

THE HARRY VAN ARSDALE JR. CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES

# LABOR writes 2015

We Are The City



# LABOR **writes** 2015

We Are The City

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## A Word From the Dean

*Labor Writes* is a record each year of the issues and concerns that animate our students and enliven our classrooms. I haven't done a systematic study of its whole run, which stretches back eight years now. But it is my impression that the contributions have gotten more and more diverse, the voice of the students more and more decisive.

This diversity and decisiveness is in part an effect of the times. The old certainties are dissolving and upheaval is in the air. But they also are in part an effect of the program itself, which also seems to me more sure of itself, more willing to stand up for what it believes in and to put its actions where its lessons are. This willingness is infectious and shows itself in the student's work.

From the People's Climate March and Ban the Box to #Black Lives Matter and the Fight for Fifteen!, students and faculty have been engaged in helping to make our city a better place. The spirit that animates these desires is evident in the essays collected here. Please join me in thanking everyone involved.

Write on!

Michael Merrill  
Dean

## A Word From the Editor

As the Dean points out, “diversity” is the key word for this collection of student work – essays and art. As the committee read through the submissions, we were struck by the diverse voices and stories that were expressed. And diversity is what makes our city such a great place, even with all its quirks, troubles, and joys – and so our subtitle, “We Are the City.”

I want to thank the committee for all of their hard work on this issue, from reading all the submissions and making difficult decisions about what to include to editing the student writing and formatting the essays to fit the anthology. I want to thank Barrie Cline and her class for the illuminated photos they contributed. Barrie has been a tireless worker on behalf of the labor movement as expressed by our students through their art.

Finally, kudos to the students whose work appears in this edition of *Labor Writes* – their hard work in their respective classes is very evident in their writing – the art, the essays and, for the first time (and hopefully not the last), poetry. Our students have a lot to say, and it is well worth the time to listen to them.

Read on!

On behalf of the Editorial Committee  
Rebecca Fraser, Chairwoman

## Cover Art

**“LIGHT GLOBE” BY LOU ALVAREZ, KIM SPICER,  
ANGEL CORCHADO AND MICHAEL YEE**

# BEING THERE

## Brownsville and Cheryldean Reid

### KIM SPICER

Brownsville in Brooklyn, New York is where I lived for many years. I grew up in the Tilden Houses also known as the Tilden Projects. As a child, I saw a woman lying in the rain with a sheet over herself. I lived on the 10th floor and found out that she had been raped and thrown off the roof; I didn't understand what it meant or how it happened; I just knew she was dead. I knew who her boyfriend was, and I always thought he killed her. When I saw her body, there was a song playing on that rainy morning, I can't remember it now, but in the past whenever I heard it, it always made me think of that woman. That woman lying there in the rain under a sheet was not only a young beautiful woman; she was a human being. Living in Brownsville in the Tilden projects, I've seen some horrific things happen, and I'd have to say that the most memorable person was my cousin Cheryldean Reid.

When I was a teenager, my sister Toya and I were walking down a path in between two buildings in Tilden. A known drug dealer was 30 feet in front of us when someone walked up and shot him in the abdomen with a sawed-off shotgun. It's strange because I didn't see the face of the guy who did it, but I remember seeing it happen. I remember walking past as the victim bled out, walking as if I was watching children playing a game of "skelly." The very next day, another guy who was the victim's best friend or right-hand man had his head blown off in the parking lot behind my building. I recall watching it and once again I was sort of numb. It was such a long time ago, but I remember seeing brain tissue and it reminded me of spaghetti sauce, which grossed me out for a long time.

Most of these acts were in retaliation, but there is always the exception; there's always that person who tries to do good in the neighborhood, maybe a community leader or a protective parent, children at play, or someone just minding their own business who ends up paying a fatal price. There was this young girl Jennifer who I would say, "hi," to every day. She was one of those kids who had to raise her siblings, so she couldn't really play outside because she was always watching them. One day she went to answer her door, and two gunmen shot through the door, hitting her and leaving her paralyzed. They meant to shoot her brother and ended up shooting Jennifer; she eventually died, but if she hadn't been shot, she'd be alive today; her brother was eventually murdered too.

I remember seeing Cheryldean Reid's picture in her mother's apartment where I'd hang out sometimes, and I always wondered when she was coming home from the military. Standing less than five feet in height, she had the heart of a giant. Cheryl served in the United States Army and lived in Germany for years, and she is one of nine children. She had kids of her own; her first two children Brittany and Anthony were born in Würzburg, Germany. After her service in Germany, she came back to the

United States and became a corrections officer and worked on Rikers Island. While working for the corrections department, she gave birth to another daughter Christine. While being a mom to three children, she became an officer in the Self Taught Empowerment and Pride (STEP) program. It was designed as a boot camp for female inmates to show them that there is something better than running the streets. She was not only a caring mom and neighbor, but she was a caring corrections officer, which is almost unheard of.

When my sister and I played outside, we used to always look to see if Cheryl was coming downstairs for *fun time*. We weren't the only ones either; the other children in the neighborhood would too. She always played physical activities with us and must have used all her military training because we were running some serious distances even hopping around in potato sacks. Cheryl constantly educated us about finishing school and college; it would drive my sister and I mad because we were already lectured at home. As children under 10 years of age, we didn't want to hear that; it was supposed to be *fun time* and no one wanted to be lectured during *fun time*.

Eventually, I got a little older and only saw Cheryl in passing. One day I was on my way home and I ran into a scene; I saw lots of cops, police tape, and flashing lights. One of Cheryl's younger siblings, Daphney, came up to me and asked if I was okay. Nonchalantly, I said, "Yeah, I'm all right." I didn't even ask what was going on or anything; I just needed to get upstairs. When I finally managed to get upstairs to my apartment, my mom ran to me and said, "Your cousin was shot in the head." My world began to spin. I couldn't believe it. Cheryl was so amazing and nice. I can't even come up with any words to really describe the type of person she was before she got shot. I was about 16 years old when this happened. I remember feeling horrible because when Daphney asked if I was all right, I shook it off as, "Yeah, I'm okay." I've seen blood and police tape before; there wasn't a body there, and I wasn't interested because I was trying to get home. So, I felt really, really bad. The good part was that there wasn't a body on the ground.

Earlier that day, Cheryl was waiting by the curb for Brittany and Anthony to get off the school bus. She had Christine with her. Walking close by was Harold Butler, a scorned husband, who had found out that his wife was having an affair. Butler's wife was having an affair with Cheryl's neighbor who lived down the hall for many years. His name was Jaboh and he was best friends with Cheryl's youngest brother Tyrone. When Cheryl collected her children from the bus, she headed towards the building. While walking up the ramp, Tyrone and Jaboh were walking out, and that's when Butler opened fire and the *only* person hit was Cheryl. When Cheryl saw the gun, she yelled to her children, "Get down" and covered the stroller that Christine was in. Cheryl was struck in the head and assumed dead by all. She appeared lifeless, and it all happened in front of her children. People gathered to help; they took the children upstairs to their grandmother, and Cheryl was whisked away to the hospital where she surprisingly survived the shooting.

Since this was a criminal act and she was an officer, she had 24-hour security. Once she was awake and able to talk, I went to visit her and tell her how sorry I was, but I could see that she was struggling. The injury to her brain was substantial; she knew who I was, but kept calling me Toya, which everyone did, but then they'd always correct themselves. Up until then, she never made that mistake. I knew she knew what she was trying to say, but her brain wasn't 100 percent just yet. There was a great deal of damage, her brain swelled, and they had to shave her head and cut her skull. She was partially paralyzed on her left side. After five hours of surgery, the doctor didn't expect her to live, but she did. She survived somehow and the first thing that came out of her mouth was, "What happened and where are my babies?" She also said she had spoken to her dad who died when she was seven.

Today, Cheryl lives in South Carolina with her family. She can walk with the help of a cane, but her preferred method of travel is a wheelchair. Her brain is back to normal as far as I can tell, but I've never asked; our conversations are normal. She still calls me by my sister's name at first and then corrects herself as everyone does. Like I said earlier, there's always that person who tries to do good in the neighborhood like a community leader, a protective parent, children at play, someone just minding their own business who ends up paying a fatal price, but thankfully Cheryl is still a mother, cousin, sister, neighbor, and friend.

# Danger in Chalma

## OLGA JIMENEZ

In summer 1963 my parents took us on a trip to Chalma, Mexico to visit Señor de Chalma. My parents were Catholics and they wanted to bring their children and other relatives to pray and thank Señor de Chalma for the healthy life we were enjoying and material things we had in our lives. It was worth a trip to go visit Señor de Chalma at least once in our life span to receive his blessing. Chalma is the second shrine in importance for the Mexican Catholics in the Mexican Republic; everyone wanted to visit. In addition to visiting a sacred place, the trip itself is fabulous because Chalma, where Señor de Chalma is located, is a small picturesque town. There are not many towns like that in Mexico, especially one with its incredible history.

Let me give a brief history of Chalma: The place where a dangerous event took place in my life when I was a child. Chalma has been a very important place for Mexicans since Pre-Columbian times, when our population was pure Aztec Indian. Chalma about a two-hour drive of Mexico City; it's a town very well-known within the Catholic Community. Our ancestors were polytheists. They worshiped several gods; one of the gods they worshiped was *Ozteotl*, now known as Señor de Chalma. They believed in his healing power.

The Aztec Indians walked through the mountains for several days to pay a visit to *Ozteotl* to honor him with dances, wearing flowers on their heads, and carrying incense to pay him for the health favors they had received. Before the Spaniards conquered Mexico, the Aztecs and other Indian clans were free to worship their gods. But later on the different friars' arrived in Mexico and were charged to evangelize Aztecs and other tribes. Augustinian friars did not approve of Aztec beliefs. They had a difficult task to evangelize the Aztecs Indians and other clans. The Aztecs secretly continued to worship their gods.

The Augustinian friars knew they had a difficult task to achieve because the Aztecs and other Indian tribes wouldn't be easy to be convinced with the new religion. The Augustinian Friars would have to spy on the Aztecs to make sure they didn't keep worshipping their gods. The friars secretly would follow the Aztec Indians and discovered the Aztecs still worshiped *Oxtoteotl*. When the Augustinian friars realized the Aztec Indians wouldn't stop worshipping *Oxtoteotl*, they decided to do something. Once the Augustinian friars found the secret place Aztec Indians worshiped their god, the Augustinian friars decided to replace *Oxtoteotl* with a man sized Black Christ, claiming that it was a miracle.

This sanctuary continues to be very important for Mexican Catholics: When you enter into the town, you feel it's magic. It's green with lots of trees, a water spring, a river fed by the water spring, mountains, cliffs, glens, and fresh air, including abundant



vegetation. You could make a painting of that beautiful scene. In addition, the town has a kind of tree named *abuehuete* that has been there for centuries. Once you are there you can enjoy the whole scenario.

It's believed within the Mexican Catholic religion that we have to go with faith and devotion or we might be converted into stones or something bad can happen to us. We Catholics are very happy to take this journey.

This was what happened to me on my trip to Chalma. We were 10 people going to Chalma; our trip started very early in the morning to avoid traffic, and we reached Chalma early to spend as much time as possible. It was a nice day because we all went together as a family. My mother Rosario, my father Trinidad, the youngest brother Jorge, our youngest sister Norma, as well as my sister Patty, my Aunt Anselma, and my Uncle Nicolas. We were excited and planned on having a wonderful day. We made sure we had everything for our trip; we were making sure to bring everything to the van, which was blue and old fashioned, but fortunately for us in good condition for our trip. We're brought things to the van: Food, fruit, juices, sodas, vegetables, plates, silverware, napkins and glasses.

We probably were not very comfortable, but we were thinking about the fun we were about to have. While we were riding to reach Chalma, everyone was having a good time; I had a happy family. My father was driving and the rest of family in the van talked about different topics. For instance, they told jokes, anecdotes and legends. Especially my Aunt Anselma – she told us scary tales, for example, she said “You have to have faith; be serious when you arrive there and do whatever it takes to honor to our Señor de Chalma. Otherwise, something very bad could happen to you.” We listened to her very carefully, but we had no idea what faith meant, for us kids the most important thing was to have fun. My aunt was keeping us busy so our trip was pleasant.

Since the trip started very early, I don't think we had breakfast. Most likely, my mother wanted to feed us before anything happened, but I bet most of the children wanted to start playing all kind of games the moment we arrived there. Everybody was excited because it was different from other places we had visited, and we were about to experience something new. Once we arrived there, we forgot about the tales my aunt mentioned to us in our trip. We kids wanted to have fun. When we arrived, we were very happy and we were admiring the beautiful town full of vegetation with trees that had been there for centuries. We brought lots of food so we would have enough to eat while we were there.

We kids started running on the open area while the adults were bringing down food, plates, beverages, and a couple of quilts my parents brought to sit on the grass. We were very active children and we wanted to do everything run, jump, and go to the river. We were taking advantage to the trip and enjoying a picnic too, we had to take advantage of the trip on that beautiful green area coming from a big city to small town.

I arrived there full of energy; everything was beautiful, and I wanted to try to do things that could only be done there. I did everything including going into the river even though I didn't know how to swim. My mother refused to let me go, but I insisted very much and my Aunt Anselma advocated for me. Then my mother ended up letting me go to the river. She was watching me while she sat on the grass trying to relax from our exhausting trip. Since we arrived there I was eager to go to the river to the top of a huge stone. It attracted me the most. A bunch of kids and I were walking towards the middle of river. I was leading the group because I was the one who started the idea to go toward a group of huge stones in the middle of the river. We were trying to get close to the stones in the river.

Once we were next to the stones, I decided to go on top of the huge stone. My thinking was, I wanted to sit on top of the huge stone, but my big surprise was that trying to go on top of the stone the moment I slipped away, and the next thing I knew the river was taking me away from my siblings. I guess I was screaming. I was panicking trying to hold on something, but there was nothing I could hold on, so the river ran with a fast speed and moved me with a strong velocity.

My father instantly reacted when he saw me getting lost in the waves and he realized how fast the water was taking me away from them. His reaction was to jump into the river to rescue me from the river. He didn't even have time to take his shoes off, not even to take off his pants; his only reaction was to jump. The speed of the river almost took my father too when he was trying to get me out of the river. He caught me a couple of times. But the water pressure was stronger than my father's strength and took me away from his hands, but he didn't give up.

He kept trying to fight for my life against the water to get me back on land, but I was unconscious and in a very bad shape at this moment. I thought I was dreaming. All I remember was the sound of the water like a bad dream I couldn't wake up from. My father was losing the battle against the water because he hit his head against a big rock. I believe my father got me at the third try. He was a strong man and he pulled me by my long hair out of the river.

My father's military training helped him to save my life, as well as his courage and love for his daughter, which made him a hero. Later on, after my dangerous life event took place, he told me that he thought he had lost me and was losing hope as he tried again and again to save me. I say my long hair and my brave father saved my life.

I'm glad I'm still in this world to share my unbelievable story. In addition, I think El Señor de Chalma left me alive to tell my story and for people to confirm that we must keep our faith and devotion strong.



# SHIFT CHANGE

# The Union as a Security Blanket

## TERESA GEORGE

History has recorded countless atrocities against humanity throughout the centuries. Such accounts range from unhealthy and dangerous experiences of workers to the brutality and fatality among a certain race. With the assistance of my readings, let me paint a picture of what men and women had to endure without little or no redress.

The fire climbed high against the factory walls; onlookers stood in awe as women jumped to their own mercy. The vision was unimaginable, and the screams were unbearable to hear. One can only try to understand the pain they felt . . . the terror. They were stripped of their clothes, locked away, and given meat infested with maggots to “*satisfy*” their hunger. They were beaten and tortured in the attempt to keep them quiet. When they walked down the streets in protest, violence surrounded them, and many were shot down to their deaths. Were they not human beings as well? Did they not have rights?

Unfortunately, **no** they did not. Many women and men have lost their lives due to unsafe work practices and also in the fight to be equal. Many have fought and died in order to have rights, vote, and be free. Those men and women paved the way for us to live with these freedoms and to indulge in these luxuries. OSHA requirements, unions, and equal opportunities brought about positive changes, all due to the courage and unity among men and women.

Unions were created to protect the rights, safety, and professionalism of a specific workforce. In the beginning, opportunity and acceptance were based on exclusivity and not offered to many individuals. Take Local 3 for example; in the past, members were of kindred descent, mainly father-to-son and branching off into nephews. Presently, there is a much larger spread of members. In actuality, many individuals within the union have no family connections at all, which is wonderful. This widespread union membership shows the evolution of a new vision, one in which men and women of all stations in life can equally and fairly work together, referring to themselves as brothers and sisters.

Unions are broken down into different levels. In many ways, it works as a chain of command starting from the unionized worker and climbing all the way up to the head elected official, business manager, and president. Yet this structure can coexist with an open door policy, allowing individual members personally to get information or resolve a serious issue via communications with officers and high-level members of the organization. The exact process all depends on the situation at hand. Most officers are just as much our family as the worker to our left or right and are more than happy to speak one on one with members. Nevertheless, not every union operates in the same way. Each separate union will live by its own set of rules, regulations, benefits, and pay.

Within Local 3 and other unions, there are shop stewards, foremen, committees, an examining board, and an executive board including the business manager and the president. The shop stewards are the eyes and ears on the job site. It is the steward's responsibility to oversee the daily operations of the site. It is up to the shop steward to make sure that worker proficiency is constantly building. The position of steward can be attained either by appointment or election.

The foreman is responsible for specific activities in the workplace and the safety of his or her men. The examining board consists of elected members who have the task of evaluating those who will advance from MIJ to A-Journeyman. They also oversee other day-to-day proceedings and are legally responsible for everything within the union, both positive and negative. The president is head of all areas within the union, and the business manager negotiates contracts and acquires employment for workers. There also are the positions of a vice president, secretaries and the treasurers of the union. Committees such as the safety, youth or "bad boy committee" are appointed and overseen by the president of the local.

Unions and non-unions rest on opposite sides of the working fence. Ultimately, unions band together and create a piercing and echoing voice, whereas the voice of an unhappy non-union worker is very faint. Non-union workers can work day in and day out, depriving themselves of benefits and their rights, only to be thrown away and left with nothing. They have no control over, and often lack knowledge about, their rights regarding what they can or cannot do or what they truly deserve. On the other hand, we union members are able to create or alter our own contracts via use of our bargaining agreement. This gives us leeway to move around or to speak up if necessary, as opposed to being stagnant and at the mercy of unruly and dictating employers. As human beings, we deserve the right to reject dictatorship and abuse.

Our union serves as a security blanket and provides an excellent way of life for us and our families. It allows workers to be comfortable in their workplaces as well as in their homes. In many ways, a union is deemed a blessing, a prized possession; it is something cherished and loved like a child. In other words, our union is "our baby," and it is up to us to properly nourish and care for our baby, in order for it to grow big and strong and powerful in its struggles against adversity.

In order to accomplish this, union members need solidarity and to move as one. Our power lies within our numbers. Therefore, unity and cohesion are essential to the future survival of a union, as well as the future lives of those who will follow after us. It is up to us to communicate amongst one another and to spread the word. It may seem difficult at times, but every voice matters, and every person standing in support of a cause can make a big difference. Similar to the tiniest mustard seed that grows into the largest of trees, we must start where we are planted.

There is no doubt that politicians, the government, and corporate entities are against us. Non-union companies are expanding and accepting employment opportunities that could result in jobs for union workers. In addition, piece by piece the government is creating laws that lock and confine unions to a corner of the workplace, preventing us from being heard.

As election day approaches, the youth as well as every union division should step forward in support of those politicians who support us. Despite the fact that we fall on the lower end of the slope, politics are very important to unions. Without sponsors, favor, or stability, we can surely collapse. It is very unfortunate that we live in a society that feeds off people in negative ways, creating a culture in which people care only about their own well being. For example, the social security scare spurs corporate plans to tear us down from the roots, divide and conquer. We must show them that we will not fold.

The time is now to break free of those shackles and to take what is rightfully ours. More than ever before, this is the time to be heard. Let us go to every supporting event possible. Let us be active and show the world that we are truly here to stay. We must fight to hold our positions and to persevere. We must fight as those before us did. We must fight for our baby ... and again, I say with solidarity that this is possible.

Unions are so important to the welfare of us workers. They provide security and comfort at the workplace and within the home. A union will offer its warmth when non-unions workers are left out in the cold. If you are loyal to your union, it will provide for your every need and be that safety net if ever you should fall. It is the true definition of a brotherhood and sisterhood, and Local 3 stands behind that bond, regardless of race, color, or gender. Local 3 prides itself on its diversity, and I am honored to be a part of it. Let us all float together on the sea of justice, sailing into the future.

# Survival of the Union

## KAREN L. HANSEN

The United States is certainly in a somewhat unique economic situation. The middle class is shrinking, the national debt is growing, and the slow, almost catatonic ascent of the job market is evident. In this struggling economy, unions must join the fight for survival. With unions having the lowest percentage of membership since their inception, survival will be based on how capable they are at reevaluating and revamping their strategy.

In order to thrive, unions must make informed choices for their members, while keeping their members informed. They must capitalize on the innumerable platforms of social media, keeping associates abreast of new motions and agendas. To revamp their reputation, they should restore the integrity of union politics through transparency and legislative advocacy. Representatives of the union must enlighten the general, non-union public of the true purpose of their cause; they must protect the interests and health of the workers **and** the integrity of the business owners, through collective bargaining, contractually guaranteeing fulfillment of the needs of ALL parties involved. With this clear vision, the unions of today must continue to strive for creating new jobs through organizing and promoting teamwork. At the same time, the unions must adapt and change with the times, incorporating the new and fresh market of young people, immigrants, and foreign workers. Finally, and most importantly, the unions who want to survive will be those who continue to train, maintain, and educate their existing membership regarding work practices, safety, and current events, rewarding those members who strive to be better through recognition and appreciation.

