a life cycle—its beginning, middle and end.



John Furlong with the molds he made for the Anna Templeton Building.

For a craftsman like John Furlong, the old craft of plastering is a whole life story, a story he believes is starting to die in Newfoundland now that there are cheaper ways to build the rooms we live in. He knows the new rooms are not like the old rooms. He knows something is being lost. Something crafted with care. Something that strengthens a heart instead of breaking it.

Angels, Bells and Snakes: Questions for Discussion

1. What is ornamental plastering? Have you seen it yourself? Where?
2. How was John Furlong's craft part of an old tradition found all over the world?
3. When did John Furlong learn his trade.
4. Do you think he respected the older craftsmen who taught him? Why?
5. What were some ways John and his students ensured they were restoring the building exactly as it was built 100 years ago?
6. Why do you think the work thrilled some of the students?
7. Why is the craft disappearing?
8. What old crafts do you know about, that are in danger of being lost?

Sources: Personal Interviews

John and Linda Furlong, April 1998.

Site Visits

Visit to restored rooms in the Anna Templeton Textile Studies campus of Cabot College on Duckworth Street, St. John's.

Books

Plastering, J.B. Taylor, Longman Scientific & Technical, Essex.

Under The Golden Arches

Michael Winter

Word List

Technician: A person skilled in a mechanical trade.

Primitive: Basic, simple.

Environment: The objects and circumstances that surround you every day.

Hydraulic: Operated by the movement of liquid.

Minimum: The least amount.

Inflation: When prices rise.

To groom: Prepare a person for an event.

Cashier: Person who handles money.

Trough: Long, narrow container for holding liquid.

Corral: A large shed.

Condiment: An ingredient to spice up food (mustard, for instance).

Junior Murphy

Junior Murphy works at McDonald's. He's 21. He lives at home and is going to trade school to be an "automotive technician." That's the new way of saying he wants to be a car mechanic.

Where Junior Works

"As soon as I finish my trade," Junior says, "I'm leaving home."

Junior has been flipping burgers at McDonald's for the past 15 months. He works there part-time. He works about four shifts a week. The shifts are less than four hours long.

Junior's Friend, Carl

Carl runs his own garage in the Goulds. It's cheaper there. There are no City taxes. Carl uses his garage and the yard out back. Carl's got a "widow maker" instead of a car ramp.

They call it a widow maker because if it falls on you, you'll be dead. The widow maker lifts the motor so you can change a clutch plate or work on the transmission. It's a primitive way to go about things.

"Carl is married," Junior says, "and he's only my age. I've been doing a little bit of work for him on the new cars. Carl doesn't understand the electronics."

Where Junior Would Like to Work

Junior doesn't like working in the kind of environment Carl offers. Junior wants to work in a garage that's heated, with exhaust hoses on the garage doors. If he can't get on at a Canadian Tire then he's heading south.



In Carl's garage.

"I want a garage that has hydraulic ramps. I figure I can make a go of it in Florida. At least it's warm there," he says. "At least when you drop a bolt you don't have to search around in the cold slush for it."

Junior is not about to poison himself, either. "If there are no exhaust hoses, then I won't work there."

Minimum Wage

Right now, Junior finds things a little boring at McDonald's.

"I'm one of the more expert employees now," he says.

When he was hired he made minimum wage. Then he got a few raises. At one point, he was making 40 cents an hour more than minimum wage. Then the minimum wage went up and new employees were making almost the same as him.

Junior feels he has to be careful or he'll get fired. I ask him why. He says McDonald's doesn't want you to make too much. They can hire someone new and pay that person less. So they'll use any excuse to fire you.

You Start Risking Things

"My buddy Derek got fired last month. He was fun to work with. He was there when I was first hired on. Derek showed me how to core a head of iceberg lettuce. You bang the stump of the lettuce hard on the counter. Then the core comes out nice and neat. You pop the

cored lettuce into the electric shredder and collect the shreds in a tub which we keep in a walk-in cooler."

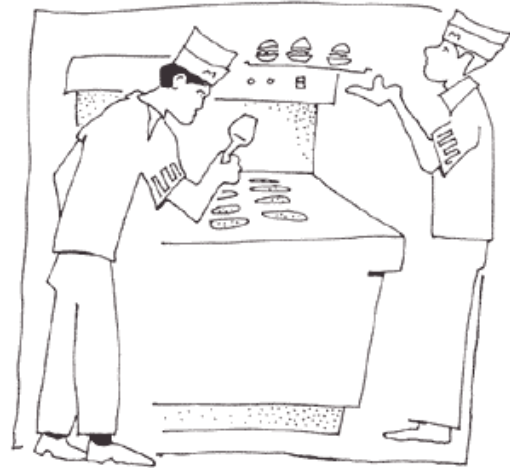
Derek was fired for stealing an ice-cream cake. "When you've been working there so long," Junior explains, "you start risking things. Just for the thrill. I'll take a hamburger into the walk-in freezer and eat it. I've swiped frozen McChicken patties and deep fried them at home. It's a game to see what you can get away with."

What Junior Likes About His Job

"I like working on the grill. I like it when the early movie gets out and we get a rush of customers. I cover the grill in patties. They're frozen patties that you have to knock apart, but I know what a dozen frozen patties feels like between my thumb and middle finger. I can feel the width as I grab them out of the small freezer."

Junior cracks them loose against the grill surface. He holds six in each hand. He lays them out on the grill from back to front. Two rows of six. You press them to the grill with a sear tool.