In the 1960s, the middle class was almost 60 percent of the population. Being middle class meant being able to live comfortably on what was earned, which means that workers could afford financial necessities such as paying bills, setting something aside for retirement, getting the children through college, and still have something left for vacations and entertainment. Now, less than 40 percent of all households are in this range. It is the unions that raised the bar in the first place and must, therefore, keep reaching to build this class up again.

Every year the national debt is rising. The top income sources for the government are income taxes, social security, retirement, and payroll contributions. Among other things, a reason for the limited funds in government is the low wages of the American people that limit tax collections. As long as we let the middle class and their savings fall short, we allow the debt to keep rising with no end in sight.

In addition, the job market is creeping up at a barely noticeable rate. We need a labor market that is improving and adding more jobs, which would bring about upward pressure on wages. According to theodora.com, "Long-term problems of a sluggish job



market include stagnation of wages for lower-income families, inadequate investment in deteriorating infrastructure, rapidly rising medical and pension costs of an aging population, energy shortages, and sizable current account and budget deficits.”

Our unique economic situation needs strong unions to stimulate and stabilize the situation. People need choice and stability in that choice, knowing their families will be taken care of with a future planned out. Unless you are privileged enough to be in the upper echelon of the ladder, paying for or winning an exclusive education, you will be fighting for a way to survive and make a decent living. Unions could offer this stability.

While moving forward on this platform, unions need not just to survive but to thrive. As I see it, the solution to this is multilayered. Two elements crucial to the future and present state of the unions are information and education. Members of the union need to know what the agenda is and how the administration is spending their money. They also need to feel motivated by their union. This type of communication should be user-friendly, accessible to members, and transparent enough so that members know what the real agenda is. In order to do this, teams should be brought together to utilize social media and technology for an informational and PR (public relations) blitz. This type of approach should be geared toward keeping members in good spirits and getting the word out about the positive sides of the union world.

Unions can use this forum and revamp their reputation as well. The word should be spread that unions are not the “lazy no-good workers” that they were painted to be years ago. The American people should be presented with a positive view of the union worker. Besides just putting the message out on social forums, union members should be constantly given the opportunity and inspiration to give back to their communities through volunteer work. With the more enthusiastic support of the members and more positive support of the general public, legislative advocacy becomes easier.

Legislative advocacy should be fair and evenhanded. Unions need to push for legislative moves that continue to give the worker choices without fear of corrupt persuasion. Unions, businesses and politicians everywhere can be corrupt. In this regard, any legislation should straightforward in its protection against corruption, without giving any one party an unfair advantage. I use the Employee Free Choice Act as an example. This Act sought to make the voting process faster in order to get the unions into a workplace with less delay. It was to do away with the anonymous voting process and allow a union to be brought in with a type of petition instead. However, the exposure of employee identity could have put the employees at risk. Other parts of the legislation make sense and could help move the process along, without finding unfair advantage and keeping with the rights of the employees.

Going hand in hand with creating this new image would be the idea of being forward thinking. Young people today are easy to embrace and welcome, and union representatives are out recruiting and organizing them. Indeed, there is always an effort needed by union organizers to create new jobs and higher levels of strength through

organizing. Let the unions also invite the immigrants and foreign workers to unite with us. Let the unions help them organize and create a social movement without division. Why not push for legislation that while limiting outsourcing incorporates those outsourced employees into the U.S. unions. The word 'union' in its very essence inspires community with a sense of brotherhood. Let it represent something binding and inspirational on a more international level.

Another key to union success is the responsibility of the unions to train, maintain, and educate their existing membership regarding work practices and safety. If the unions are to revamp their image, they must not let their members become ignorant in their responsibilities as representatives of union membership. The maintenance and continued training of standing members is as important as the initial training and education of apprentices. Some unions require continuing education. I believe this is the way to go. With knowledge of the newest technologies and safety standards, each union gets the edge it needs to keep its members strong and smart in the field. An extra edge also can be gained through general education of members. Knowledge is power, and the training to think critically with foresight can be gained through higher education, no matter what the subject matter. Incentives for recognition and appreciation should be built into the system for rewarding those who show enthusiasm for bettering their union through education and passing their skills along. One other suggestion about education is to disseminate information about the history of unions by teaching grade school and high school students about the role of unions and how they work.

Unions helped to create and build the middle class. Unions must now step back into that role and help rebuild it. There are many obstacles to overcome, and many layers of attacking the problems that unions face. However, with the right management and leadership, the unions could win America back over, and thrive again.

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## Working Hard or Hardly Working: Shift Change?

### CALEEN DAVIS

Each day since I became an apprentice for Local 3, at least one person asks me the same question: “Are you working hard or hardly working?” The first time I heard it, I was flabbergasted. I took it very seriously and questioned whether my answer would generate a laugh or get me a stern warning from my foreman. In order to avoid a conflict I said, “A little bit of both.” Although I now know the phrase is just a greeting, I stick with that answer because depending on what I’m engaged in, I’m never lying. The instances where I can *truly* say I work hard are when I don’t think I can do any more work; then, I take a deep breath and do more work. Hard work means to overcome preconceived limitations of what one can accomplish.

During the times where my profession requires me to lift heavy objects or handle dangerous equipment, my body is working hard, but my mind is virtually free from worrying; this is due to the many stories that I have heard of appendages being lost due to a person becoming engrossed in deep thoughts. On the flip side, when I am concentrating on my schoolwork, my mind races a mile a minute; at the same time, I am sitting on my bum the whole time. In both of the previous examples, I had to put in a great deal of effort, but I don’t consider that hard work because I was relaxed in another way. Some people believe that hard work happens only when the body aches at the end of the day; this makes perfect sense to anyone who does labor-intensive work. Rushing home to soak in Epsom salts is a daily routine, which is necessary in order for me to go to sleep some nights.

I wear my cuts and bruises as a badge of honor and show them with pride. No one can call me a lazy individual if I have injuries and pain, right? However, this is *not* what proves to me that I work hard. There are men at my job who are so solidly built that what is heavy for me is child’s play for them. At times, I struggle with carrying a bundle of pipes, while a co-worker can carry two bundles with ease. So, it isn’t the physical objects that I carry which make the work hard; it’s the *fact* that the weight is outside of my comfort level. The stronger I get, the easier it will be. What I consider hard work now will be easier later, so pure physical discomfort can’t be hard work. Pushing passed my discomfort level is what hard work means and highlights the phrase “mind over matter.”

After a day of demanding work, I often go to college or my electrical theory class, and I know plenty of people who consider the school portion of the apprenticeship to be hard work. The requirement of at least two nights of school ensures that we get home late and then have to complete homework in the midst of sleep, overtime, and meetings, all the while maintaining a social life. At times, my fellow apprentices and I are at our wits end, but for most of our learning situations, we get to sit in class all day,

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so physical toil is not what makes academic life hard. No amount of essays or readings will break my back, but it definitely causes fatigue. So mental hardships have to be the definition of hard work, right? No. Some of my fellow classmates never show concern toward college, while others, like myself, stress on the weekends about getting *all* their work done. Whether it is due to extreme confidence in their academic prowess or having set a low goal for grades, I will never know. I can get at least a B in most classes without major problems. However, I wish to get A's. In order for me to accomplish this while devoting 40 plus hours to the union, I must push myself passed my comfort limits. Hard work isn't based on the material you are given, but measured by how much effort one must put into completing it.

While there are general thoughts of what hard work may entail, no one really understands what it means until he or she experiences it. Even then, that personal definition does not extend to everyone. What exactly determines how much effort one must put in his or her activities for it to be considered hard? What is the difference between doing something that is easy versus difficult. If someone does a strenuous activity but enjoys it, does it count as work? The answers lie with the person who is being asked. One thing that I am sure of: Hard work does not exist in a comfort zone.

# My Pyramid Learning Experience

## TIMOTHY NOLAN

Traveling down the helix into the Lincoln tunnel, I parallel north along the edge of the Hudson River, following the banks of Manhattan, where I notice all the buildings and cruise ship terminals. As I look north across the Hudson River drive, I identify a developing building wrapped in orange safety netting. At first glance, I think what an oddly shaped building, but after looking at the detail I notice the pyramid shape the designers were striving for. As a brand new apprentice, I hear different advice daily, but one that stays the same is that on a raw construction site in New York City I will continuously face different experiences.

As I approach the construction site, located at 625 W 57th St., the first thing I notice is the extremely bizarre design. Looking up at the outside of the pyramid-shaped apartment structure, the two things visible are the orange safety nets and concrete structures that separate each level of the building. The safety net takes the place of walls that have not been erected yet. After turning the corner from W 57th St. to 12th Ave., I pass under the green protective awning that stops falling debris from hitting bustling pedestrians on the concrete sidewalk. In the middle of 57th and 58th St., a security opening houses several metal turnstiles for entering and exiting dedicated workers. On the first day of work I was required to sit in a small, dreary storage container, transformed into the “safety orientation trailer.” After the long, monotonous orientation session, I had my picture taken for my new employee ID card. Now I can swiftly pass through the metal turnstiles with the other dedicated workers.

Before starting my first day as an apprentice, there were several insignificant terms that went in one ear and out the other. As I start my long journey with Local 3, these irrelevant terms are starting to become more and more important. For instance, the word “shanty” did not have any meaning to me until the first day at 625 W 57th St.. A shanty is an unmaintained trailer used as a break room, a meeting room, a material locker room, and the hardworking foreman’s office. Leaving the large area that contains dusty shanties, I walk up make-shift ramps and pass temperately constructed staircases. I then make my way to the elevated hoist area. This portion of the building is a dangerous sketchy place because of the unsteady Alamacs, which are temporary elevators attached to the outside of the building. This area is a new, frightening experience for a greenie like me because going up the outside of the large, open structure in an unsteady metal box is not an experience with which I am accustomed. After taking several trips up the sketchy Alamac, I realized it was not as terrifying as I originally thought.

Once I finally started to work on the upper floors, I had my first encounter working in electrical closets and working alongside all trades on a raw construction site with numerous kinds of unfamiliar material. In a pyramid-shaped building, the electrical closets do not have a standardized format. Some of the closets are large and roomy

while others are oddly shaped and overflowing with electrical meters and transformers. In some cases the closets are so tiny that only one person can be in there at a time. A small step ladder has to be laid against the unstructured wall, which is not always the safest act. As I go from floor to floor, I experience different phases of construction. On the north side of the building, the glaciers are installing windows, allowing carpenters to start hanging sheetrock. Materials for these hardworking crews are highly stacked in between apartments, which make it very difficult to move around the floors and perform daily tasks. My young, ambitious journeyman and I have a location on the sixth floor, where we store tools and wire pulling equipment. We have a large, rolling gang box that is a rolling lockable storage unit for our hand tools and tool bags. In addition, we have a collection of ladders and carts that make transporting between locations easier.

After several months on this raw construction site on the banks of the Hudson River, learning new aspects of the site itself is a daily occurrence. Having this opportunity to work at this very odd-shaped building will force me to admire the unique designs and engineering techniques of all buildings in the Metropolitan area.

With my experiences, I will no longer question the meaning of a shanty; from now on, I know it will be a place to escape the scorching summer or the windy, brutal winter. Most of the materials for other trades on a construction site cause a lot of mess, but if managed properly, organized equipment can be beneficial for performing one's job efficiently. Every new experience on this unfinished construction site is an opportunity to learn and grow as an apprentice.

## Work: The Good and The Bad

### MICHAEL TRICARICO JR.

I began my work experience at age 16 and now have about 15 years of total work experience. My experience changed from a dishwasher to a Christmas tree salesman, a mail carrier and now an electrician. With all of these jobs I have experienced and seen many things in such a short amount of time. When I was younger, I never put too much thought into my future with work.

The summer of my 16th birthday was a complete turn-around because I began desiring things that I could not buy. When I first began my work experience as a dishwasher, there were many things with which I became frustrated. First and foremost, I made minimum wage, which was around \$5 an hour at that time. I stood on my feet for six hours with no break. The work included loading and unloading the washer and monitoring the machine and the cleanliness of the tableware. Although this labor was simple, after three weeks, it became tedious and I would mentally wonder off. There was never a balance for me at this job; on the nights that were busy, which I didn't mind, I would have a server or bartender hounding me for more glasses and dessertspoons. The boredom while it was slow and the overload of work when it was busy also were very frustrating. There were many times when after being denigrated I wanted to walk out and never come back, but there was something more than money that kept me there.

One of the satisfactions that I received from this job was the small amount of cooking knowledge that I learned. One of the chefs, Mario, for some reason took me under his wing and really taught me different preparation methods on his downtime. I really appreciated this and enjoyed learning the techniques of a chef. We had a great time working together because we were able to make one another laugh while working. Sooner rather than later he made sure neither the servers nor bartenders were barking orders at me, but at the same time he had no problem telling me to pick up my pace. If he addressed an issue he always kept a calm demeanor and did not want anyone to feel disrespected or insulted. He kept the kitchen workers united and happy while keeping a productive atmosphere.

After two full summers of the part-time tedious work in the kitchen, I left due to a new opportunity. Although the work at this job was wearisome, the last day of work I felt relieved but somewhat sad about leaving. Thinking back to my last day of work at the restaurant, I know it was not the work that I missed but the people. However frustrated it became when we had a full house and a server telling me I was too slow, I overall was satisfied with the words exchanged among my co-workers. I felt approval from the head of the kitchen and learned several things that I will always remember. Most people do not seek a job to gain a personal relationship among their

fellow co-workers. A priority when starting a new job is not whether you will gain a relationship, but sometimes it's one of the most satisfying things and a huge factor of your happiness while being at work.

At 18, my father was able to get me a lead into the post office as a mail carrier. Excited to begin my new job and make triple of what I previously made, I still was aware there would be pros and cons to this job as well. After being trained on a specific route, I began delivering mail. I for the most part was by myself almost 90 percent of the time, unless I had to go back to the main office. Although I did not mind being on my own, I felt as if I always had to be aware of what I was doing. After a couple of months of delivery, the postmaster for whatever his reasoning was constantly down my back. He right away talked down to me because I was new and young. After a handful of times, I spoke back and from that point, he would write me up if he felt good cause. This man was by the book with everything. At first I understood, but it came to a point when it seemed he was out to nail me.

My feelings about this man took a turn when he followed me during my route and wrote me up for every improper thing that I did. I was written up for not wearing my seatbelt and not parking properly according to the book. After speaking to fellow co-workers no one could share the same experience. My relationship with my superior became difficult and frustrating and I became uncomfortable and dreaded going to work.

For 40 hours a week I felt I was constantly being watched and talked about. Things continued to be sour and due to the uncomfortable relationship with the postmaster, I ended up quitting with no intention of going back.

Within the workplace we all have various experience that will determine overall how happy and satisfied we are there. Although I have had jobs where I hauled a heavy weight, washing dishes and receiving little pay, those jobs were more satisfying than the better paying ones in which I had vacation and sick time. Only workers themselves can relate to this; not everyone will understand that awkward relationship that occurs among employee and boss.

There is no such thing as the perfect place to work; the perfect work-life would be to not have one at all. We all seek to achieve many things within work, it may be consciously or subconsciously, but we all can look back on our work experiences and relate with certain situations. Every job, easy or difficult, tedious or overwhelming will have its frustrations and satisfactions. I was once frustrated doing such easy work for little pay and decided to leave for better pay only to realize that I was now frustrated because of lack of respect from someone of higher authority than I. Any worker, no matter the job, will experience the boredom, the refusal of management to hire more workers, and demands of added production for the same pay. However, there is the experience of the social aspect in which we gain friendships and the satisfaction



of approval of someone of higher authority. Both of these pros and cons will come together to make our own personal work experience. The unique thing is, we can all still relate without having the same experience.

# The Application of Collective Intelligence and Skill

## GIUSEPPE BADALAMENTI

Any field of work depends on the collective intelligence and skill of its employees. The abilities and skills of the workers should be used as the means to achieve the most desirable outcome and produce the best result possible. Any trade will improve and benefit if the workers willingly apply their knowledge and efforts to complete a task in the best manner possible. There is a positive relationship that demonstrates how the intelligence and skills of workers improve the productivity and quality of their trade. In the book *How to Tell When You're Tired* by Red Theriault, there is a great example of cooperative efforts. This is best described in chapter three of Theriault's book titled "Now We're Just Going To Make a Few Changes Here and There." The collective intelligence and skills of the factory workers outsmart those of the scientists. As a Local 3 electrician, I can provide many personal examples of the collective intelligence and skills or the lack of it and their results within my tasks, but also I can share similar ideas and instances that were mentioned to me by other members of my union.

The chapter's setting is in the 1920s at a factory in Illinois, where they make switchboards, telephone receivers, and dialing units. The author states that a study was conducted by a group of scientists to find more effective ways to speed up or raise production. Especially during this time, several studies like these were done, so managers could see how to maximize production out of their employees. The scientists were sociologists and psychologists who were trying to find the "relationship between working conditions and productivity." The study revolved around working conditions that were ideal. The workers had two 15 minute breaks a day, lighting was adjusted as needed, and they even had speakers installed so the workers could listen to music as they worked. This study went on for two years and a lot of data was collected. As an outcome of the analysis of the collected data, researchers concluded that the production stayed relatively the same. They tried to manipulate some of the factors, for example, they sectioned the factory into two groups and gave one group an hour break, and dimmed the bulbs to see if that made a difference. It did not.

After two years of research, one of these scientists from the greatest schools in the country discovered something. He stayed late one day, which was around 3:30, and noticed that none of the factory workers were at their work areas. This was odd because their workday ended at 5 p.m. He also heard commotion coming from the break room, and came to find all of the workers doing anything but working. He was puzzled at the sight of people playing cards, and reading. Some women were even knitting, and some other men and women were indulging in conversations. He asked one worker why were they all on break at 3:30. The response was: "We've put together all the telephones we're going to make today." What this meant is that he knew the quota that was required, and the workers stopped whenever they reached that quota,

no matter what time it was. This also demonstrated that the workers were collectively using their intelligence and skills but not for the benefit of their trade and tasks, but rather to statistically reach the required quota. This is a significant realization, and it is important for today's workers to think about the true meaning and goal of applying our best selves in all our tasks. This study is a perfect example of the collective mentality of workers in my field about how they apply their knowledge and skills. Their intelligence and skills are not used efficiently and productively to better the trade, but to just sustain the status quo instead.

As a worker in a union trade, I can relate to this story. As a union member I am privileged to work in safe, well-kept areas when possible. I'm currently working on a job where I am on a finished floor that is climate controlled, well lit, and very clean. Unfortunately, I work with people such as these factory workers who think they should only work up to what they think is comparable with their pay. They read an unwritten book that says how much pipe they should put up in per day or how much chopping they should do before they think it is ok to "call it a day." Quotes such as "Let's call it a day" when we drill five one-inch holes and "They got what they paid for" are thrown around a lot on my job. Some people say them as if they are joking, but I believe they are not. When production slows down after that job is complete, it gives me a reason to believe I am right in thinking that.

I worked with an apprentice in my first shop and he told me of a story similar to what I described and what the author told us about the study conducted. He worked with a journeyman who only put in five lengths of pipe a day. It didn't matter if it was straight pipe, which, as a person in the field, you know you can do in a couple hours, or if the pipes had lots of bends the work could take much longer. This was the first time I heard of a professional thinking this way, and I was very surprised to see it again on my current job. This person felt that the contractor would be satisfied and expected for him to do only five lengths a day, which was the amount of work he put in. He did not care about applying himself and providing the best outcome for his company; instead he felt that only the minimum skills and efforts were sufficient.

Mr. Theriault and I both disliked the story when we heard it for the first time, and I am sad to admit that almost a century later, people still have this attitude or mentality at my workplace. "Only give them their money's worth;" unless you are the estimator on the job, I don't think you can have any clue of what "their money's worth" really is in terms of production. As I said to a journeyman recently, "The shop is not here to support us and make us money; we are here to support and better the shop, and ultimately we'll be kept in our positions for all the intelligence and skills we provide." A shop cannot stay in business to get its money back at the end of a project, without a profit it's not worth staying in business. I believe the workers need to come together and unite though their efforts to improve their field of work. The collective intelligence and skills of workers should be used not only to complete the minimum expected production, but ultimately they also should be used to achieve the highest possible production and quality of a task. If we do not apply our best selves within our daily

tasks, we are not only harming the company we work for, but the field that provides us with our career. It is of great importance for a worker to apply his/her intelligence and skills, not only for the completion of a task, but to also master and surpass the expected outcome.

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# Lessons From Labor and the Economy

## MICHAEL HOUCK

I dreaded the first day of my Labor and the Economy class. When I heard the name of the course, I figured it was going to involve numerous uninteresting math problems. Was I wrong! Instead of being forced-fed charts and diagrams, students were encouraged to understand world affairs. Instead of memorizing facts that I would probably forget in a short time, I have been given a different outlook on the economy.

I was one of those people who figured that workers in low-wage jobs, such as fast food, deserved lower wages. I looked at the facts that I work harder and go to school to educate myself in the electrical trade as reasons that I should be get paid more than they. I now realize I was going about this in the wrong way. If you ask me now, I will tell you that minimum wage workers are not being paid nearly enough, and their paychecks need to be raised substantially. The main reason that employers are able to take advantage of employees in this country is that we keep one another down. We should be building up and helping one another get raises and better benefits. The only reason I am only going to be earning \$52 an hour as a journeyman is that employers have set the standard of wages so low that it can only go up so high. If the minimum wage were raised to a more livable amount, my wages too would be increased to keep up with the demand of skilled electricians.

I think the public's perception about taxes is a very similar dilemma. We are working so hard, often multiple jobs for such low wages, that when we hear a politician speak of increasing taxes we are automatically against it. We often don't even look at their proposed plan; we shoot it down immediately at the thought of more of our hard-earned money being taken away. The rich count on the poor being uneducated and ignorant and voting these laws down; meanwhile, many of the newer proposals would only affect them and not us.

I think that we should raise taxes on the rich; any amount earned over \$400,000 a year should be taxed heavily. We need the help that these taxes would bring. We need better schools and public transportation, as well as better funding for programs that would help those who really need it. The rich are not the ones using the benefits that the government provides for us, so they do not care that they are barely contributing a drop in the bucket of what they are earning. It might convince some CEOs not to accept such a ridiculously huge salary if they knew a great portion of it would be taxed. This would help keep workers employed, without CEOs looking to broker huge deals with no regard for how many people they will put out of work.

Unions in America are an incredibly strong way to make sure we do not lose our rights or get taken advantage of by employers. Other countries have found other solutions. For example, Germany has work councils on job sites, which is a better way to stay in communication with management. The work council is a separate entity that is

independent of employers and the trade unions. In every business with five or more employees, the employees set up a work council. This concept only works because they operate using codetermination or simply cooperation between management and workers in decision-making. If they cannot come to an agreement on a particular matter, they can set up a conciliation committee that equally represents both sides. Both parties have to accept an independent chairperson who heads the conciliation committee. If neither side can come to an agreement about their differences, then they have the option to go to labor court. I think the way they have their system set up is a beneficial way for employees and employers to agree and let both sides feel good about what took place, instead of dragging out the process.

People in this country are always complaining that some people leech off the system, taking food stamps and government housing when they don't really need it. The truth is, they do need it. That is because the jobs here do not pay enough on which to survive. The unemployment rate in Germany is about half of what it is here in America, yet the benefits an unemployed German citizen receives is far greater than what we can receive in America. They get 60 percent of their previous net salary and 67 percent if they have children. They can get a maximum weekly benefit of 2,964 Euros, which equals about \$4,030 in U.S. dollars. Here in New York City, the maximum is less than \$500 a week. Our benefits also expire in about a year with the recipient being left with no income and no way to support the family. In Germany, if someone cannot find a job in the time period allocated, then that person can apply for Hartz IV program, an open-ended food stamp/welfare program. It pays about \$530 a month for living expenses, plus the cost of housing which includes heat and health care.

If their benefits are so good, why don't they have similar problems to ours with their citizens sucking the system dry? The answer is actually quite simple. In Germany, it pays to work. The salaries are more beneficial to a family than sitting home and collecting. That is what we need to achieve here. If the lower paying minimum wage jobs increased their wages, then people would be able to support their families by working. It's no wonder they sit home and collect checks when they wouldn't make any more money if they went out and killed themselves working. We need to stick together, and push for greater salaries and benefits for all instead of being fearful and kicking each other down. If American citizens in general are doing better in life, I too will be doing better in life. If we raise taxes on the rich, my children might live a better life by having better schools and public transportation. If my children are able to go to better schools, they might learn this valuable lesson earlier than I did, and we might be able to stop the cycle.

# The Struggle

## LEON ANDREWS JR.

Waking up every day with one thing on your mind,  
Gotta' make it out the hood on time.  
Early mornings,  
Late nights,  
Music bumping,  
Too many creepers on sight.  
Know too many around your way,  
But not enough.  
All types of things going on,  
Makes staying focused kinda tough.  
Keep that eye on the prize though  
So it'll pay off in the long run,  
Before you know it, that big \$  
Over 50 an hour at 26 how fun.  
Don't let the struggle overcome the big pic,  
Make it to work, make it through school,  
They'll all say it'll be quick  
It's only the beginning, man,  
And only the strong will last,  
Gotta' get past those years,  
So the struggle will be the past.

# How to Bring a Job Together: Two Wires at A Time

## CHARLES TANDOI

Splicing wire is a simple yet essential part of virtually every electrical job. For electrical devices to function, electricity must flow not only into, but also out of them. If wires are not spliced, the electricity cannot complete a full circuit. Without that full circuit, there can be no power. My primary job as an electrician is to provide electricity to the customers, and that is all but impossible without splicing.

First of all, let me explain exactly what splicing is; it is the act of joining two separate pieces of something. When wire is spliced, two different strands of copper are twisted together, forming what is, in function, one wire. But wires generally don't have exposed copper. To reach the conductive metal, first the insulation must be stripped away with either side cutting pliers or a wire stripper. Then the wires can be spliced. However, the insulation is now gone, leaving the copper dangerously exposed. This could potentially cause a fire, so the exposed copper must be safely covered with a wire nut. These nuts are all labeled for both the number and gauge or size, of the wires on which they can be used. There also are additional types of wire nuts with special qualities for use in different environments or conditions, such as high heat or excessive moisture. Once an appropriate wire nut is chosen, it can be placed on the spliced wire and easily twisted on. This serves not only as a safety measure but also prevents the splice from becoming undone.

However, there is still the question of which wires to splice together. The ground, usually a green wire, is a safety precaution. As such, it should always be spliced first and undone last. While not perfect, the ground gives the current an easier path, as opposed to a person, to travel down in case something goes wrong. Next, the neutral (usually colored) white, should be spliced. The neutral is the path on which the current returns to complete its circuit. It should be spliced before the live wire because it is harmless by itself. Once the live wire is spliced, the neutral also becomes dangerous. Finally, the hot wire (usually black or red in low voltage) is spliced. This is the wire through which the current arrives, and caution should always be used when handling it, even if it is assumed to be dead. Once this is complete, the circuit has been successfully spliced.

And so what may originally seem a daunting or overly complicated task is actually quite simple when broken down into manageable steps. The entire process then becomes one step in completing a circuit, which itself then becomes one step toward completing the entire job.



# My Tangible Treasures

## ANDREI IVANOV

There are two types of things that people carry with them to work every day: tangible and intangible. Tangible is what we physically have with us such as phones, wallets, keys. Intangible are our feelings and emotions. It is incredible how the terms describe and represent who we truly are and bring our personalities to life. Whether they are tangible or intangible objects, they represent who we are as individuals.

When I leave my house, I always check for my iPhone, my keys and wallet. This routine became a habit a year ago, when one day I forgot to take my wallet with me. The train station was too far from the house, and I was too lazy to go back home. If I didn't have a few dollars in my pocket I would have returned home, but I bought a metro card and went to work.

It was a regular day at work. Back then, I was a foreman at "Eve's Salon" in the city. Next to the salon was a store, and as we were working we heard a woman screaming behind the wall. We didn't pay attention because we thought it was probably coming from a TV or just a quarrel between the customers.

In approximately in 10 to 15 minutes we saw police cars coming and pulling over next to that store. My helper and I decided to go out to see what was going on. When we came out I saw a woman crying hysterically and about 10 police officers next to her. All of a sudden she started pointing at me and saying to the police officers: "That's him. That's the guy." I was shocked and confused, and the next thing I knew I was handcuffed by the police officers without any explanations. They started searching my pockets for my wallet to get my identification and they kept saying to one another that he has no identification on him. I tried to explain that I forgot my wallet at home, but the next thing I knew I was in the police car on the way to the precinct.

When I got to the police station I was handcuffed and questioned. The woman implied that I wanted to hit her and steal her bag. I explained that I forgot my wallet at home. I only worked next door and had never seen this woman before. Even after I gave them all of my information I still had to spend the night at the police station. At around six o'clock in the morning a police officer came up to me and told me I was free to go without any explanations. As soon as I was out of the precinct, I saw my father and two of my closest friends standing and waiting for me. I have never been happier to see them. When I finally spoke with my father he told me they found the real guy who did it, and thus, they let me go. It just happened that I was wearing very similar-looking clothing – blue jeans and an orange sweater – and looked a lot like him. The next morning I returned to work as usual with my wallet in my pocket, in the hope to see this woman and get an apology from her, but she never did apologize. After this incident I have never ever left my house without my wallet; I always carry it with me.

Some of the intangible things that I carry with me all the time are happiness and fear. I love my family so much that sometimes I fear something bad will happen to them. You never know what's going to happen. When my son started preschool it brought even more worries because I was used to him being at home with my wife where I knew he had the best care and love. Now when he is at the preschool there is always the fear that something might happen. I know kids are kids and they need to grow and make their own mistakes, but parents can be very overprotective. Sometimes I call my wife and ask her if she called the school to ask how is he, and she always calms my nerves by saying everything is fine. I also worry about my wife because she drives to work and, yes, there is a bit of a fear that she might get into a car accident. Fear is always with me and in me. However, I have learned how to deal with it and try my best not take it to heart.

Happiness is perhaps the most enjoyable and pleasant feeling that I carry with me. I'm a very happy person. I have a beautiful and smart wife who has given me the most amazing gift of all, and that is our son, Aiden. He is a funny, adorable and a very happy toddler. I'm blessed to have the most supportive and loving parents, and most importantly, to have an amazing relationship with my in-laws. Our family is a rock, and I'm proud to have such a great support system in my life. Now that I finally got accepted to the union I think there is nothing more I need to be happy about in this life. I have it all and I will protect it all because nothing beats this amazing feeling inside that brings me joy, peace and love.

We all have things that define us and make us individuals. From my personal experience, tangible things can become lifesaving objects, and they are things I never forget on a daily basis, such as my wallet, keys and iPhone. However, intangible objects are things that are impossible to forget because they are within me. Just a thought of my son or my wife brings emotions of fear and happiness. Even though they are different feelings, they are so important in our daily lives. In that light, let's keep carrying what's most important and leave unnecessary worries behind.

# Reflections of Work

## STEPHEN FERGUSON

In his book *How to Tell When You're Tired*, author Reg Theriault talks about his work experiences throughout his life, as well as the work experiences of others in many different careers during a multitude of time frames. Theriault begins by talking about his nomadic farmhand family and the start of his working-class life. After lying about his age, he was put to work in a hot, sticky, fly-infested shed to make boxes for shipping melons. As time went on he moved up in rank to better positions that were not necessarily easier jobs, but he worked alongside the men and was a part of the camaraderie that made him feel as if he belonged.

In my experience, despite the poor pay and hard work, working with the men and women of Local 3 makes it easier to go to work on a daily basis. It is satisfying to feel as if you truly belong to something that is greater than just the task at hand. The fact that I'm the "gofer" for a group of guys and still feel like an integral cog in a giant well-oiled machine says a lot about the importance of working with a sense of purpose. Much like Theriault, starting at the bottom is something that one does in apprenticeship. At the start of my apprenticeship, I took a serious pay cut, but working toward a goal keeps me focused.

Chapter three of the book tells the story of factory workers producing switchboards, telephone receivers, and dialing units. The factory employed a number of sociologists and psychologists from two of our country's most prestigious colleges. The job of these scientists was to figure out how to make the factory workers produce more work in one day. The scientists used break times, different levels of lighting, music, and a wide range of variable changes to the workers' environment, but they always kept the length of the work day constant. For years the result of the experiment was inconclusive, until one day a scientist decided to stay late and noticed that all the workers stopped working two hours before the workday was even over. When confronted, one of the workers said "We've given them their money's worth," and with cooperative effort, the factory employees made the experiment indefinitely inconclusive.

I can relate to this story because of my own work experience between the ages of 16 and my early 20's, when I worked in the supermarket industry. I found supermarket retail stores to be the most lucrative retail businesses to own. That's why large super retailers like Kmart are selling grocery items now, to try to snatch a piece of the "golden pie." What I saw working in supermarkets was the epicenter of American poverty. If you think about it from a capitalist point of view, the supermarket scheme is brilliant. The people applying for jobs are only given part-time positions for minimum wage. Work schedules are made with the goal of keeping the part-time jobs under a certain number of hours a week, never allowing the opportunity for overtime or full-time employment.

The supermarket maximizes its profits by making a minimum contribution to wages and benefits. Working hours are sporadic, so obtaining a second means of employment is next to impossible. It's the perfect example of working with no purpose, never being able to provide for anyone and never being free of poverty. For these reasons, employees of supermarket chains tend to use a cooperative effort to not do any more than they have to in one working day. In all reality, giving employers their money's worth is something the employee has completed about half way through his or her shift.

Theriault mentions throughout the book that his main source of employment was as a longshoreman. He describes being the new guy and working with a wide variety of characters. The difficulty of the work is a point that Theriault makes clear, but he insists he didn't mind because of the stability it gave him and his family, along with the relationships he developed with the men at work. The job, in his eyes, gave his life purpose and made him feel like a man.

I could go on and on about how being an apprentice gives me the same satisfaction, but I will not. However, Theriault reminds me of the time I worked at the Fulton Fish Market lifting heavy boxes every three minutes. I was a delivery boy for a man known as "Tony Crab;" basically, I had a giant wooden handcart and had to deliver seafood (mostly shellfish) to various trucks parked around the market. The hook we used to throw around boxes of fish and bags of shellfish was a very sacred item. If a standard hook didn't work for you, there was one guy who made the best custom hooks filled with twists and turns. My hook had a spiral that ran down into the handle, which was made out of wood. I was paid cash at the end of the night, which was a good thing to me at the time. The bad thing is that the work was during the night, so I would get home early in the morning and sleep all day. Although the job was hard, it gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment. I made many friends there whom I still know today; in fact, one actually married my cousin.

I have come to realize that work affects you in different ways, and as long as your job is something that gives you fulfillment in life, do it to the best of your ability. Theriault is right about one thing, you are what you are in this world; there is no reason to be ashamed of it or shy away from it.

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# How to Revive A Decrepit Infrastructure

## PRISCILLA EHLY

In his article titled “Should the Laborer Fear Machines?” Nicholas Carr gives a brief history of the development of machines in industry, the worship and glorification of this trend by capitalists, and the fear and displacement new technology imposes on workers. Carr never actually answers the question himself, but his conclusion suggests that he agrees capitalist assumptions are “fundamentally right about the economy’s prospects.” That since the 1930s Depression was temporary and prosperity returned, equilibrium will be reestablished again and jobs will return in our current economy.

Mechanization began in the late 1700s as Britain began using the new steam engines to run looms and other machines. Many workers were replaced while many others had their jobs reduced to performing repetitive motions like stepping on pedals or pulling levers over and over again all day long.

Adam Smith called them “pretty machines,” and predicted that they would provide a great boost to industrial productivity by enabling “one man to do the work of many.” There was significant resistance to this mechanical replacement of workers. Workers resorted to “machine-breaking” and the Luddite rebellion was fomented to sabotage the machines in an attempt to save their skilled jobs. Hence there has always existed a conflict between increasing profits by increasing mechanization and workers whose jobs are threatened by it.

In 1930, the economist John Maynard Keynes described a future affliction facing the working class as “technological unemployment.” He was referring to the rise of machines used in production processes previously performed by the manual labor of humans. However, Keynes believed this was merely a “temporary phase of maladjustment.”

I am convinced that the use of technology has already permanently destroyed whole categories of work for Americans and will continue to do so. Still, it is not a realistic or desirable solution to this “maladjustment” to repress technological advancement. Science and technology cannot be halted. Global market economies will continue creating and utilizing new systems and inventions in the workplace, destroying old work patterns and replacing human workers. However, we cannot continue to throw thousands of workers and thousands of towns and regions in the U.S. to the wolves.

There are rust belt communities still jobless since their manufacturing factories were shut down in the 1970s. Every decade since has brought the same type of shift. Since we are now in a permanent “service” economy with barely any manufacturing occurring in the U.S., assuring that service workers are paid enough to support their families is the only way to survive and thrive as a nation. Minimum wage pay will never be adequate unless it is raised, effective immediately, to a livable rate of at least \$15 per

hour. Wealthy Americans seem to believe that their comfort and money are enough to prove that the U.S. is doing fine. Compassion and charity for the poor is inadequate. We need to commit as a nation to demanding that all workers receive adequate compensation for their labor and accept job creation as a viable, democratic solution to long-term unemployment.

We need to spend Federal money, tax money, on creating infrastructure-related work. It is not welfare to pay Americans to repair bridges, railroads, highways, schools and hospitals. If we were to transfer some of our corporate subsidies to this sort of expenditure, the nation would benefit. Workers would benefit. Perhaps several thousand CEOs would receive smaller bonuses, but several million Americans could begin bringing home paychecks again and some of our decrepit infrastructure could be revived.

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# One Must Be Tired to Achieve One's Goal

## ROSARIO CHIARAMONTE

What is life without work? That's a question that might forever go unanswered. Most people will never know what is it like not to work because working has been around for just as long as we have. Some consider a wage-paying job "work," but I bet slaves wouldn't feel that way.

Slaves worked for years with a single penny given to them. Even though they were treated beyond terribly and considered property, they still woke up every morning and went to work. These slaves were forced to work to simply survive their day-by-day lives. If they didn't work, they were not fed nor taken care of.

Convicts also were forced to work without a pay. They were not paid because it was considered a repayment to the society for committing crimes. Society felt that if you did the crime you paid the time, which is most likely agreed on throughout the world. They needed to be treated as poorly as they were so they would learn that what they had done did not benefit them in any way.

Then there were men working halfway decent paying jobs. They were hired to gather and pack up for distributing guano. They were not being paid top dollar, but considering the times they were in, it was much better than some others were experiencing. The catch to these "well paying" jobs were that these men were forced to work in terrible conditions, which came along with long hours in weather conditions that would be considered fatal. These men barely complained because the money was feeding and helping their families survive. Some of these men fell sick from the fumes that were released from scrapping this guano, but they did what they had to do to continue working throughout the day. Some of these men who built up their skill on distribution and hard labor skills eventually moved onto higher paying jobs. They were still forced to work long, hard and stressful hours, but the pay increase was definitely worth it.

Like it or not, work is something that we humans must partake in. In this day and age, it does not matter whether you are wealthy, middle class or poor; everyone is obligated to work. There are more fortunate people out there than others, but those people had to start somewhere in order to get where they are.

I can somewhat relate to what these men have gone through. No, I was not enslaved nor was I scraping bird droppings or picking cantaloupes, but I know how it feels to work as hard as possible and receive little to no acknowledgement. My situation is not half of what these men have been through, but I have experienced a job with poor work conditions and low wages.

I began working as a bus boy at a local high-end restaurant when I was about 18 years old. Always being in school and never having to work, I had no idea what life had in store for me. When I first met my new boss, I quickly picked up that he felt he was just a little better than everyone else because he was wealthier due to his high income restaurant. I refused to say anything because the income mattered most. My day started at around 7 a.m. for breakfast and ended at around midnight when we were closing up.

I was serving people all day long. My day consisted of taking customers' orders, taking orders from staff, serving these customers' food and then cleaning up after large groups of people. I worked long and hard hours with low wage and a few dollars in tips. My hard work and dedication didn't go unnoticed to my customers who saw me on a daily basis, but my boss overlooked it.

After my 19th birthday, my mother pulled a few strings and got me an interview with a dispatching company for Time Warner Cable, which was like a calling from God. With this opportunity, I would be enrolled in a union with a better paying wage and equal rights to those who were above me. With a prayer to God, I was accepted for the job. My hours were still not as good as I expected due to the late-hour shift, but it definitely beat breaking my back for no acknowledgement and low income.

After long days and consistency, I worked so hard in proving my work and dedication to further my education in this field. I wanted to learn as much as possible, so that I could eventually move up to something better. By my 20th birthday, I was accepted into the apprentice program for Local 3. I was excited yet worried because, yet again, I didn't know what to expect. Was I going to encounter yet another boss who didn't appreciate my hard work? Was this job worth the pay cut for now? These were two of the questions that ran through my mind.

My first day on the job was completely different from what I imagined; I was welcomed onto the site with open arms. I wasn't going to be treated as if everyone was better than I was because they had more experiences than I had. They were there to teach me and help me get a better understanding of what I would be doing for the rest of my life. My boss became a mentor to me, helping me with whatever I was struggling with. I knew deep inside then that he wanted me to excel in my line of work.

After a year on the job, most apprentices must be transferred to different sites, so that they can rotate around companies and be around different atmosphere. My year was coming to an end. When that day came, my boss pulled me into his office to have a word with me. He expressed that he was so proud of the work I completed, and that he saw the fight and determination in my eyes to exceed any task I was given and so took it upon himself to have my time there extended.



No one at the moment could have understood my excitement. I was finally being recognized for all the hard work, extra shifts and overtime I had put in. I felt as if someone had finally seen that I was not just a young man who wanted to make a living; I had to make a living and did anything to reach that point. I have learned that there are people who are above you, who make you feel as though you're too low beneath their level and then there are people who appreciate the work and time you have put in. I have reached the point of realizing how tired I am, but three years later into my apprentice program, I have learned that I must be tired in order to achieve my goals.

## Band Together, Get What We Deserve

### THOMAS STIMMEL JR.

In 1965, there was a man named Rob Stanley who faced an ultimatum from his father: pay rent or get out. This is when he went to the local steel mill called Interlake Steel. After being hired on the spot, he was given the worst job in the mill. Rob was to shovel taconite into the blast furnace on the overnight shift. Although the job was terrible, it paid \$2.32 an hour and that was enough for him to cover his monthly expenses. This job was mindless, thoughtless, and easy enough to teach a monkey how to do it. Rob's mere \$2.32 an hour would be equivalent to \$17.17 an hour today. Stanley was an unskilled high school graduate working at an entry-level position and earning way more than someone with the same qualifications would today. Why was this possible? He was represented by the United Steelworkers of America.