"A sear tool is a big aluminum disk with a knob handle. I like controlling the grill. I like turning two rows of burgers and then lifting two other rows onto buns that have been toasted and dressed with mustard, ketchup and pickle. I like sprinkling the burgers on the grill with onion." The onion comes in dry packets, which you have to add water to in the morning.



Working on the grill

"I love the pace you can get into and before you know it your three and a half hour shift is up. You've made maybe five hundred burgers. If you work four hours they have to give you a 15 minute break. So a lot of shifts are only three and a half hours long."

A few people work eight hour shifts. But these employees are being groomed for management positions. "A lot of times you're asked to stay on longer. If you agree, then they don't have to give you a break."

Look Like You're Busy

You have to keep busy. Even when it's slow business, you have to look like you're working. With both hands. One hand you're searing the meat onto the grill, the other you have to be wiping down the stainless steel around the grill.

Junior has to buy his own hairnets and shoes. The shoes get caked with grease. McDonald's supplies the uniform and paper hats.

The uniforms don't have a pocket. This is so you can't steal money. You can't bring money up on to the floor and you can't take any from the cash. You're not allowed to accept tips from the customers. You get dressed downstairs and then come up to the floor and punch your card on a timeclock. You don't get paid until you're on the floor.

The Job of Cashier

Junior doesn't want to work up front as a cashier.

"Up there you can't get away with anything. You're in front of the customers. You have to be polite."

The cashiers handle the customer's money and the cooks handle the food. Money has germs on it. The money, and the hands that touch the money, shouldn't come in contact with the food.

"Back on grill you can fool around. You can go into the walk-in freezer and scream your head off at the asshole manager, and no-one will hear you."

The walk-in has a heavy steel door you can see yourself in. When Junior sees himself, he promises he'll quit someday soon.

Lot Check

A lot check involves emptying the garbage bins outside in the parking lot.

"You can take your time as you're doing a lot check on the castle bins. You can get some fresh air."

They call garbage buckets "castle bins." You're not allowed to say the word "garbage" at McDonald's. So they call garbage buckets "castle bins," and garbage bags are "castle bin liners." This is to make everything sound clean.

Yuck Buckets

"The yuck buckets are the worst part of the job," Junior declares.

On the side of the grill is a trough. Junior scrapes the grease from the grill into this trough. When the trough is full he has to empty it.

"You get a castle bin liner (a garbage bag) and you put it into an empty milk crate. You fill up the crate with ice cubes. Then you pour out the trough of warm grease and burnt meat onto the ice."

The fat turns solid in a second or two. Junior's nose wrinkles.

"There's a stench of old meat and fat that gets right into your lungs," he says. "It's like your lungs get coated in lard."

The ice melts and you're left with a big cube of cold hard fat. Junior carries this crate to the corral outside.

Time Trial

Every few months McDonald's employees go through a time trial. The manager presses a stopwatch and he times how long it takes for a customer in drive-thru to get his order.



Under the golden arches.

"The manager stands right over you. So I'll hear the call for two Big Macs and the stopwatch starts and then when the order is handed out to the customer, the stopwatch freezes."

It's hardly ever good news. Junior is compared to a standard time that's been set in the United States. There's a "university" in the States devoted to McDonald's training.

"When I was last in the manager's office I saw that the owner had a framed Doctorate degree in Hamburgerology. I know that's hard to believe, but I saw it there, done up with a red seal and in fancy writing."

Working Breakfast

All the meat is frozen. The only thing that looks like normal food is the eggs for breakfast.

"I love working breakfast. It's different. I like doing anything different. I'll do a lot check, I'll take down the flags when we close for the night. Sometimes the 18-wheeler comes and we have to unload boxes of meat, condiments, paper napkins, soft drink cups, fat, lettuce, trays of buns, all the food for the month. I like that, unloading the truck. I like doing anything that has a bit of variety."

Hitchhiking

Junior drives up to McDonald's on his black, 650 Honda. In winter he walks up or gets a ride from his mother. He has a girlfriend. She lives in Pouch Cove. In winter Junior hitchhikes out to see her. He takes an empty red gas can with a yellow spout with him on the road.

"People pick me up and say can I take you back to that gas station? No, I say, Pouch Cove please." Junior laughs. "If you carry a gas can you'll always get a ride. They think you've run out of gas."

Junior wants to cut the gas can in two, put hinges on it, and use it to carry his lunch.

"That'd be funny," he says. "And it wouldn't be a couple of burgers."

Under the Golden Arches: Questions for Discussion

1. What is Junior studying at the trade school?
2. What does Junior like about working at McDonald's? What doesn't he like about it?
3. Why does Junior have to watch what he does at McDonald's?
4. Why are most shifts only three and a half hours long?
5. What is a 'castle bin liner', and what is a 'yuck bucket'? Why can't Junior say the word 'garbage' while he's working?
6. What does Junior think of Carl's garage?
7. Why does Junior think about moving south to work as a mechanic?
8. What attitudes does Junior have towards the work he does? What do you think about his attitudes?

Sources:

I shared a house with a young man who Junior Murphy is based on. The essay is comprised of a series of discussions I had with him while we lived together. "Junior" is a vivid story-teller and I had no problem re-creating his descriptions. I'm happy to say that Junior has quit working for McDonald's, and has found a job with a local garage. I showed this finished essay to him and he had a good laugh over it. Some of Junior's "auto mechanic" quotes are not his, but are based on my brother, who is an auto mechanic as well.