Organization of labor is the key to having a safe work environment where you also can earn a decent wage. The United Steelworkers of America demanded a decent salary for all jobs, and they got it. Workers in the fast food industry today are fighting for higher wages, but it is highly doubtful that they will succeed because they are solely represented by themselves. Without organization and labor unions to back these workers, they will never have enough negotiating power to get what they want. Only six percent of private-sector workers belong to a union, making wages easy to manipulate for the non-union world. It is a crying shame that fast food workers are expected to live on minimum wage of \$8 an hour. Especially knowing the tough economic times of current day, when the billion dollar fast food industry is able to turn a huge profit, the industry should be willing and is definitely able to pay more.

But first things first: These workers need to unite, and they need a great leader. If I knew the first thing about starting a labor union, I would be the first to sign up for the job. It's only right to be represented as a workforce and not just as cheap labor that can be replaced in the blink of an eye. Someone needs to stand up now for these people. If change doesn't happen soon, it never will, and things will only get worse. Fast food jobs, without a doubt, require much more skill than shoveling taconite into a furnace. I'd be happy to make \$17.17 an hour to shovel some stuff around all night. Working a fryer and preparing food is time consuming and physically demanding, so why not give these hard workers what they deserve? It seems as if they are on their own, and that's just not right.

The basic message is that without organized labor there will be low wages, unsafe workplaces, and easily replaceable jobs. As a member of one of the best labor unions still in existence, it's hard for me to just sit back and watch a workforce diminish and not put up a fight. With the right guidance, decision-making, and people backing you, anything is possible. It's a long fight, and I like to believe it's just beginning now and only going to get better for the future. Everyone needs to band together and bring

the power in numbers; then, and only then, will there be results. Let us take back the power together and get what we deserve! Enough people have been cheated out of so much by those who have everything. Let's get organized.

**WE BUILD NEW YORK**

# The City I Lived In

## PAUL YOUNGFLEISCH

In the early 1970s, I grew up in a city that television portrayed as dark, gritty, and dangerous; the city where murders, burglars, and rapists were hiding under broken streetlights and in dark alleys. In my eyes that portrayal was as far from the truth as it could possibly be.

I grew up in a city, New York City, that was bankrupt, but to my childhood friends and me, we were rich; we were the kings and queens of our blocks. People had pride in where they grew up and lived: “Brooklyn Rules.” It was a point of pride to have your immediate family, uncles, and grandparents living in a four-room railroad flat with a bathroom in the hall. At that time, the city had a different beat: Graffiti on trains was its paint scheme and the vibe in Times Square was not Disney.

The residents of New York City received an education in and out of school; we learned what blocks not to walk down, how to check your seat before sitting down on a train, and to never carry what little money you had in your wallet (we stuck it in our socks). All of the kids who lived on our block played on that block from dawn until the streetlights came on; a Spaulding and a taped-up broom handle provided endless hours of entertainment. People worked in the neighborhoods where they lived, building and keeping the economy in the neighborhoods. In the early ’70s, the manufacturing was still in the neighborhoods of the outer boroughs and the financial district was in the city.

My uncle Robert worked as a brewer at a Rheingold Brewery where they had three taps in the bathroom: hot, cold, and beer. He would come home every Friday with two cases of scratched and dented beer. Honestly, I think he did the damage himself, so he could bring it home; for him, it was the greatest job in the world. My brother-in-law’s father was the president of the Longshoreman’s Union Chapter in Brooklyn. When ships docked in Brooklyn, for some reason all of the neighborhood kids started wearing the same kind of sneakers.

The tide started changing in the late ’70s. Mayor Ed Koch was laying off a majority of city employees, and the building of the World Trade Center (WTC) had begun. When the WTC was finished, it dealt a deathblow to manufacturing in Manhattan and the outer boroughs. When Rheingold Brewery closed down in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, my uncle was a different person; he had to go work in the city as a doorman and was miserable day in and day out; he had never had to commute by train, not like that. I also remember seeing my brother-in-law’s father collecting food and money for the out-of-work longshoremen and how he fought to keep the last piers open in Brooklyn. It felt like a black cloud had moved in over the city.

As a child, I did not understand the effects of closing factories or what the building of the WTC would have on the economy, I just saw my family members and friends' fathers struggling to find jobs, changing from happy-go-lucky uncles into grumpy old men. The building of the WTC was not the only reason for the changes in New York City's economy, but it was a focal point for it. As I see it, as the wealthy class won the battle for the city. The building of the towers was a coordinated effort to push the working and poor class out of lower Manhattan. The Rockefellers, the government, etc., planned and succeeded in breaking the Longshoreman's Union's hold over lower Manhattan and its ports, moving them to Brooklyn and inevitably to New Jersey.

The city's power players were able to use the laws of eminent domain to seize and knock down buildings that were in the way of building the towers, helping to raise property values in lower Manhattan. To me, it was a stamp in time when the wealthy stepped on the working class. Events continued in that same direction; in 1993, Democratic President Bill Clinton – who claimed to be for the working class – signed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into law, which only helped big business. All of these situations pose the question: *How* can the average person fight the push by wealthy and big business from building a “WTC” for one side of society, while it pushes the rest of us to the far edge of society?

There is no simple answer, but we as the working class need to start somewhere. At this point, the fight has to be at the grassroots level and the only place to go from there is up. We need to get the working class to step up and say *no more*, have them put an active hand on their future, start voting, join unions, and get more involved in their communities. We need to speak to anyone who will listen; basically, we need to but the “dem” back into democracy and let those in government or hoping to be in government know that we the working class will not stand for it anymore. I do not want to be that uncle who hangs his head when he comes home from work because society broke me.

# Mother Dear

## KIMBERLY MCBRIDE

Mother Dear  
Life is  
Unfair ...  
Line when the fare  
On my Metrocard  
Just ain  
T  
There OOOO  
Why "O" why  
Is life so  
Unfair ...  
Like when the transit worker  
Yelling pay yo  
Fare ...  
Why can't I just  
Beat the train  
Fair ...  
Daughter Dear  
Life is  
Unfair ...

# My Panorama of the City of New York

## LOUIS ALVAREZ

The Panorama of the City of New York is housed in the Queens Museum. It was created for the opening of the 1964 World's Fair. It takes up 9,335 square feet of exhibit space and is arguably the largest architectural model in the world. The model accurately depicts every structure within the city up until 1992 when it was last revised. It's a work of art and fine craftsmanship. You can stare at it for hours admiring the city's layout; it's a map lover's dream. I appreciate this model in all its accurate detail and I think of all the changes since it was last updated.

There have been many buildings and structures erected since then as well as many razed to the ground through demolition or destruction. The emptiness of the missing twin-towers is the biggest change I've seen within my lifetime. And although we see this static grand scale model with its thousands of tiny little pieces representing where we live and work, I see a work in progress for the last 400 years.

I envision the whole model as a landscape with green rolling hills, forests and streams. Inwood Park on the northern tip of Manhattan is the last place on the island left, undeveloped since before the European colonization. I see the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam with its northern border constructed of a wooden fence located on today's Wall Street. I see tobacco fields in an area cultivated by the Lenape people who lived here before Europeans. The same rural area soon to be the outskirts of the town inhabited by the Dutch was finally named Greenwich Village by the conquering English.

Up in the Bronx, I see fields and farms belonging to the family of Jonas Bronck in the mid-1600s. I see the 19th century town hall in the borough of Queens on today's Northern Boulevard off Main Street's Flushing. Across the street is the 17th century Quaker House, still standing as the oldest house of worship in the city.

I see the area of Central Park in the early 1800s before it was an actual park with shantytowns, slaughterhouses and rock outcroppings creating poor conditions for farming. On the same footprint as the NY Public Library, I see a large reservoir. Feeding this reservoir is a high aqueduct spanning the river between the Bronx and Manhattan bringing fresh water from the Croton River in Westchester County.

Further south, I see the City of Brooklyn in the 1890s with its grand homes and Hansom wagons rolling down cobble stone streets. I see the footings for the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge, being dug out by men working in wooden caissons, contending with horrid conditions and occasionally suffering from the bends. Gone is Ebbets field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. There are many more places, which have come and gone or remain as a testament to the workers who risked their lives to build this great city.



New York City is a work in progress; it's been a collaborative effort from multiple generations of laborers and highly skilled construction workers. I take pride knowing I'm a part of that effort. Think of Robert Moses staring at a map and drawing lines, erasing old ones, connecting major roadways and creating parks, or Santiago Calatrava, the architect and engineer, designing the future transit hub at ground zero.

Europe's cathedrals were built this way; this city is our cathedral. It's a community art project in the grandest scale. I like to imagine what someone from centuries past would think of what has become of the city they once lived in.

The city built up with huge skyscrapers or manmade mountains; distribution plants, bringing lighting to our homes; manmade tunnels hundreds of feet below the ground, feeding us clean drinking water; horseless wagons and trucks on roadways made of concrete and tar; moving pictures on the facades of buildings around Times Square; underground railroads powered by some invisible force called electricity; giant flying contraptions powered by roaring thunder.

That's what's become of the ongoing project we call NYC; a city created by dreamers, architects and engineers; a city built by the hard work of construction workers; that's my Panorama; that's my canvas; that's my home.

# Garment District

## ELIZABETH DE LA CRUZ

The Garment District is a neighborhood in Manhattan from 5th Ave. to 9th Ave. and 34th St. to 42nd St. Both my parents worked in the Garment District. I remember going to the different factories and being amazed at the hectic pace. I was amazed by the patternmakers and seamstresses turning out beautiful, fashionable garments. This neighborhood has been known as the Garment District since the late 1800s, and at one point in history, was the center for fashion manufacturing and design in the United States and the world. However, over the last few decades, the Garment District, and manufacturing in New York has experienced a decline. This is mostly due to manufacturing in the U.S. becoming less competitive and as a result jobs being outsourced.

New York City first became a leader in the garment industry by making clothes for slaves working in the southern plantations. It was cheaper for the plantation owners to buy clothes than to have the slaves make them. Tailors also made clothing for sailors and western prospectors. The garment workforce, at this time, was mainly Eastern European immigrants and by the late 1890s about 75 percent of the garment field workforce was Jewish. With the supply of cheap labor, the amount of clothing produced in the Garment District increased 6 times in the 1870s and by 1910, 70 percent of women's clothing and 40 percent of men's clothing produced in the U.S. was made in New York City.

However, workers were not seeing the benefits of this now powerful industry. Sweatshops became the norm in the Garment District and other parts of New York City. Unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union fought for worker rights and safety. Through strikes and bringing to light the poor working conditions, they were able to improve wages, benefits and the workplace.

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union was once one of the biggest labor unions in the U.S. The membership was once predominately Eastern European. However with the "new wave" of immigrants, 1900s to 1960s, the membership changed to mostly Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Mexicans and Chinese. In the years following World War II, the union had less and less in common with the new immigrants and won very few battles in workers' wages and benefits. They slowly lost their power in the Garment District and the industry and through various mergers with other unions, the ILGWU is now known as UNITE.

The Garment District has seen a dramatic change in the type of businesses that now make up the neighborhood. The Garment District peaked, economically in the mid-1970s. Because of outsourcing to countries that produce goods cheaper and technological advancements, there are fewer and fewer garment producing factories in the Garment District. A few years ago, some of the area's leaders proposed changing

the name to something much trendier. They wanted to do this because they wanted to attract designers, high-tech companies and other creative types of businesses. In the end, they decided that the historical value of the name was more important.

Three years ago, the Garment District was rezoned to include the Hudson Yards and the city's lawmakers decided to allow residential developments and hotels that pay more for real estate square foot than a garment firm could afford to pay. Now these same streets are being crowded with luxury residential high-rises, and I can't help but feel sad for this once powerful neighborhood.

# Struggle

## MARC PREPETIT

Every day I wake up. My dreams struggle to become reality. Time flies chasin' the dream.

I struggle to believe in whose reality I am living. Is it mine or the world around me?

Running with the wolves. A New York state of mind. Trying to make it here.

# Harry Van Arsdale and Electchester

## JOHNNY ZOUMBOULIS

Having lived in Electchester, an affordable housing complex given to middle-class communities, for four years, I was always intrigued by the whole concept of how this sprawling complex came about. Who started this and for what reason was this built? My union provided its members with affordable housing and made certain that Electchester wasn't turned into an investment opportunity. It is a cooperative urban landscape meant to bring people into the middle class, and one man was the architect of it all: Harry Van Arsdale was a visionary, and his vision, his art, revolved around blue-collar workers. He wanted his members to be active in their community; a community who votes for politicians who are labor friendly, where neighbors were not just neighbors but co-workers all in the same boat, fighting for a middle-class wage and managed by union workers, not by big corporate money interests.

Van Arsdale tried to ensure a social and economic balance for his union members for whom he fought hard, ever since he took over Local 3's International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in 1933. In 1949, he turned a golf course into a middle class community of 38 buildings that gave 5,500 people affordable housing, which was a lot cheaper than the market rate. He wanted a close knit community of unionized electricians where the strength of a union lies in a community in which we stick together, and we live in a place where people aren't disconnected from their fellow brothers and sisters. The market for affordable housing is sparse in New York. While we have some of the highest rents in the world along with a shortage of affordable housing, many decide to rent rather than to buy for reasons such as, not being able to afford to buy a house, not wanting to be tied down to a mortgage, or not being able to qualify to purchase a mortgage to begin with.

When I first got accepted into Local 3, I had been engaged for three months and with a marriage a year away; we needed to start looking for a place to live. We started looking at apartments all over Queens and we could not believe how expensive the rents were (and are) for a studio apartment in a decent area, as it averaged out to about a \$1,000 a month. Despite all the talk about newly built "affordable housing," our experience was that these alleged homes were very hard to find, especially since I was making \$11 an hour. Fortunately, a journeyman I was working with told me about a housing community that Local 3 owns, which gives apprentices priority in helping them get in, knowing they don't make enough money to be able to rent on the current rent market – that place is Electchester.

Electchester is a necessary good in an otherwise evil market. In 1951, New York City had a shortage of housing and the land for Electchester was purchased after a delay caused by the Korean War. According to the "Electrical Union World" in May of 1949, Local 3 began the process by taking advantage of recently adopted public housing

laws, using a combination of union funds, contractor funds and member investments to get the project off the ground. In the Joshua B. Freeman's *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* he discusses how Robert Moses was the "master builder" at that time and also was labeled a notorious union foe, since the Wagner term, when he refused to adhere to fair working conditions for the zoo workers in 1931. Moses needed private sponsors to support his Title I project and it was difficult for him to get private funding, especially since he wanted to build in areas that many investors did not view in their best interests.

As a result, the main support group he turned to was labor, even though he hated organized labor; however, Moses above all else wanted to get things done. Thus, the financing of Electchester would be done with private funds. Van Arsdale was able to work with a person who hated unions but he kept his enemies close and was able to put union members to work with respectable middle class wages. So, the irony is that for Electchester to be built it required an anti-union-Moses in the process and this ultimately softened his image.

Thanks to Harry Van Arsdale Jr. I was able to find an affordable, spacious 1,000 square foot, two-bedroom apartment on the fourth floor with a parking spot for \$1,080 in a clean building. The building also is very diverse; growing up in Astoria, it was a predominately Greek neighborhood and *here* I have many Asian, Latino and African-Americans neighbors. I'm proud to live in a wonderful multicultural, multiethnic neighborhood that is an expression of Local 3 and Flushing and beyond.

Van Arsdale was an artist of social culture; he transformed economical need into a community circumstance that would engrain in the members of Local 3, a more tight knit union feeling. Some of his hopes for Electchester being made up solely of Local 3 members did not last. Now due to lawsuits, roughly half of Electchester is still Local 3, while the other half consists of members from other unions, as well as people from all walks of life. His vision was not to have us succumb to a disconnected society where the rich live in the suburbs and the poor in the urban areas. He wanted us to all come together as one – at home – and as a union.

## New York City: Non-Fordist

### MATTHEW DARCY

During the first four decades of the 20th century, New York City was significantly underrepresented in economic areas that had the most growth. From the 1900s to the 1940s, the country's major industries were based around the development of fuel, rubber, and other parts and technologies used to accommodate the automobile. New York City was a bystander in these industries, and its citizens were bystanders in the consumption of these products. In 1950, every 6.9 residents in New York City owned an automobile in contrast to the national average of 3.8. In essence, New York City was a non-Fordist city during the age of Ford.

Many workers in New York found flexible production jobs that they believed to be more rewarding than those in the automotive industry; for example, they preferred being machinists working with complex equipment that required more skill and experience. The city was a melting pot of scientists, engineers, and highly skilled workers. Since the days of Thomas Edison, the development of electronics, components, and equipment took place in New York, and we were the pioneers. With the skill and intelligence of its workers, the city played a major part in the development of these electronics. Many jobs that city residents took were seasonal. For example, the garment district had seasonal employment for specialty jobs, such as the need for fur garments and other warm clothes for women that sold during the fall and winter.

Due to the different types of manufacturing, New York City was a non-Fordist city. Millions of residents lived with a union worker; these union workers helped to expand public services such as the arts and hospitals while forming allies with civil rights organizations and black groups to fight discrimination. As the union workers in New York grew in strength and numbers as they fought for equality for all workers in the 1950s, a form of social democracy was created that strengthened the city's middle class.

According to Joshua B. Freeman in *Working-Class New York*, "Organized labor played a critical role in creating the homegrown version of social democracy that made life in New York unlike anyplace else in the United States." Unfortunately, the social democracy of the 1950s differs from today's political and economic structure in New York. Before, the working class was able to organize people and help make a difference, while today it seems that the people with the most money are the ones who are able to bring about change in the city. The people and organizations with the most money also are the ones who have political support. Yet even now, if organized labor were to regain the strength, numbers, and power that it possessed during the 1950s, a social democracy could work again, and the middle class could band together to make positive changes in the city.

**Work Cited**

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# Immigration and New York City

## PAUL DESILVA

Immigration is an important part of the history of the labor movement, especially the immigration boom now and the similarities and controversy that goes along with it, like in the past.

Immigration has influenced the labor movement immensely, especially in New York. New York was and still is a melting pot for people all over the world. Up until 1892 immigrants came through the Castle Garden, and then Ellis Island opened. America appealed to foreigners for many reasons. The two main reasons: First, because they wanted a better life and thought that the streets were paved with gold; second, they were escaping from a hard life in their country – usually political or religious unrest, war, and unemployment.

The northeast as a whole was influenced by the boom of immigration; New York was affected the most. There were so many jobs to employ hundreds of thousands in the concentrated zone of the metropolitan area. All kinds of jobs were available in manufacturing, retail, construction, garment making, food markets, factories, mills, real estate, dock workers and many other skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Immigrants influenced and affected the labor movement in many ways. One way was that the boom of people itself had made more jobs. More people means more products, more food, transportation, housing, garments and everything else people needed. These were hard jobs with long hours, poor conditions, and low pay. The working-class people, immigrants or not, strived to advance the interest of working men and women. The labor movement was their answer; organized labor was the key to securing a better life without discrimination and inequality.

The immigrants of today and in the past have many things in common. They both are punished with stereotyping and prejudice. The immigrants of today are coming here for the same reasons as our forefathers had. They want a better life for their families and a chance at opportunities for employment. I can't understand why people look at immigrants as negative, or that they do not belong and we should close the borders. Immigrants have made great contributions to this country. The country was founded and built by them historically, and today they make some of the best teachers and even doctors and work in many other essential occupations. Immigrants are still a very important entity to this day and unless you are Native American, then you have immigrants in your family tree somewhere.

## New York City: 1930s to Present Day

### KEITH SMITH

After taking a college course called “The Political Economy of New York,” I now understand how New York City functioned from the 1930s to the present day. I was particularly interested in Joshua Freeman’s book *Working Class New York* because he describes NYC during the 1940s as a “Social Democracy Polity,” which means that the working class was no longer accepting the reality of the meek public resources that were afforded to them. To overcome the lack of resources, the working class of New York along with “labor groups and their allies fought to expand public services.”

Through their struggles, hard work, and social support, the working class made New York City into a reformed society of their own. While they met certain “Quality of Life” standards, the city was coming to terms with racial and gender equality. Through the years as this “Social Democracy Polity” progressed, it was *really* the labor movement that pushed the city along, as it was built on the backs of hard working Americans and immigrants. During the 1940s, the middle class became extremely powerful with almost “one union member per household . . . [They formed] and operated transit systems, colleges, hospitals, and even radio stations.” One of the greatest institutions they created was the non-for-profit City Center for the typical working class individual. The middle class believed that they should be able to enjoy the same pleasures, such as the arts and entertainment, that the wealthy enjoyed and at a reasonable price. These “Quality of Life” projects and strategies are key to the improvement of residents’ wellbeing and building the social circles that developed in the city.

As New York City continued to transform, the 1950s and 1960s brought dramatic changes to its labor movement, including economic and social shifts that hurt its development. One major enemy of the middle class was inflation, which disrupted health and housing programs. During the 1970s, it became so bad that the city’s economy almost redlined. During this “fiscal crisis,” as it was commonly known, people thought that the city was spending more than it could afford on social services. In actuality, the situation was more complex and confusing than the public thought. During 1975, it was the “refusal of major financial institutions to continue to lend the city money; for decades, New York’s municipal debt had grown” (Freeman 256). The common practice of financing capital construction with long-term bonds “accounted for much of the borrowing, and from the mid-’60s on, more and more of it consisted of short-term notes, used to fill holes in the city budget” (Freeman 256). The out-of-control borrowing from commercial banks made the banks more reluctant to lend money because none of it was being paid back. For example, “the bankruptcy of department store chain W. T. Grant, severe problems in the airline and real estate industries, and heavy Third World lending left them with massive potential losses, threatening their capital base” (Freeman 257).

By 1975, New York's Commercial banks had loaned the city over a billion dollars; they were determined to make their money back, so they "quietly sold off some of their New York paper," with the goal of bringing in more individual investors who would buy the municipal notes at bargain prices. For instance, some notes worth as much as \$25,000 were going for \$10,000. As the financial leaders were trying to reform the debt of New York City, they saw this as "an opportunity to undo the past, to restructure New York along the lines more to their liking than those drawn by decades of liberalism and labor action" (Freeman 258). The financial elite backed by Mayor Beame implemented an overhaul of the city's budget by creating "a program of municipal austerity, including a freeze or cutback in the number of city workers, an increase in their productivity, reductions in capital spending, cutbacks in city services, and increased fees and taxes" (Freeman 258).

In order to keep New York City from defaulting, Governor Hugh Carey came up with the Municipal Assistance Corporation, or "Big MAC." This program "could sell up to three billion dollars in bonds, using the proceeds to retire city notes" (Freeman 260). These two new ways of settling the "fiscal crisis" led to protests and strikes across the city; it separated the "haves and have-nots" even further than ever before. The banks and politicians basically told the public to 'suck it up; the suffering will only last for a short time.' While the city was in a downward spiral, banks gained control of the policies and reforms being handed down to the residents of the city.

The banks took the power from the mayor and imposed a new political system. To further stave off the default, they demanded that the unions put their members' pension budgets into municipal bonds. This was a huge financial risk to their members' retirement funds; if New York City went into bankruptcy, all would be lost. By gambling with \$2.8 billion of the city's union members' retirement pensions, New York was able fund its public services while reestablishing its economy.

As the city rose from the brink of full collapse, someone needed to be blamed for the problem and to be punished. Historically, the poor have often been made the scapegoats, and in William Tabb's *The Long Default*, he uses the phrase "Political Economy of Blame" to explain how politicians were in business to point the blame on the public sector and low-income households in order to protect themselves and their quality of life. Through budget cuts on social services and layoffs, they brought New York City to its knees. The politicians used misleading figures and numbers as propaganda to take away jobs and reduce benefits, as they were looking for any reason to keep knocking the public sector further down the ladder.

As a result, they targeted the poor and penalized them for their property. To pay for the reparations for the gigantic hole they dug in New York's budget, they restructured their tax program and falsified documents to show that its welfare system was more of a burden than it really was. The private sector had many other plans for the public sector. To create benefits for themselves, they reduced corporate taxes and gained subsidies for "job growth." In addition, "[T]he private sector has seen the growth of the government employment and of municipal unionism as a threat, fearing the

“demonstration effect,” and also wanting to raise its profits by transferring resources from the public sector to its own coffers” (Tabb 67). They created steep cutbacks in the “social wage,” which is a term used for the other “income” we receive from the state such as: “government services, public education, health care, housing subsidies, parks, museums and so on” (Tabb 67). As a result of the private sector’s failure to prevent the nearly total collapse of the city’s budget, we see who is actually to blame for not being able to balance the funds of the public sector effectively.

The targeting of the poor and low-income people lets the phrase the “Political Economy of Blame” shine through as the orchestration of “New” New York City as well as “New” America. Tabb points out that “The Koch Administration, housing organizers charge, [was] trying to freeze poor people to death – or force them out of the city as part of its transformation strategy” (93). Through the revitalization of these dilapidated neighborhoods, a new neighborhood was created with new residents, and most importantly, new money. Now New York is a city that invites the rich while kicking to the curb the very people who made this city the great place it is – a curb well outside of its limits. Tabb discusses how a poor, low-income neighborhood are “recycled” by “dislocating poor people through gentrification” (89) and upgrading properties to fit the needs of upper-middleclass taxpayers. The methods used to accomplish this are not always legal; they border on plain-old human right violations as well as murder. As time progresses, the quality of life standards in New York change with each new social class that calls it home.

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# Message of Mockery

## ROBERT LEONARD

The High Line is rail bed that once heard the roars of freight feeding the industrialization of New York City; it was a symbolic representation of the golden age of the middle class that has been gentrified to suit the needs of the privileged. Twenty seconds after walking up the steps of the High Line, it became apparent to me that the goal of this development is to establish a neighborhood isolated from its surroundings. As an observer, this is visually apparent by looking at the Dubai style high-rises resting on the face of the walkway, while older industrial buildings and brick apartments are only half a block away. It is truly a tale of two cities. While some may view the High Line as a beacon of hope for the redevelopment of the west side, I see it as a tool used to force communities out of neighborhoods and change the landscape of the city.

While the High Line is a public space, it invokes feelings of hostility towards outsiders. You may visit but in reality, you're not welcome there. I watched the expressions of shock from some of the regulars as our class marched into their turf. I wouldn't be surprised if next week they had private police patrolling the High Line; I believe the reason the space does not *feel* public is because the average person does not fit in. Picture this: When you think of a public space, you may imagine a subway or public park. And what comes to mind when you think of a subway or public park? Answer: Dirty, crowded and used by the average Joe. Meanwhile the High Line invokes a feeling, a sort of return to the aristocracy. The windows of the surrounding residential buildings are all large and are welcome to public peering. They scream, "Look at the excess I have acquired and look what you can buy with massive wealth." It is a glorification of all of problems with distribution of wealth in this country. Even the landscape and materials that are used is *all* high end, and are not the typical brick or concrete that would be in a normal public space.

The use of older industrial infrastructures may be visually appealing; however, it will always carry consequences for community residents. Builders, to increase property rates and returns on investment properties, use rapid re-zoning and redevelopment of neighborhoods like this as a marketing tool. This is why the High Line project was key to the redevelopment of the west side. Both private and public money were involved in the development. On the private side, it would be a return investment, and upon completion it changed the desirability and property value of the surrounding area, essentially forcing the gentrification of the neighborhood. You can see this not only by the number of high rises that followed the span of the High Line, but by the amount of new construction, which would birth new residential towers. I counted 10 to 12 brand new construction footprints across a 10-block span, and all are being constructed at the same time. I feel disgusted by what the High Line represents; hidden behind the stones and a stainless steel railing is a message of mockery from the ranks of the wealthy elite.

## High Line: Personal Backyard?

### ARDAM ANTONETTY

The New York High Line was a beautiful class trip that, I, as a New Yorker would have never went to alone. Almost *immediately* I felt out of place in my own city being in Chelsea Market with the Google employees and tourists strolling through the area. After the brief experience of the Chelsea crowd, we were on our way to the High Line.

The High Line was a rail line that serviced New York City and more importantly its industrial district. Walking through the path was pretty amazing only because I kept imagining just how the High Line looked with a train running through it. Think about how awesome a train running through a building in the 1930s would look like. The High Line viaduct was a portion of the New York Connecting Railroad to the West Side Line in 1934. It originally ran from 34th St. to St. John's Park Terminal at Spring Street and was designed to go through the center of the blocks rather than over the avenue; it connected directly to factories and warehouses, allowing trains to load and unload their cargo inside buildings. Milk, meat, produce, and raw and manufactured goods could be transported and unloaded without disturbing traffic on the streets. This reduced the load for the Bell Laboratory Building, which was housing the Westbeth Artists Community since 1970, as well as for the former Nabisco plant in the Chelsea Market building, which were served from protected sidings within the structures.

I don't feel that the High Line viaduct, as it has been remade, was meant to be a public place. Though it is open to the public and has wheelchair accessibility the way a public park should have, while walking through the areas it just is not welcoming to the general public. The professor was giving background information on some of the buildings that surround the park and how some people are paying upwards of \$5,000 a square foot for the condos. At that price, one would think that the park is a personal backyard for the rich to stroll merrily and feel like masters of their universe. It definitely has a ritzy feel to it with all the high rise condominiums encircling the High Line.

The change of the High Line from a mega useful delivery system to a fancy park only tells you history repeats itself and screams: "The rich can have and do anything they want, like change a city and its mechanics!" From aiding the working class and the city, the High Line was turned into a park that has no practical use other than allowing someone to charge triple the amount for prime real estate. Slowly but surely, the middle and working classes are getting phased out and the rich upper class are swooping in and taking over the city.

New York always has swayed towards money, as evident in other projects and dilemmas like Central Park, and the fiscal crisis of 1970s. The city has always followed the money; if the tycoons needed supplies at blazing fast speeds, the city morphed into a personal train station where the train would stop inside the building to load off the product. Now the tycoons (upper class) want a swanky place to live with a view of something amazing. High-rises pop up everywhere, which enable breathtaking views of the panorama of the city as well as the other boroughs *only* for the wealthy.

# ARTWORK



## Index for the Artwork

### LONG EXPOSURE PHOTOGRAPHS

These works were created as part of the public art class with the electricians at the Joint Board, where students were able to work with artist Sol Aramendi to expand on lighting techniques in photography, including long exposures, to “paint with light” creating self-portraits and other experiments with the medium.

1. “Light Man 1” by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee
2. “Light Man Scribble” by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee
3. “Apparition” by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee
4. “LI Expwy” by Kim Spicer, Lou Alvarez , Angel Corchado and Michael Yee
5. “Dragon Flames” by Angel Corchado, Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, and Michael Yee
6. “Doc McStuffinStein” by Kim Spicer

“Workers’ Pavilion” by Bobby Andrew

Catalyzed by Social Practice Queens, a partnership between Queens College and the Queens Museum, the idea for the Workers Art Coalition grew out of the public art class Barrie Cline teaches at the center. WAC engages in public art projects where the worker is invited to create works of art and artisanship, and to represent themselves and their labor. Here this work culminated in a “Workers’ Pavilion” created on the anniversary of the World’s Fair commemorating a thwarted attempt to have a Temple of Labor for the ’39 World Fair.

“Shanty” by Stephanie Lawal and Bobby Andrew

“Plumber’s Collage” by Tameeka Gwyn

“Caged Light” by Shaun Brohan



"Light Man 1" by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee



"Light Man Scribble" by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee



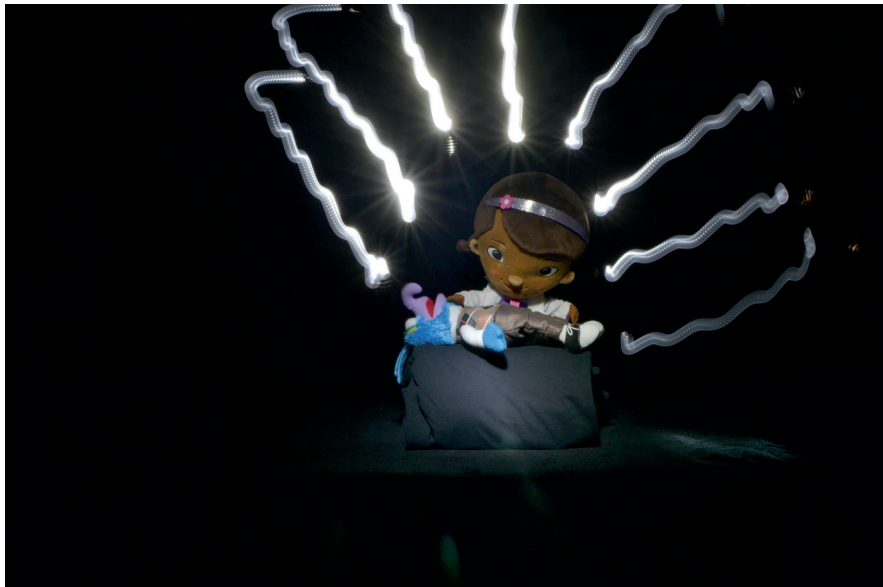
"Apparition" by Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, Angel Corchado and Michael Yee



"LI Expwy" by Kim Spicer, Lou Alvarez , Angel Corchado and Michael Yee



"Dragon Flames" by Angel Corchado, Lou Alvarez, Kim Spicer, and Michael Yee



"Doc McStuffinStein" by Kim Spicer

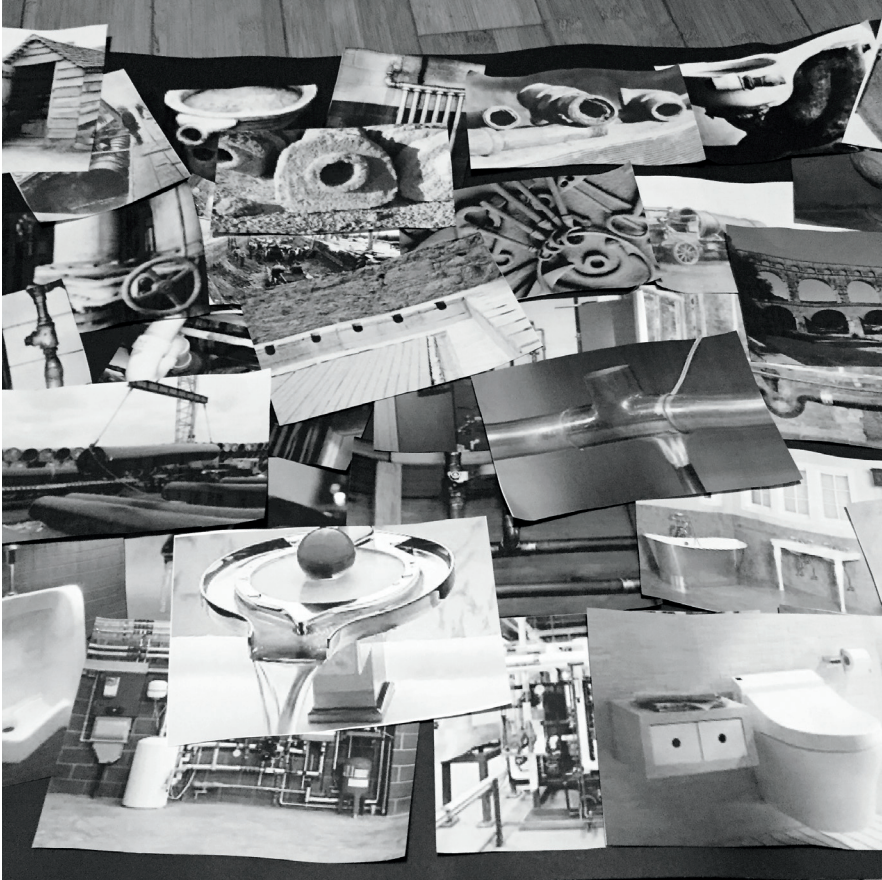


"Workers' Pavilion" by Bobby Andrew





"Shanty" by Stephanie Lawal and Bobby Andrew



"Plumber's Collage" by Tameeka Gwyn



"Caged Light" by Shaun Brohan

# POWER

# The Art of Negotiating

## BARRY LIPTON

Over the course of my 25-year career at the Newspaper Guild, I negotiated approximately 160 collective bargaining agreements. I found that the single most important principle to adhere to, the one principle that was most likely to bring about a satisfactory outcome, was to never let the person leading negotiations on the other side of the table control the dialogue.

Trying to ensure this was an art form. You couldn't start out by being abrasive or by giving your opponent the sense that you were bullying him or her. There was always time later, if necessary, to become more aggressive and domineering. How one began the process often foretold the chances of being successful by the time the negotiation was over.

The first thing you had to be able to do was to read and size up the persons you would be having the dialogue with across the table and find a way to neutralize them if you perceived them as difficult.

In one of my early experiences as the chief bargainer for my union, I came up against a young, very aggressive, vice president of labor relations for the Daily News. He had a horrible reputation, having decimated several unions at the paper during a strike just a few years before. When I noticed that he wore elevated shoes and a toupee, in addition to smoking a large cigar, I knew I would be dealing with a person who was really insecure at heart. He had a habit of walking into the bargaining room and just standing there until all of the members of the union's bargaining committee sat down and then he remained silent. It was his way of intimidating them. My solution was simple: I lit up a cigar of my own and remained standing when he entered, and I only sat down after he did. He clearly understood what I was doing and seemed to respect me for it. It proved to be the beginning of a productive relationship.

Another important principle was to always keep in mind where you wanted to end up. This required developing layers and layers of issues you were willing to strip away to get to the union's important concerns.

I had a contentious negotiation with Consumers Reports Magazine, where the chief bargainer was intent on eliminating negotiated annual wage increases and replacing them with a system whereby the union would simply negotiate a pool of money the employer had to spend on increases, but giving the employer the unilateral right to determine which workers would get an increase and how much it would be.

No matter how hard we tried, our attempts at normal dialogue on the issue would not go anywhere. It was then I went into high gear and spent session after session, week after week, relentlessly and seemingly unreasonably pounding away at a list of union demands I knew they would never agree to. My objective was to wear them down, and it worked. Once they finally indicated some willingness to begin to talk constructively about the wage issue, I suddenly switched gears and became extremely cooperative, indicating that we would temporarily put aside the other issues that had frustrated them. In the meantime, we explored ways to resolve the wage issues. They breathed a sigh of relief and we proceeded to reach an agreement.

When I took office, I realized it was important to try to develop relationships away from the table with the executives I would be dealing with. I made the effort to reach out and get to know these people before we found ourselves in the adversarial roles we had to assume during bargaining. Phone calls to say hello and the occasional drink or lunch, when we could relax in one other's company and get to know everyone better, went a long way in establishing a degree of trust and making it possible to be able to talk to others.

I even made it a point to invite all of the management people to the Guild's annual holiday party that was held at Guild headquarters and attended by scores of Guild members. This gave both the management people and the employees we represented time to relax and socialize together away from the workplace. I liked to think that on occasion it contributed to making problem solving a bit easier.

In a broader sense, I think that some of the principles I have mentioned might be employed in creative efforts designed to attract and involve people. Very often, the attempt will be similar to the goals I had in bargaining: to interest and involve people and to assimilate them into the process.

# Open Letter to Mayor DeBlasio

## DON A. WELLS

Dear Mayor DeBlasio,

I am a proud member of the Democratic Party and a resident of District 18. I have seen first-hand the adverse effects that the insufficiency of the minimum wage has had on some individuals of the community and society in particular and the economy in general. The individuals to whom I refer are in my community of Crown Heights, and while they are in the minority, they form a large number nonetheless. With these adverse effects in mind, I am requesting a moment of your time to read this letter that touches on my concerns after reading an article in the Daily News of Sept. 10, 2014, titled “NYC Mayor Wants Corporate Welfare Queens to Pay A Living Wage.”

The article mentioned that you, Mr. Mayor, stood in solidarity with the fast food workers of this city and strongly suggested that the corporations pay their employees at a higher rate. I am of the opinion that this increase is long overdue and would be extremely beneficial to the needy parties involved. I applaud you for the proposal of this bold and brave legislation.

Although you may be familiar with these two concepts, please permit me to explain what Pareto Efficiency and Utilitarian Efficiency are. Pareto efficiency is the brainchild of an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto, who lived from 1848 to 1923. His philosophy was to maximize consumer surplus (the difference between reservation price and the price at which one buys or sells) by allowing consumers to buy what they want. He also was of the belief that no one should be made worse off than he or she is, even to make society better. Therefore, the fundamentals of Pareto Efficiency do not support assistance for the poor. Utilitarianism, on the other hand, is a form of economic efficiency that is far more beneficial to society than Pareto. It is based on the belief that sharing the wealth from rich to poor is in the best form of social equality. Jeremy Bentham, a well-renowned British economist who lived from 1748 to 1832, invented this theory. It measures overall happiness, and the primary beneficiaries are the less fortunate of a civilized society.

Naturally, raising the minimum wage is the Utilitarian approach and will most certainly favor the general public. It would increase every employee’s happiness and heighten morale in the workforce, which by extension would translate into a stronger economy. Consumers would be afforded an increase in spending power to satisfy their necessities and some desires. The additional acquisition of goods and services would serve as a catalyst for financial turnover and positive economic movement. In most parts of the United States, a meager minimum wage of \$8 an hour may sustain low income families but not in New York City, one of the most expensive cities to live in.

The intended legislation of an hourly increase to \$11.75 by government-subsidized corporations, which totals in excess of \$3.9 billion annually, will minimize and perhaps even eliminate dependency on public assistance programs like food stamps as a fundamental means of survival. Instead, this would free up government revenue that could be allocated to other areas such as infrastructural development, health care, education and numerous equally vital areas that require capital. In Crown Heights, for example, there is a desperate need for libraries and staff to facilitate early childhood development programs. The existing facilities that provide the programs are under-equipped and under-staffed and cannot accommodate the transitioning of young people into well-rounded adults.

I think that in time, a vast majority of my fellow New Yorkers will come to appreciate this daring endeavor and realize that it wasn't just a spur-of-the-moment decision, but one in which you invested a considerable amount of thought. I also am of the opinion that even the naysayers will reap the benefits of your labor when it comes to fruition. I do realize, however, that it will be some time before this process is finalized.

Let me conclude by saying: A job well done, and I am excited about your vision and the direction that you are taking this great city.

Your humble constituent and concerned citizen,

Don A. Wells



# Standing Up For Our Rights

## WILLIAM STRONG

What would you do if I told you there would be major consequences if you voted a certain way in politics? How would you feel if I made it seem you and your family would be out of a job and have no source of income if you voted for the wrong person? The United States of America stands on the ideals that we have every right to vote for whomever or whatever we believe in. So then, why were these bullying tactics used for a union vote at the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tenn.?

Workers were given the right to vote whether they wanted to go union. But before they were given this vote, politicians stepped in and used scare tactics to persuade them not to go union. Currently, many politicians are against labor unions and they are definitely against the idea of having these workers unionize. Before the voting process took place, Republican U.S. Senator Bob Corker began claiming that a new product line would come to the plant if workers voted against the union and that if they voted to unionize, the new product line would be lost. This claim put fear into the workers who thought there would be less work at the factory, which would lead to job cuts. Volkswagen officials denied these allegations and Senator Corker was never able to show any evidence that this was true, but the fear was already planted in the minds of workers.

Another powerful Republican legislator, Bo Watson, held a news conference two days before the vote and declared that a vote to unionize would be “un-American” and stated the Republican-controlled state legislature would be disinclined toward providing aid that would assist in the expansion of production at the plant. It was just back in 2008 that the state provided a \$500 million dollar incentive package to lure Volkswagen to Chattanooga. Even the governor of Tennessee, Bill Haslam, would join the anti-union campaign in an attempt to block the union vote.

The media picked up on all of these threats, and the message was clear. It basically said: if you vote to unionize, you are hurting the economy and that the expansion of the factory would be stopped, which would essentially cost the jobs of the people in the community. These threats and ideas would be, in the end, an effective tactic. When the votes were counted unionization was narrowly defeated. Forty-four votes were needed, and the question remains: if the 44 voters were never threatened, would they have voted the other way? Politicians, their allies, and financial benefactors say “no,” but the writing on the wall clearly says “yes.”

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The fight over whether unions are good or bad for this country will go on forever. The fact that people aren't educated enough is what causes this fight. People want to argue that they shouldn't have to pay union dues to have the right to work. But these same people cry that they are not getting paid enough or that they have no health insurance. Society as a whole needs to stand up to Corporate America and the politicians who are against the idea of the middle-class worker succeeding. We all have the right to work and support family and ourselves. If we don't have the unions on our side in fighting this fight, then we are just a mere voice that goes unheard. Solidarity is what makes unions strong. And it is solidarity that will keep this fight going. If we stand down to politicians and keep listening to lies and threats, we are headed down the wrong road. We are given the right to vote and to make our own decision. When these tactics are used, it is simply propaganda. Rather than listen to what the media has to say, people need to get out and educate themselves. It's your vote. It's your way of life. Don't let someone scare you and take those rights from you.

# Society's Need for Government

## JOHN DOYLE

Thomas Paine wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*; it was published in 1776 and challenged the British government and the royal Monarchy. When it was released it became an instant bestseller in the colonies. In his writing, he said, "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one." With this paper I will try to explain what he meant by this statement, and if I feel he was correct or not.

"Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last is a punisher." I started with this quotation from *Common Sense* because I feel it breaks down in a bit more detail what his feelings were of why government is governed. This was an issue leading into the American Revolution, the colonies were unhappy with the way the kind was governing them so they decided to revolt and create a government befitting their needs.

I feel Thomas Paine was saying that government is needed to keep the population from running rampant. Due to our nature and the natural growth of society it becomes more difficult to have everyone's voice represent with the decisions concerning the population. Thus government is formed. Now the problem is that when a government is formed and working at its best, all the population will not be happy but the vast majority should be. At the same time people can be corrupt and lazy to say just two flaws of man and those could turn into poor government. When a government is at its worst the majority of the populace will not be happy with its performance.

When I turned 18 I registered to vote and have started to understand how our government works; at the same time I looked into other country's governments. From my own personal experiences, I have to agree with this thought of Paine's. This is largely due to the fact that I see when things are good, people still are not happy with the elected officials. And when they are not, our population is practically ready to revolt. Some countries like Egypt and Libya were so angry with their governments that they actually did revolt. So due to what I have seen and studied, I feel this idea is as true today as it was during 1776.

“Government, like dress, is a badge of lost innocence; the palaces of kings are built upon the ruins of the bowers of paradise.” This shows that as society grows so does the need for government. With that said, we need to try to make the best government for our population. *Common Sense* was published to make the population more aware about the problems associated their governing country. The statement about government being necessary was on point with the needs of society. The amazing thing is that the government that was built back then is still going strong today. I guess Paine was correct.

# Is Government a Necessary Evil?

## DOUGLAS BAISLEY

Thomas Paine wrote, “Government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one.” I believe Thomas Paine meant we need government to give us laws and order to live by. At the same time this limits our freedoms. I both agree and disagree with this statement.

Paine meant that a large group of people living in an area needs common laws to keep the peace and also protect them. This is where the role of government comes in. The government sets up laws for people to live by, like Moses’ Ten Commandments, so everyone can live together peacefully. The government also protects its people’s land from foreign invasion. This is the necessary evil. You are giving up some of your rights to abide by the laws of that government, in return for protection and a safe living environment.

The problem arises when government abuses its power. This is what Paine means when he says that, “Government in its worst state can be an intolerable one.” Government has the power, once established, to abuse its authority. Government can overtax its people for its own selfish needs. Government also can forget about what the people need and concentrate on its own greed, making the life of its citizens intolerable. As John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton wrote in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

I agree with Paine because most people who are in government at this time are looking for power and wealth. Christopher Columbus even wrote in his journal: “For that purpose granted me great favors, and ennobled me that thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents, which I might discover and acquire.” Even before discovering anything, Christopher Columbus is already setting himself up with power. With this power he can then exploit whatever he finds and turn it into wealth. Governments tend to abuse their power for their own selfish needs. They get lazy and complacent and only look to better themselves. In Book Two of his *History of the Indies*, Las Casas tells how the Spaniards “rode the backs of the Indians if they were in a hurry.”

This is an example of laziness and abuse of power.

On the other hand, I disagree with Paine because I don't believe that government has to be a necessary evil. Government has the power to set up programs to help people who are sick and underprivileged. Where would these people be without the government to help them?

As you can see government has the power to either help or hinder its citizens.

Most governments do a little of both. This is why I agree and disagree with Thomas Paine.



# BOOKMARKS



# Words and Thoughts

## JOSE CARDOSO

Webster's dictionary defines literature as "written works such as poems, plays, novels, and articles about particular subjects that are considered to be good and have a lasting importance." Years ago, it would have been a punishment and chore for me to even read that short definition. Growing up and until not too long ago, reading was my least favorite thing in the world as well as writing. But, as I grew and matured I slowly started gravitating towards poems and literature, and ironically as a whole, my view on literature and the arts has changed dramatically.

Growing up I never liked reading – not one bit – I enjoyed running around, jumping, exploring the playground, and getting hurt time and time again. I would probably get hurt at least every other day. It wasn't a big deal; I just brushed it off and kept running around. I was extremely active and had the attention span of a goldfish. In second grade, there was a time dedicated to library and story time. I remember dreading that point of the day. Sometimes the teacher would round us all up in a circle sitting Indian style and have us listen attentively to a story. Other times, we would sit and try and sound out words ourselves.

When we had to listen, I would just count the tiles on the ceiling; when we had to read, I would pretend I had no idea how. The teacher would eventually get frustrated, give up and I would run to the computer games. I was however mindful enough to pick the spelling games on the computer when the teacher walked by, only to minimize it when she was gone of course. I believe this was partly the reason I was held back a year and had to repeat the first grade. I knew how to read the simple words and do the simple math; I just didn't want to do it at all.

My dislike was at its peak during sophomore year of High School. Throughout most of the year, the curriculum was focused on Shakespeare. It was terrible! It was as if I was reading an entirely different language. The words that I did recognize and understand seemed out of place while brilliant sentences seemed backwards to me. The grammar was confusing and I was completely lost. Statements and points of the story seemed out of place as well. I am not lying or exaggerating when I thought homework questions on certain Shakespeare texts were without a doubt trick questions. Each and every time, critical thinking and analysis of Shakespeare texts had me lost. While the rest of the class would have a great discussion and interpretation of the text, I would just sit there again and count the ceiling tiles. The only Shakespeare piece I did enjoy was the movie Hamlet in which the always-entertaining Mel Gibson played the main character, Hamlet.

After high school I didn't know what I wanted to do. I got accepted into a few colleges, but didn't have any direction in terms of a future nor did I have the money to afford college. I did know that I *really* wanted to make money; I wanted to make

a lot of money. When one thinks of money, they usually think of business, so I started my college career at Westchester Community College in pursuit of a business administration degree. I thought I would either transfer later on or just find work with an associate's degree. Needless to say, I didn't finish for the obvious reason of pursuing something for the wrong reason. However, something changed; all the classes I was taking toward my degree became a chore, and I began to get jaded by the whole business world. At least the classes made me feel that way. Ironically, the English reading and writing classes were my favorite and were the very ones I began to excel in. They also happened to be the most laid back classes. During discussion, my peers were talking about ideas and perspectives, not numbers and procedures. I looked forward to these times in class.

After dropping out of Westchester Community College and never finishing, I did continue to read here and there whenever I could or had time but not much; life got in the way. Not until recently when I started school at Empire State College did I begin to really enjoy not just reading again, but writing as well. My first class was a reading class and I was reluctant and still thought of it as a chore but still went into it with an open mind. I will always remember my instructor, not only for having a catchy email address, which is not hard to forget but for being one of the best teachers I've ever had – in any grade or subject – the class was more of an open discussion about texts and what the meaning, themes, and purpose of each was. Without the typical procedure that I've experienced in 99 percent of all English or reading classes, there was very little dullness or lack of ideas in the class, and if there were silence, he would surely throw something out there that made sense and then numerous students would easily interpret, understand, and discuss.

My current class that I am taking now is much like the previous class where the instructor conducts the class in much of the same way. There is honest discussion about texts and poems that both go hand-in-hand and challenge my thinking. I looked forward to the reading and writing assignments in the first class as I do now with the current. I enjoy understanding not only where certain characters in the stories are coming from, but the author's mindset when writing the texts as well. It's not only enjoyable to try and interpret the characters, authors, and texts, but I learn from the different perspectives that come up with classmates. I have come to really enjoy reading and writing a great deal in recent years. Reading to me not only expands my vocabulary, but also expands and raises my overall intelligence. Often times, strangers will have conversations and discuss ideas but with motives behind it. There is often a point or a reason why two total strangers are talking to one another, either to benefit in some way or to know something of value to them. Of course there is small talk and good and real honest conversations.

What I'm trying to say is: people just don't stop a random stranger on the street to have an honest conversation, talk about experiences, discuss different ideas, or discuss the world as a whole. It just doesn't happen, and if does, it would most definitely be a strange and awkward conversation. However, with higher education, it is different.

The classroom gives us a space where the instructor facilitates and the author speaks to us in an honest form in regard to the overall theme or messages either directly or indirectly. Whether it is fictional or nonfiction, biography or poem the message behind it is always there. There is always a story to learn from.

There is a meaning to every author's text, whether a novel or poem and it is those meanings that allow not just me, but others to better understand the human condition and the world a little bit more. Whether we agree with them or not, books still conjure up ideas, solutions to issues, and provide a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. If we are unconscious of certain things, each other, the world and ourselves, we may never know the truth until we give it a chance and have an open mind. If I never tried, I would still have that high school/sophomore mentality, which a lot of people unfortunately still have.

# Whitman and Equality

## CARLOS LEON

“A Song for Occupations” by Walt Whitman is a very interesting poem to read. In the beginning as I was reading through it, I thought it was based on the togetherness of working men and women as union members. However as I continued reading, it became clear that this was written before labor unions were formed in the United States; I based this conclusion on some of the phrases and words that Whitman used.

As I continued reading the poem, the real meaning became more apparent and much clearer. This was a poem or song based on the equality of all men and women, and it highlights the role each individual plays in society, especially when these roles, jobs, or professions are brought together for the betterment of all in society. Whitman in his writing also appears to be breaking down the false stereotypes of the different class levels that people consider as a kind of factual social order that makes one person or group better than the other. Although we know that some people are more educated, have more money or seem to live a better or richer lifestyle, everyone is *created* equally. Everything that one accumulates in life is not really significant; as Whitman points out, they are purely materialistic objects. The true value of someone’s life is being alive. The most important aspect is living a life equal, without judgment of another’s religion, race or monetary status.

Throughout the different verses in the poem, these points are brought together and Whitman’s message is made clear. In one of the verses of the poem, he writes, “Neither a servant or Master I, I take no sooner a large price than a small price, I will have my own whoever enjoys me, I will be even with you and you shall be even with me.” He is clearly stating that the servant or worker is on equal ground to the master or owner. The President of the United States, although he is in a more prestigious position in life, is the same as you and me; he needs us to work for his success, as we need him to help us achieve success. The large or small price represents the amount of monetary value one gets from their profession and makes no difference to who they are as persons. According to Whitman, the fact that some people make more money than others doesn’t mean that their life has more value; it simply means they have more money.

### Work Cited

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# A Gut-Wrenching Film

## MICHAEL MCLOUGHLIN

*Chasing Ice* is a remarkable film, as it personally made me rethink global warming and the effect that even my own job might be having on it. As a union member who ultimately works some form of construction, I am contributing to the continued growth of our planet. The problem is that we are growing the same way we always did. I'm not building green energy buildings. In fact, I'm laying the wires that are providing power from power plants that are a part of the problem. I'm wiring buildings that are 30 and 50 stories high, which will cause power plants to keep churning out energy and polluting the world.

It seems odd but ultimately climate change needs to be addressed from every conceivable angle. We are hurting this planet and photographer James Balog shows us that in *Chasing Ice*. In this film, he documents ice melting and calving off of glaciers in Iceland, Greenland and Alaska. It draws you in like watching the horror of a car accident. There's morbid beauty to it. The second you forget that it is morbid is the moment that you miss the point. He captures unprecedented footage of ice melting off of glaciers that are crumbling into the ocean. We are destroying this planet and he shows us proof.

I'd certainly recommend this film; I think everyone should watch it; it seems like the public opinion and in general, people feel the "jury is still out" on climate change. While this film would certainly change their minds, union members specifically should watch it. It might help us to keep in mind the potential damage we might *even* be a part of. In that sense, maybe we can live our lives more carbon neutral in another capacity and contribute positively elsewhere.

*Chasing Ice* is a gut wrenching account of man's direct impact on our glaciers. It is a film that captures the sad beauty of our destruction of these monumental and seemingly everlasting glaciers. It is a film that will change your mind on climate change, and it truly says something about what we're doing. It's a film that needs to be seen and its message heard.

### Work Cited

*Chasing Ice*. Dir. Jeff Orlowski. Perf. James Balog, Svavar Jonatansson, Adam LeWinter. New Video Group, 2013. DVD.

## A Review of *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair

### GIL MEDINA

First, muckraking vs. journalism in Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*: Muckraking is defined as the action of searching out and publicizing scandalous information about famous people in an underhanded way. Journalism is defined as gathering, processing, and dissemination of news and information related to the news to the audience.

When I hear the term muckraking, on an emotional level I get a sour taste and it has a negative connotation to my ear. It would seem that this is journalism of sub-par standards, taking account of an issue or topic from an extremist position in a negative way. I believe that this can be a partial truth and it really comes down to which side of an issue you stand on. In the instance of Upton Sinclair's 1905 novel of the meat industry located in Chicago's infamous Packingtown I believe it to be incredibly valuable piece of literature. This is evidenced in two pieces of national legislation that came from the reaction to his book: the Pure Food and Drug Act along and the Meat Inspection Act, both signed into law in mid-1906 after President Roosevelt ordered investigations that proved the issues in Sinclair's writing to be true.

As to whether *The Jungle* is a work of fiction rather than a journalistic endeavor I say there is no doubt that the characters in the book never actually took a breath of air, never physically existed on our world. What's more important to me is that their story relates to individuals existing in the real world, dealing with issues the main character, Jurgis Rudkis and his family face in the fictional setting. There were thousands of real life stories that spoke of the abuse, unsafe working conditions, emotional destruction, poor quality of life, and the value of our neighbors in this world and society that is reflective of the storyline in *The Jungle*. Just because writing features fictional characters, businesses, and locales doesn't preclude it from telling an important and at its foundation a true story. Sinclair uses this fictional immigrant family to expose real life horrors and atrocities that workers and their families were forced to deal with in order to survive in what they thought was going to be the land of opportunity. It seems to me that the telling of stories is a way to convey ideas, to articulate philosophies and to describe events. I would argue under the circumstances described above, whether you've read the novel or not, you would be hard pressed to disagree that an individual story is one of fiction, when the core issues represent those that are true and are worthy of being viewed not only as journalism but a tremendously important piece of historical record.

When asked whether *The Jungle* and Sinclair's other writings are socialist propaganda, I believe it is true that he came to the writing of this novel with a specific agenda, but I also believe that all storytellers do. I would argue that many reading this book the issue that was most prevalent was the horrible products that these businesses were putting out as whole, quality, and pure. If you were to concentrate on this issue you could see

the book as look on the reality of the meat packing industry at the time the book was written. To define something as to be only one thing is extremely hard to do and more often as not foolish. A rock can be seen as a rock, but to a petrologist it is much more than that. So to look at Sinclair's writings as socialistic propaganda solely would be a mistake. I believe that he fully intended to use this writing to push his political beliefs but they also make us think and feel about the human condition on many levels.

The working conditions in this country and specifically for organized labor have become safer for the worker over all. In the current climate I would state that at many of the larger scale projects they are continually pushing the issue of safety. This is due to the financial implications and rewards that are associated with a safer, less injurious workplace than an overall concern for workers' safety and long-term health, but sometimes the reason for an outcome doesn't outweigh the outcome.

In *The Jungle*, we are introduced to Jurgis' grandfather Antanas Rudkus. A proud and hardworking man, he is at a time in his life when his strongest days are behind him. His introduction and the realization of his existence is a harsh one for the reader. His biggest issue is not being able to find work, but the challenge to contribute an ever-needed increase in wages to support a family of more immigrants that increasingly rely on him. To do this he decides to pay a kick back of a third of his wages to a foreman for a job in the pickle room where he sweeps the pickling floor of chemically laden brine into a hole in the floor that is connected to a catch-sink that allows it to be used over again. This hole has a trap that funnels the scraps of pickle meat and refuse, and he also has to clean these traps out and bring the day-old scraps back so they can be used with the rest of the meat products. He is exposed to these chemicals in the brine that he is sweeping up and they will eventually eat through his shoes and cause sores on his feet that will not heal. He is working in a room that is constantly chilled so this also leads to his physical breakdown as well. We have an old man who is exploited not only monetarily but put into a chronic state of exposure to cold and toxic chemicals that eventually lead to his death in the new land of opportunity that he traveled to with great hope.

You might ask if there's any hope in this story of Jurgis Rudkis and the inhabitants of the Packingtown district. Once again I believe this answer is dependent on how you view the story. In the end Jurgis seems to be back on the road to stability. To me this hope or glimpse of a better outcome comes after he is introduced to socialism. Sinclair, being a socialist and pushing this agenda, uses this mechanism to state that this is the answer not only to Jurgis' individual issues but also to the issues of the workingman on a global scale. There is hope in that Jurgis has found a device in which he may be able to create effective change not only for him but for all of those lost souls who by the book's end the reader has come to empathize with – the characters' overwhelming pain, misery and exploitation that is life in Packing Town.

As for what I think of the book, I believe Sinclair struggles to push an agenda arguing that the cure to the world's ills is the righting of the wrongs of the "worker." Being a staunch union member and activist, I can understand that thought and the sentimentality behind it but I don't believe it to be the cure-all, no matter how good a step in the right direction it may be. Socialism is the fulcrum that is used in the novel to push exploitation away. I feel that in the case of *The Jungle* the subject is not worked through enough. Sinclair tells us at the end that there is an answer however that's only the end of the novel, the final pages. Until this point he is continuously hammering away at the brutality of daily life. He is pointing out the exploitation of the social and economic circumstances that were experienced in the early 20th century. Sinclair's use of socialism in the novel is in my opinion too little and too late to for his agenda outside of the novel.

I believe he could have gotten more of a response to his agenda had he worked the tale differently. Sinclair himself remarked that he "aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach." In this work we are shown the hideousness of meat production for the masses. We see the lack of basic hygiene and neglectful contamination of the food supply. This was what was seen by the masses that read the work and their reaction helped to correct these issues with the federal government's response. It seems to me that Sinclair hoped readers would embrace socialism as a means to correct the poisoning of our food supply by heartless owners, which also would in turn correct the issue of inequality and exploitation that I am sure he saw at every turn. For him this was not to happen. Even today in many high school classes where this book is read the students discuss muckraking and the impact of the novel as it applies to the working conditions and sanitary issues of meat production. What those classes usually fail to discuss is the socialist aspect of it. Is that because as a culture we look at or associate socialism with communism and that makes it bad? Sinclair's heavy handed and brutal approach as to the conditions these characters were forced to live and work in, in my opinion, overshadows his desire for the reader to embrace socialism.

The reader is usually more concerned about themselves and what they are consuming than changing the world through a political means. His hope to enrage people to a new world order became a secondary or tertiary concern in the light of the individual's food consumption. It was easier to address the stomach than the mind for many with easier and speedier results and in that way he was successful in hitting the stomach not the heart, as he would have had it.



# Historical Novels by Howard Fast

## KEVIN GARVEY

### Prologue

In order for me to understand these historical events written by Howard Fast, I first had to understand the man, so after reading Howard Fast's *My Glorious Brothers*, I looked up his biography on Wikipedia. Howard Fast was born in 1914, his mother, Ida, immigrated from the British Isles and his father, Barry, from the Ukraine; Ida died in 1923 and Barry became unemployed. One brother went to live with relatives while Howard worked selling newspapers. He was 18 when Roosevelt took office and he lived through the hard times of the '20s and '30s, watching the rise of Fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe and to some extent in America.

Fast spent World War II working with the United States Office of War Information, writing for *Voice of America*. In 1943, he joined the Communist Party USA and in 1950 he was called before the House Committee on Un-American Activities; he was sentenced to three months in prison for contempt of Congress for refusing to divulge the names of people he knew who were on the list of donors to aid the orphanage which housed the children of veterans of the Spanish Civil War; one of the donors was Eleanor Roosevelt ("Howard Fast").

### *Spartacus*

The story begins with three young people traveling from Rome to Capua in 71 B.C., a 25 year old young man and two younger girls. All were of good birth and traveled in relative comfort, he on a beautiful white horse, the girls in litters. Four slaves who could travel 10 miles without resting carried each litter. It is obvious from the beginning that both the slaves and the Romans considered the slave system the norm. When they stopped on the Appian Way, just outside Capua to view the "tokens of punishment," the litter pacesetter asked Helena, in broken Latin, "May we rest, oh mistress, oh mistress?"

"Of course" said she, for she was the compassionate one, raised to hate cruelty towards animals, whether slave or beast" (6). The Appian Way was the road built by the Romans that illustrated the progress of mankind's progress and Rome's capacity for order.

Each mile was marked to indicate how far one was from Rome. There were lodgings every five miles where the traveler could rest, have a meal, and rest their horses. During this time along the road, a crucifix was planted every few yards with a dead slave hanging from it. Most were indifferent at the sight of the crucified ones and some saw it as an indication of Roman strength and a lesson to the slaves. Yet some saw it as a waste of money, for slaves were expensive. From the outset, knowing Fast's

background, it becomes obvious that this work is not just a good novel, but also the epic story of Spartacus and his army of slave warriors. All through the novel the author gets his point across – that this slave, Spartacus, threatened the entire Roman Empire, and for four years these slaves defeated army after army with little or no arms except those taken from the defeated ones.

Fast was not the first communist to admire Spartacus; Lenin, Stalin, and Marx saw Spartacus as the model for the modern proletariat. Marx wrote to Frederick Engels: “Spartacus is revealed as the most splendid fellow in the whole of ancient history. Great general, noble character, real representative of the ancient proletariat;” Toussaint Overture, the Haitian rebel that led the slave rebellion was referred to as “The Haitian Spartacus” (*On Marx*). The victors always write history, so the story of this servile war is sketchy at best. Oral historians repeated what was passed down, from one generation of suppressed peoples to the next. That history along with the rare “official accounts” was the basis for Fast’s novel. When Crassus described how and why he felt that destroying the colossus monument of Spartacus and the smaller one of the three gladiators, both carved out of volcanic stone on the slopes of Vesuvius, he indicated that no one ever came as close to destroying Rome as Spartacus did, and if the tokens of punishment are unpleasant, think of how he felt when he saw the ground carpeted with the bodies of the finest troops in Rome. He felt that he had to erase the memory of what they did and how they did it. He said, “The order of things is that some must rule and some must serve. So the gods ordained it. So it will be” (192).

The “tokens of punishment” was the crucifixion of 6,472 rebellious slaves on crosses along the Appian Way from Rome to Capua. There are three components to this book, the characters in the novel, the history of Spartacus and the servile war and the political agenda. I doubt that this historical novel would have been as popular as it was without all three. In the first century B.C. Spartacus led, with others, a small group of gladiators in Capua to overpower guards at their training camp run by Batiatus, the gladiator trainer. That little group turned into a revolutionary force of an up to one hundred thousand slaves and gladiators; they fought for almost four years, killing thousands of Roman soldiers and losing thousands of slaves. Armed with the knives from the cooks’ shops, and weapons that they stripped from the soldiers that they killed, they fled to the slopes of Mount Vesuvius.

Spartacus saw a group of field slaves on the slopes outside of Capua, where he sent the Jew, David, to see if they wanted to join them; they came back with David, saluting the Gladiators and kissing their hands. Spartacus wanted the women to stay back, not to fight, but he saw how they fought with fury. Varinia, his wife begged him to let them fight, “I can fight like a man can fight” (159), she cried, and so she did – fighting alongside of him in every battle for the duration of the war. The war went on for three years and after many victories, despite their bravery and determination, the slaves were defeated. Spartacus laid out simple codes of conduct for his followers in contrast to the moral depravity of the Roman elite:

We will not dishonor ourselves; we will not do as the Romans do. We will not obey the Roman law; we will make our own laws. Our law is simple: Whatever we take, we hold in common, and no man shall own anything but his weapons and his clothes. And we will take no woman . . . . Nor shall any man hold more than one wife. (166)

On the cross, the Jew David remembered the one exception, the time when Spartacus, in a cold passion of hate had pointed to the two Roman soldiers and said, “As we did, so will you do! Go into the sand with knives and naked, so that you may learn how we died for the edification of Rome” (248).

This is when Spartacus asked David, “Am I right or am I wrong” (248)? David gave his answer: “What is right for them is never right for us . . . . You must destroy Rome – You Spartacus, you must take these people away and be stern and strong” (169). He then goes on to say:

You must teach them to fight and to kill. There is no going back. The whole world belongs to Rome, so Rome must be destroyed and made only a bad memory, and then where Rome was, we will build a new life where all men will live in peace and brotherhood and love, no slaves and no slave masters, no gladiators and no arenas, but a time like the old times, like the golden age. We will build new cities of brotherhood, and there will be no walls around them . . . . There was no one among them – no, not even among the little children – who did not dream dreams of a world where none were slaves. (169)

It may seem that I jump all over the place with these notes, and I do, but so does Fast; he goes from one conversation to another; discussions that illustrate the nature of the characters, the arrogance and entitlement of the Romans, the love and respect between the gladiators and the slaves. Lentulus Gracchus, the old Roman Senator in a rebuttal, says, “Politics required three unchanging talents and no virtues. The first talent was the ability to choose the winning side. Failing that, the second was the ability to extricate oneself from the losing side. And the third talent was never to make an enemy” (170).

There are statements like the one made by Crixus, when asked “Can we run away?” and he said, “Where shall we run? Everywhere, it is the same as here. Everywhere, it is master and slave” (165), which reinforces the point that this is the message of the story. During the tour of the perfume factory and the description of the workers, (the “paid slaves”), I was reminded of what it must be like in the factories all over the world. The visitors felt something different about the workers: they were not slaves, nor were they Romans and that unsettled them. Caius asked, What “if they could do what Spartacus did,” and Crassus replied, “Workers revolt? No that will never be. You see them not slaves, they are free men. They can come and go as they please. Why should they ever revolt” (297)? The crux of the novel’s message is clarified in the last paragraph: “And so long as men labored, and other men took and used the fruit of those who labored, the name of Spartacus would be remembered, whispered sometimes and shouted loud and clear at other times”(363).

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## Another Renaissance

### LIZ FEZZUOGLIO

The narratives of fiction and graphic novels tend to follow the same storytelling formats. However with the advent of any new art form, be it the fine arts or literature, at its birth it meets critics and naysayers. Graphic novels are currently experiencing those birthing pains, struggling to be widely accepted as a serious art form and not just lowbrow trash. Evidence of graphic novels being more than just comics and being considered a piece of literature can be found in Jeff Lemire's narrative *The Underwater Welder*. If the graphics were stripped away from the narrative, it would still have a strong story and arc, but the ways Lemire draws creates a stronger experience for the reader; at the same time, it follows the archetype of the hero's cycle in the protagonist, Jack Joseph, and evokes the same catharsis from epic tales from the past.

Joseph Campbell, an American literary scholar, observed the idea of "the monomyth," or "hero's journey," which has the fundamental structure that many great literary narratives followed, and is one that Lemire takes his readers on with his character Jack Joseph. The hero's journey, as described by Campbell, is "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Campbell 23).

*The Underwater Welder* opens with Jack Joseph starting his day just like any other, and he's about to ship out for two weeks of work before the birth of his child. From there, he is drawn into a pseudo world of his past haunted by the ghost of his father. As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that in order for Jack to continue living, he must travel through this world and survive the trauma of his past that he never quite dealt with when he was younger. This story of catharsis is then greatly enhanced by Lemire's graphics.

*The Underwater Welder* carries the reader through an environment rich with texture and agitated movements yet the format of the panels has a steady pace, which builds as the story progresses through its arc. There is the juxtaposition of structure and chaos, which is achieved through Lemire's use of lines within the panel. While Jack is on land, the story takes place in mostly 12-panel grids and comes off structured and strict despite Lemire's sketchy and fast drawing style. All this energy is contained in small boxes and it almost becomes overwhelming for the reader as he casts a light on how Jack might be feeling in his life: Trapped in the same small town he grew up in despite all the potential he had.

The way out of this trap is in the water, which serves as a gateway to his past and is clearly expressed in Lemire's change of format. The minute Jack goes underneath the water, the reader can feel the impact; once he enters the water, the panels breakaway from the grid format and give way to the open landscapes, which allows Jack to explore what is keeping him stuck in his life. This ebb and flow between Jack on land – in reality – and Jack underwater – in a dream state – creates a palpable tension as the story arcs. If Lemire attempted this with a strictly literary format, like that of a novel, it might not have had as much of an impact on the reader.

Graphic novels like many new forms of communications throughout history have to experience its share of naysayers. When Pollock first removed the canvas from the easel to the floor and made paintings about capturing movement into his work, it was not well received. Only after his death was his work acknowledged for its contribution to the art community. Hopefully with time, graphic novels will be accepted by a majority of the literary community as a serious genre.

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# TEXTURES



# Darker Than Night

## MALCOLM DOLES

Darker than night  
Deeper than pain  
Radiant n precious  
A glow warmer than summer rains  
Soft  
Strong  
Subtle  
Plain  
Watch the beauty in its glaze  
As it glistens from sun rays  
Powerful unpredictable the world has yet to uncover its secrets  
Or see the beauty in its roots  
In which those r the deepest  
All shades textures flavors embrace what's within  
I don't know about you but I love black skin.

# My Personal Ethnography

## ERIC VARGAS

Many people who live in poor or third world countries have this dream of one day coming to the United States and creating a better living for themselves and their families. From the outside looking in, the U.S. is the land of opportunity, where dreams come true and drastic changes in your life can occur. While growing up in the Dominican Republic, my family had this dream, and somehow through the graces of my grandmother accomplished this goal. Though we now reside in the U.S., we never stopped embracing our culture. On the contrary, we Dominicans made ourselves at home at a place in uptown New York City called Washington Heights.

Long before I was born, my grandmother had five kids of her own to raise, and my very own mother was the oldest of them all. They lived in Santo Domingo, which is the capitol of Dominican Republic in a town called Villa Mella. There, my grandmother had a small restaurant where she made and sold fried food such as: Fried plantains, fried sausages, steam cassava and mashed plantains, which many people know as *Mangu*, and last but not least fried pork, or as we call it *Chicharon*, which was her specialty. However, she wasn't the only one with a restaurant at this location. Cousins, aunts, brothers and sisters all had their own stands side by side where people from all parts of the country and sometimes foreigners would come to eat, drink, dance and enjoy the nice view that our location provided.

My grandmother was a very beautiful, charismatic and attractive lady, which caught the attention of a very well-known politician in Dominican Republic who couldn't resist eating at her restaurant and enjoying the atmosphere. He helped her display her food at very big conventions for the country where she and her cooking became very popular. Today some Spanish and Dominican artists mention our town and restaurants in their songs as a great place to eat and dance. She then traveled the world with this politician and eventually settled in Puerto Rico, left the business in my mother's hands, while she slowly sketched a plan to eventually move all her kids to Puerto Rico as well. Within a couple of years, all my aunts and uncles were residing in Puerto Rico and the restaurant in the Dominican Republic was passed down to other family members who could use the income that the business provided.

My mother and my father met in Puerto Rico where I was born in 1985. Most of my cousins were born there too. Soon after my family got their residency, we moved to uptown Manhattan in New York City; once again following my grandmother's steps who was the first to make her move to the city. I was 11 months old when I left Puerto Rico. My grandmother and mother quickly found work in a Spanish restaurant, and my father who was a very good auto mechanic found work at an auto repair shop.

He did so well that after a couple of years, he was able to open his own shop in the Bronx. My parents would then move to the Bronx. My family was very close, so eventually all my aunts and uncles moved to the Bronx.

Throughout the years my family traveled back and forth to the Dominican Republic. We celebrate our independence here in the U.S. every year and march twice a year in our very own Dominican Day parade here in New York City. We like to celebrate both the Dominican and Puerto Rican day parades because of the times we spent in Puerto Rico and since I'm a Puerto Rico Native, I view it as an advantage and another reason to be proud and celebrate.

I now have family who still resides in Puerto Rico. On special occasions, like birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter my mother and grandmother come together in our kitchen and make us a feast full of all the dishes we love and would eat back home in the Dominican Republic. This might not be your typical success story, but in the eyes of my family we've come a long way. My grandmother had this plan for her family and through her love for cooking and pleasing customers, accomplished just that. Today, I have the opportunity to become an electrician or whatever else it is that I desire and it's all thanks to her and her accomplishments. We are a very tight knit family who left our homeland, but embrace our culture strongly. For my grandmother I'm thankful, because of her I'm proud of my culture; now, my goal is to return the favor to her and my mother generously.

# Birthrights

## CHI KIN LIAO

I've been asked to consider the statement, "economic outcomes are determined by individuals' effort and talents (or lack thereof)." Is this a "cultural" explanation of economic outcomes or a "structural" explanation?

I believe this is a "structural" explanation. Let's look at what is socially structural. According to William Julius Wilson (*More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City (Issues of Our Time)* [2010]): "Social structure refers to the way social positions, social roles, and networks of social relationships are arranged in our institutions, such as the economy." Let me give you an example: Mr. Bill Gates is one of the most famous men on this planet. *Wikipedia* says that Gates was born in an "upper-middle-class family." His father was a prominent lawyer, and his mother served on the board of directors for First Interstate BancSystem and the United Way. Gates's maternal grandfather was JW Maxwell, a national bank president . . . . At 13, he enrolled in the Lakeside School, an exclusive preparatory school. When he was in the eighth grade, the Mothers Club at the school used proceeds from Lakeside School's rummage sale to buy a Teletype Model 33 ASR terminal and a block of computer time on a General Electric (GE) computer for the school's students (*Wikipedia*).

Yes, Mr. Bill Gates had talent in computer programming and he put a lot of effort into it. But from his background, it's very clear that his social position, role, and networks of social relationships were a key factor in his huge success down the road.

Simple question: Back in 1968, when Gates was 13 years old, how many African-American or Latino-American or Asian-American 8th-grade kids had a chance to play with computers?

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# The Victors

## BRIAN CARTY

When it comes down to world history, no matter whose history it is, the European countries almost always come into play. It's called Eurocentrism, and it has to do with the world revolving around Europe. In short, people think that Europeans were smarter, more civilized, richer, and more devout than their other less developed neighbors around the world. But these are simply offshoots of a supremacist ideal that has been largely accepted, even by the education system.

In truth, the Europeans were not as rich, powerful or civilized as some of the other countries and civilizations that existed during the 1400s-1500s. The entire argument against European supremacy can be found in the relationships between the rising civilizations of the time, mainly in the form of commerce, but also in the form of conquest. In terms of trade, there were two kinds of trade. The first, more basic kind was an integrated system. This was a civilization that had developed enough to produce special items that could be traded, sold, and bought for other needed goods like wood, food, salt, and so on. Along with this, these individual civilizations had their own special goods that were abundant in their own lands but not in others. Asians had silk, Africans had gems, Indians had cotton, and so on.

This leads to the second, larger system of trade: polycentric trade. In this system, there are several routes of trade that overlap each other, meaning that the items in one trade route will find their way to the furthest ends of the other trade routes. In this way, goods from east China could make it all the way to Europe and vice versa. But this was expensive for Europe, because the goods cost extra. To be sure, Europe had goods that it sold almost exclusively, but they operated in a corner of the trade, as all of the trade revolved around the Indian Ocean and the Silk Road.

In this way, Europe was nothing special. On the contrary, the Middle East and China were the most powerful at the time, that is until China became isolationist. Then Europe was able to capitalize on the void left by the Chinese, which meant Europe could tax everything that came through the Silk Road and across the Indian Ocean. This, along with stealing some technologies from the Mongols, led to Europe's superiority in the conquest of the Americas.

Yet the Europeans weren't the only ones conquering. The Mongols were able to carve out their own chunk of the world for themselves, mostly by invading and killing their neighbors until they had an empire. But unlike Europeans, who tried to force Christianity on their conquered foes, the Mongols believed that religion shouldn't be forced on people. They believed instead that others should be tolerant. On top of this, it's been said that Mongol territory was so safe that you could walk from one end of the Mongol empire to the other with a pure gold headpiece and not be stopped.

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The Mongol empire only lasted 80 years and was gone just as Europe was pushing its influence around the world. And this is where the Eurocentric history really begins, with Pizarro, Columbus, and other pioneers venturing out in search of new lands and treasures to bring back home, while laying waste to the so-called heathens they encountered. But the truth is, the European civilizations simply took over and declared themselves victorious, claiming to have been bringing civilization and culture to their lesser neighbors and new colonies. The truth, however, is and has always been that they had little to nothing to do with civilization in the world – they just took over in several different ways.

# Immigration

## KAREN L. HANSEN

In the late 1800s, there was a massive surge of immigrants. *Padrones* received commissions from business owners for bringing in labor pools that were willing to accept the most menial wages. The *padrones* also took a percentage of each immigrant's paycheck as a fee. These immigrants came to the U.S. to escape persecution or poverty in their own countries. They were brought to a new world by desperation. This kind of "import labor" led to discrimination from more settled groups, high work turnover, poor living conditions, and overcrowding.

Due to the earlier rise of nationalist and anti-immigrant groups, the immigrants were herded and inspected like cattle when they first arrived. Crowds of immigrants were culled to eliminate the unattractive and unwanted newcomers. Those with any sign of weakness, intellectual disability, or disease were sent back.

Upon entering the United States, immigrants moved to the hubs of industry to follow the contemporary trends of available work. Unfortunately, the high rate of immigration meant they could easily be replaced at the whim of the employers with others that were happy to find work. Sometimes immigrants found the living conditions to be as deplorable as those they had left behind. In addition, they were rebuked and denigrated by other, more settled, groups. Exhausted and downtrodden, some simply accepted this as their lot. Some eventually resisted these conditions and treatment. Slowly, immigrants were incorporated into groups like the Knights of Labor, no matter what level of skills they had, and they began to be represented alongside others in already established trade unions. Thus the immigrant began to be represented as a worker with full rights.

Since the beginning of the history of "Manifest Destiny" in America, immigrants have played and continue to play a key role in the economic growth of the United States. Each group that comes in and gets assimilated seems to forget, over time and through a sense of entitlement, how their own people moved to this land as immigrants. There are groups whose sole interest seems to be to curtail and inhibit the influx of new cultures.

There was a time when there was resistance to Germanic and Irish groups, and then to Italians and Eastern Europeans, as we saw in the book *Out of This Furnace* by Thomas Bell. Each group seems to become the accused bane of America for a due period of time, until the next wave arrives. Nowadays, Hispanic immigrants take the brunt of discriminatory conduct. This cast of blame won't end until the next generation has assimilated and a new wave of immigration begins.

It seems to me that for a young country, our citizens have short memories. One can only hope that human rights continue to be represented as part of a united front and that all people here will eventually be commended for the flavor they add to our melting pot of culture and industry.



# Immigration and New York City Labor

## ELIZABETH IRIZARRY

It's easy to see why and how so many people would come to the United States to seek the "American Dream." Many come to try and make a better life for themselves and for their families. Some come to get away from the dangerous conditions in their countries, to escape famine, or to simply find work. So many people from other countries have come to the shores of the United States that by the late 1880s, one third of the population of the United States was made up of immigrants or the children of immigrants.

The people that migrated to the United States in the earlier part of the 19th century seemed to have forgotten that they too had once been "immigrants." The sentiment towards the latest influx of people from other countries was that of a negative nature. These feelings were captured in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1866), where Francis A. Walker, refers to immigrants in that period as: "the throngs of ignorant and brutalized peasantry from the countries of eastern and southern Europe" ("Restriction"). Anti-immigrant societies were formed and nativism was prevalent.

Unions complained that the American people were losing jobs to immigrants. Their voices became loud enough for the government to pass an immigration law. The law was somewhat directed at trying to stop the thousands of Italians that were being brought into the United States by *padrones*. The job of a *padrone* was to "find" workers from other countries for different companies.

In an effort to slow or stop the heavy immigration and appease the people, certain laws were enacted. In 1892, the government started charging immigrants a "head tax" of 50 cents when they got to the United States. Earlier, the Chinese Exclusion Act stopped certain laborers from entering the U.S. because of their ethnicity.

From an immigrant's standpoint, today may be the best time to be an immigrant in the United States. Many undocumented immigrants may not need to fret about the possibility of deportation. President Obama intends to "turn undocumented immigrants into people who can fully contribute to American Society for the benefit of the entire nation" ("Obama"). The different circumstances of immigrants and the impact of their status on their families is now being given much consideration. Immigrants make up our nation and if they can work here and be productive citizens, we are heading in the right direction.

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## Crossing

### TERESA GEORGE

*“My feet began to blister and the days became a blur. ..I haven’t eaten in too long and the thought of the last drop of water I tasted, escapes me. At this point I was ready to be captured. Anything would be better than this” ... .* When I think of Fernando, Elena, Tom`as and the stories they told of others, I can only imagine how migrants must feel. The will power that they have, the struggles they go through, and the determination to receive better, and at all cost ... even death.

In the past, crossing the border seemed to be nothing short of a breeze; a piece of cake. Many like Elena were able to easily cross back and forth at their leisure. Later, the only breeze that many received, was the wind that hit their face while fastened to the undercarriage of a train, like Tom`as. Nowadays, crossing the border has become even more difficult. The border is now heavily guarded, coyotes are charging more, walls have been built, surveillance has increased in various levels, old pathways and maneuvers have been discovered and put to bed. Because of this, Many have lost their lives *“wandering in the wilderness”* in search of a route to the other side.

Yet still, in the face of blood sweat tears and possibly death, migrants find a way across. As Bob (a border patrol officer), one of the witnesses in the book mentioned, *“The wall is totally for show. There’s no wall that’s going to keep anyone out who’s determined to cross. They’ll go over, they’ll go under, or they’ll go around ... .”* Therefore, it appears that no matter what America attempts to do, the well-known statement is true ... *“where there is a will, there is a way ... ”*

## **GETTING THERE**

# My Work Space

## PEDRO LUGO

The time is 6:35 a.m. on a beautiful summer morning and I just arrived at the Cross County movie theater parking lot. This is the assigned area for the Hyatt Hotel construction workers. As I see condensation dripping from the side windows of my car, I feel dread as I imagine the heat I will endure during my dusty workday. “Well, another day, another dollar,” I tell myself as I exit my vehicle grabbing my early morning coffee. The hot beverage is steaming like a gym sauna since the morning heat only maintains its torching temperature. Good Morning! Good Morning! Good Morning! I pleasantly acknowledge my fellow trade workers as I walk to the site.

The beauty of summer: Hands are sweaty, face and neck are sticky, and sweat is dripping down the center of my back. Wow, just walking in the building and my body is perspiring like I have been working half a day. I get slightly blinded until my eyes adjust from the bright sun to a dark room, well, dark in comparison. The elevator is crowded with men that will go to the eighth floor. Our shanty is on the third floor, so I take the stairs since it is easier. The deeper I enter the site with my fellow brothers the more the air thickens as the disturbed dust rises from the trampling trails the men are making. The feeling is like a volcano erupted and the gray dust is the ash from the volcano. “Good Morning! Good Morning! Good Morning!” to my fellow coworkers. I greet them and ask how they are doing. I sit and wait until the general foreman tells me what my assignment is.

6:55 a.m. and I feel it is roll call time as the foreman starts delegating assignments.

Unfortunately, I get fireproofing detail. For those that have never performed this duty, it’s one of the most boring tasks that an electrician can perform but it also is one of the most important and underrated tasks that we must complete. The importance of ensuring the fire envelope of a room is the deciding factor in whether a fire would be contained in the room or whether it would spread throughout the building. I grab a 6-foot ladder, a corking gun, and fireproofing material and head for the eighth floor of the building. We must start on the upper floors and work our way down until we reach the bottom – that is the attack plan. Vrooom, Vrooom, Vrooom, it sounds like I am at the Daytona race track during a race. In reality, it was just the sounds of the screw guns running off screws as they hit the sheet rock. I go up and down the ladder, walking on top of sheetrock scraps, climbing over pipes and ductwork, trying to seal around electrical pipes, fire alarms and low voltage wires, BX and MC wires. It just seems this work will never end. “Lunch! Lunch! Lunch!” the carpenters yell as they notify their men. Thank god it’s lunchtime, so I can mentally rest a bit.

Must be quick, as you know lunch is only half an hour. I run to Panda Express and order some grilled teriyaki chicken with noodles and a 32 oz. Sprite. By the time I get back to the site and eat my food, it is time to start work again. Oh well, back to fireproofing duty. The routine doesn't change. Up and down I go as I seal the pipes and wires. Room to room I go tackling the obstacles of having to work around 30 carpenters sheet rocking the rooms and corridor. And they try to seal the walls. The smell of the insulation is getting to me. It is an indescribable stench, like an old fart that lingers in the air that smacks you in the face as your friend laughs from the face expressions you make.

"Clean up! Clean up!" the men start chanting. Yes, time to go home.

I grab the ladder and my tools and head to the shanty. I chain up the ladder and put away the tools. Face itchy, hands dirty, and my shirt and pants are stained red like I got hurt while I worked but in reality it is the red fireproofing that is witness to all the work that I have performed today. Despite it all, the relief that the day has ended supersedes all the feelings as I grab a Gojo wipe and clean up while waiting for our dismissal.

"See you guys tomorrow," the foreman yells for all of us to hear. Before leaving I take two cups of water from our water fountain to cool off my body from this scorching hot work day. I start heading out, walking out of the building, heading to my car. The cold water I drink is making me perspire like dripping condensation from a cold can of soda. Wow – I continue receiving the brief cool air conditioning breeze from open stores' doors as I pass. I walk to my car, drenched like I just left a sauna. I open the car and get a blast of heat, as if I just opened a 350 degree oven that is baking a Thanksgiving turkey. "Damn," I quickly reach in my car and start it with the a/c and quickly jump out to allow the temperature to go down. I pop the trunk door open and I start putting my bag away. Walking back to the front of my car I pleasantly think of the cool air I'm about to feel as I drive home. I enter the car saying: "Another day, another dollar" as I head back home.

# I Have Arrived!

## CAROL BARCLAY

The 1 train stops and I step out onto the platform on the 125th St. train station. It is such a beautiful sight. As I stand there looking down toward the jobsite at these magnificently erected buildings made of sky blue glass, I realize that I am a part of all this. I have arrived! This site is called the Columbia Manhattanville Project. The 17-acre site that the university will develop consists primarily of the four large blocks from 129th to 133rd streets between Broadway and Twelfth Ave., including the north side of 125th St., as well as three properties on the east side of Broadway from 131st to 134th St. The project includes more than 6.8 million square feet of space for teaching, research, underground parking, and support services. Completing this project on time is important, but the workers' safety and security are two factors that will not be overlooked.

Before workers are allowed on the jobsite they must attend a two-hour site safety orientation given by Lend Lease. After the briefing, workers are given picture identification cards. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is mandatory: safety glasses, high-visibility safety vests and gloves. There is a live demonstration on how to correctly use a body harness and everyone is expected to wear steel toe boots and hard hats. In order to use the lifts or ladders, you have to fill out permits and wear a harness. If you are doing fire watch, a hot work permit has to be signed. Fire watch is when you are looking around for any possible signs of smoke or fire while welding, brazing or soldering is in progress. Before the hot work begins, all combustibles within 35 ft. must be removed or covered with a nonflammable canvas. Also, while the hot work is in process there must be a fireguard patrolling the area and looking for any possible signs of smoke or fire. All fireguards have to be certified by New York City Fire Department.

At the Manhattanville Project, everyone has to follow all of the safety rules. On this jobsite, there are workers from different trades: carpenters, iron workers, sheet metal workers, steam fitters, electricians, laborers, welders, plumbers, safety inspectors, and more. Presently, there are 17 floors. Six are below ground level and 11 above ground. There are tool boxes, lifts, and tables with floor plans on each floor. There are ladders, wires and materials: sheetrock, cement, bricks, pipes, extension cords and electrical outlets. There are toilets on every third floor. There are five hoists – two above ground, two below ground level, and one on the new building.

The new building is still a skeleton. No walls, ceilings or flooring, just six floors of iron beams that are being welded together. The iron workers and the welders are on this second building. I observe them every day, all strapped off in their harnesses; laying down heavy iron with the help of a caterpillar machine. The welders are bent over, welding. I admire these guys. I would like to be a welder in the near future. Welding is an art. You have to practice developing your skills and be precise with what you are doing. The idea of putting metal together and creating shapes is somewhat like doing architectural designs. I love art and designing/creating in metal, and applied heat is powerful. This job is very dangerous, you have to be careful. There is no room for playing games.

As usual, I greet everyone getting off the train: the workers in front of the food cart and the security guards at the jobsite. On Mondays, you can hear me saying, "Welcome back!" And on Tuesday, "Have a safe day." Wednesday, I sing out "Hump day." Then on a Thursday, I wish everyone a blessed day because its payday for me. On Friday I carol "Happy Friday!" They all just smile when I am around. I love my job.

Security stands waiting by the gate. Everyone will enter, provided they have their identification card. No ID means no entry. Security is very important on our jobsite. There are six entry gates, but at six o'clock in the morning, only one gate is open to allow workers to enter. There are several security guards on this site. Outside, the buildings are well-lit and on each floor there are lights hanging from the ceilings. Some of the workers also have their own lights hooked unto their hard hats. Our security and safety also depends on a well-lit work area.

There are 32 plumbers employed at this jobsite. I am a member of the Plumbers Local 1 union; presently, I am working with Cardoza Plumbing. At 7 a.m., we all meet up in the shanty to sign paperwork, including the attendance sheet. There are two foremen who give us our assignments for the day. Most of my workdays consist of doing fire watch, fire stop, cutting pipes, labeling pipes, taking measurements, taking coffee orders, and more.

There is always an inspector watching when I do fire watch or fire stop work. I am supposed to always carry special IDs: F60, F90, and a card showing that I am a certified 3M trained installer, capable of doing fire stop work at all times. The inspector's job is to make sure everyone is doing their work correctly and safely. It is in our best interest to know the security guards, inspectors and workers on the jobsite. Whenever I need help, and the carpenters are around, they help me because I communicate with each and every one of them. For example, recently, while doing fire stop, I needed to move some metal tracks in order to complete the work. I asked a carpenter if it would be OK for me to temporarily move the tracks. He did not hesitate to move them for me.



Here is another example: one day I was doing fireguard duty and I didn't completely secure the area. One of the inspectors spoke to me about it and I immediately took care of the situation. I usually communicate with them and they are aware of my work ethic. Because of this, the inspector didn't report it and send me off the jobsite. If I observe something that is unsafe or may have been overlooked, I say something. Sometime workers are not tied off while on the lift. I always bring it to their attention.

It is good practice to look out for each other. Like I said before, completing the project on time is important, but our safety and security are the two factors that should never be overlooked.

# Eyewitness to Non-Union and Union Lives

## KAM CHENG

I was raised in a working-class family. As a child, I witnessed the hardship that my parents went through to keep the family going. They had been working in Chinese restaurants in the United States as cooks and food preparers for maybe a quarter of a century but did not have much savings, and they had very harsh working conditions and no health care. My parents had to work for very long hours every day in the restaurant and suffered a lot of damage to their bodies during work, such as straining their backs from lifting food cases, getting burns from hot oil once in a while, and cutting their fingers when preparing food.

Every night when they came home from work, they were very exhausted from the day's work. They just came home, ate dinner, showered, and then they'd have to go to sleep before starting the next day of work. Even in their one free day off during the week, they had to recover and rest for the whole day; therefore they were not able to enjoy life or do anything recreational because of the amount of stress put on their bodies by work. The amount of hours they had to work per week compared to the salary that they got was not reasonable. They earned minimal wages with no overtime pay because they were salaried and not paid by the hour. To make matters worse, they had no health benefits. If they were sick, which they often were because of all the aches, pains, and fatigue that they experienced from work, they had to pay for the medical bills themselves, out of pocket. They did not know Medicaid existed back then and nobody told them it existed, so they never get the medical attention they needed.

So, to help out my parents, I worked in the Chinese restaurant as a part-time laborer while I also was in school. At that time, I fully experienced poverty and employee neglect, and I realized that when I was working in the restaurant, the amount of time that restaurant workers put into working compared to what they earn is ridiculous. Working class people in general put all of their time and life into their jobs and they are not rewarded for such hard work. Instead, they are taken advantage of like slaves. They get no benefits, earn minimal pay and lack days off for anything else besides working.

I hope that there will be someone or something to change these unfair conditions and make working class people, including restaurant workers, get better pay, more reasonable working hours, and better benefits, so that they can experience some joy and rewards for their hard work. More importantly, I hope that working class people can have the resources to be able to take care of their children properly, to allow their children to have better education and the opportunity to advance in life.

Because of the limited resources that my parents provided for me, I could not finish community college and decided to join the United States Navy. However, if there had been a union for the restaurant workers that my parents could have joined, then they might have had a better living standard, and been able to take better care of their children by giving them a chance to receive higher education. Joining the Navy had its good sides. I didn't have to put as much burden on my parents to raise me and pay for my college education. At the same time, I got paid in the military and I also got educational support through the armed services. While in the Navy, I learned the value of teamwork and how to work well in a variety of environments. I also gained some computer skills and learned how to run the Ethernet data cables that are used to connect computers to a Local Area Network.

The skills that I learned through the Navy have helped me a lot in my current career with Local 3 because there is some carryover in the skills I obtained from the Navy to my current job. For example, the concept of running the data cables in the Navy is similar to running the electrical cables in my current workplace. Some of the skills that I learned while being in the military also include planning paths for cabling, which tools should be used for a job, and how to terminate cable. I heard that some of the Local 3 jobs include data work – and my experience from data work in the Navy should be useful for doing these jobs with Local 3.

I joined the American Legion, a veteran's service organization, after I came back from the service. One of my fellow Legionnaires told me about Helmets to Hardhats, a program that helps men and women from the armed forces pursue careers in the building and construction industry. I took a lot of time to research the different industries and found the IBEW most appealing to me because the work is related to what I did in the Navy. Safety is one of my most important concerns and that is one of the principal objectives of the IBEW, especially the safety of its members. This objective is very important to me. The IBEW can provide adequate safety measures for workers on the job so that individuals can work without fear of being harmed.

When I applied for an opening for the electrician apprenticeship, I was overjoyed that I passed the aptitude test and was able to join IBEW Local 3. I believed that it was an excellent opportunity for me to work and learn from the local. As an apprentice, I can learn about electrical work, but also learn how important it is to have a union. By belonging to a union, members can stand together and negotiate with their employers for a better working environment, higher pay, employee rights, and other benefits.

After being an apprentice for some time, I really came to appreciate the depth of knowledge and understanding required to do our jobs as electricians. Becoming an electrician is not an easy task; a lot of education, both in academics and hands-on, is required to learn the basic skills, codes, and the symbol system. For example, as Mike Rose stated in his book *The Mind at Work*, "Several kinds of literacy and numeracy come into play: the mastery of new vocabulary and symbol systems; translating from one symbol system to another and using the symbols to solve problems with multiple

variables; interpreting the codes and calculating from them.” After learning all of that, I need to apply it from the classroom environment to the workplace, and that is when a lot of cognition and intelligence comes into play.

A lot of what we learn from the classroom is a bit different when compared with the actual scenarios because the environment and materials are all different. It is up to us to relate the concepts from one to another and to have the intelligence and understanding to know how to apply the concepts to our work. The beauty of the IBEW local 3 apprenticeship is that it provides the hands-on learning experience for us to combine what we learn from the classroom and apply it to the real world.

One of the many benefits that IBEW Local 3 also offers its members is the academic portion of education. It is very important for the trade unions to be educated academically as well as vocationally because it will open up more jobs and career opportunities for advancement. In addition, with increased knowledge and understanding of the trade union movement provided by higher education, our union members are more educated to understand the movement and are better informed of the things that are happening, and are more adept at taking action. It allows us union workers the opportunity to enrich ourselves by broadening our horizons and to learn about more than just labor alone. By being college-educated, we acquire the knowledge and intellect to be able to effectively represent and advocate for the interests of working-class laborers and their families.

After I witnessed the hardship that my parents went through with their non-union restaurant jobs, I learned how different and how harsh the job environment could be without a union. I understand that, as union members, we will have more collective bargaining power with our employers over wages, benefits, and rights. Furthermore, as union members, we distinguish ourselves with better job training. I appreciate the amount of skill, knowledge, and intelligence required for the work that we provide.

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# Helmets to Hardhats: The Journey of Tim Nolan

## TIMOTHY NOLAN

Throughout life, I have experienced very different forms of support and brotherhood. I joined the U.S. Army. This organization showed me the meaning of brotherhood and sticking together. Since I have been part of a brotherhood since my military days, I only saw fit to join a brotherhood for my career. Now I have another opportunity to be part of my final brotherhood in my career path and that brotherhood is the IBEW Local 3.

It was on June 17, 2008, on the turf of Raritan High School, that I left the childhood life and entered the real world of being an adult. After graduating from high school I was unsure what my path in life would be. One year later, not knowing what I was getting myself into, I joined the U.S. Army. On Oct. 20, 2009, my life changed for the better, I believe. I left my hometown and went to Fort Benning for my U.S. Army basic training. I immediately regretted my decision but had to suck it up and endure all the screaming, pain, sweat, pushups, and the bullshit. I did not know the meaning of brotherhood until my second week of basic training when I was at my lowest point, both mentally and physically. I was on the verge of letting the drill sergeants send me packing. My bunkmate saw me struggling and ready to give up, so he took me under his wing and guided me through my doubts. He pushed me passed my limits by encouraging me and supporting me. The only thing that got me through the rest of these torturous weeks was my newfound brothers. Nine weeks later my new brothers and I graduated.

The next journey of my enlistment was my individual training. I moved on to my advanced individual training at Fort Sill in the terrible state of Oklahoma where I had to build a new bond with new soldiers. I enlisted in the U.S. Army to be a 13 Fox – a fire support specialist. As a fire support specialist or forward observer our basic duties were controlling and calling for artillery and mortar fire. We also were responsible for controlling and calling in for air strikes from helicopters and jet fighter planes. After the six weeks of training was completed I received orders to report to Fort Carson in the state of Colorado. Fortunately I had the opportunity to train with a couple of buddies throughout my time in Oklahoma. We made a strong connection and I was relieved I could carry this brotherhood with me to Colorado. This kind of connection with these soldiers was more than your average co-workers' relationship, it was a trust that, if ever needed, I would have his back in combat and he would have mine. In my eyes it is the ultimate form of brotherhood. All in all the army treated me pretty well, from serving overseas to being deployed to Iraq and visiting many different states across the country. I served four years and it was a voyage that I'll never forget. My most valuable memory is the bonds and brothers that I met along the way.

Knowing Oct. 25, 2013, would be my last day putting on my army uniform, I had a lot of thinking to do. What would be my next career? Would I ever find another brotherhood as valuable as the army? I heard about another type of organization back home that could be a good fit for me. The organization that really caught my eye and stuck is the union because they really care for their employees. Before I left Colorado I registered with Helmets to Hardhats, which is a program that helps veterans get apprentice opportunities in local unions. In April 2014, I got my first taste of the union life when I applied and took the aptitude test for Local 1 elevator construction. After passing that test I was placed on the wait list. While waiting, my brother-in-law, a third year apprentice with Local 3, kept telling me about his union. He was really starting to get my attention because of the brotherhood and the friends he has made in his time in this local. I immediately became interested in becoming a member.

Now that I have been accepted into this great union IBEW Local 3, I have another opportunity to be a part of a strong, unbreakable brotherhood. It all started back at U.S. Army basic training where I met my first band of brothers who got me through that difficult time. Shortly after basic training, I was forced to make a new band of brothers at my individual training. Luckily I was able to continue this journey with them at our first station, Fort Carson. If not for these comrades, it would have been difficult getting through those four years in the U.S. Army. Hopefully over the next five and a half years I will develop similar relationships with my fellow apprentices. I hope they will guide me and push me past my limits as my fellow army brothers did. If so, I will now look to my new brothers of Local 3 to get me through the next 30-plus years.

# Scientist of Electricity: The Story of How I Got Into Local 3

## SHAUNTÁE BENJAMIN

An electrical motor started it all. It had my attention for the 45 minutes of a high school freshman seminar. This motor was a grey circular object mounted on a wooden bench. It was just there and I wanted to know why. What was its purpose? Questions bounced around my head, but the voice of the hair-deprived teacher, Mr. McNeal, kept chiming in on my thoughts, so I was forced to listen to his lesson. After he concluded, I had the opportunity to ask what other subjects he taught besides freshman seminar. Electrical Technology! Then, of course, I asked about the motor and he went on to say that it is an electrical motor, which converts electrical energy into mechanical energy. Electricity seemed more than intriguing, it was breathtaking and I made a choice, even though I didn't know it. My choice was to devote my life to electrical technology.

Right then and there he had my undivided attention. How can a machine convert energy? What is this energy used for? With so many questions, Mr. McNeal was overwhelmed and said, "This is a senior tech class and you must be accepted into the electrical technology program." A few months went past and it was the end of freshman year; all freshmen were supposed to choose three tech classes, numbered from one to three. My list ended with Electrical Technology only because I doubted my capabilities.

Sophomore year, I was accepted into the Electrical Technology program. The dream began brewing. All I could think about was this class. From the discussions we had in class, I realized I wanted to become the first female engineer in my family. We started learning about the basics, like, what is electricity? What is a breadboard? How do I wire an LED circuit on a breadboard? First things first: electricity is the flow of an electric charge. A breadboard is a prototyping of electronics. When we used breadboards in class, we used LEDs, resistors and a 9-volt battery. An LED is a lighting emitted device, basically a tiny more efficient light bulb. As I went forward in the class, I came to realize that we were conducting electrical study. Because we were studying electrical technology we were electrical scientists. From that theory I grew intrigued and began mastering the circuitry with the breadboard, which took a mere three months, and shortly after that I was top of the class.

Overwhelmed with my GPA, I began to look into careers in this field. The United States Air Force first came across my mind because my big sister was starting her process of joining the United States Army. While conducting my research, my guidance counselor was very informative. He explained to me that there are not many females in electrical technology as a whole or in U.S. Air Force. He went on

to say that I could become a pioneer for women. “Flattery gets you everywhere.” I thought of this quote as we had our meeting. With those kind words spoken, I had a drive, I had a goal.

Unfortunately, months later, I needed to have knee surgery to remove the very damaged meniscus in my right knee. Wear and tear from playing netball every summer caused this tragedy. As the meniscus was removed from my knee, my thoughts of joining the Air Force were removed from my mind. After the surgery my knee never felt the same, the disturbing aching of a knee brace annoyed me with every move I made. After months of therapy, I still didn’t feel the same, so I gave up all hope in joining the U.S. Air Force. During my second meeting with my guidance counselor, I realized that electrical technology was my passion, my life, and everything to me.

The journey to Local 3 was based on hard work and dedication. My senior year of high school, a program called Construction Skills came to my knowledge while I was looking for a part-time job with the school. This was a 14-week pre-apprenticeship. Ten weeks were nonpaid, which was the downside, since I was looking for a part-time job. What grasped my attention was what the program was really about, which was getting high school graduates secure careers in their trades. So I applied and was placed on a waiting list, while four of my classmates – who in my opinion didn’t want it as badly as I did – received acceptance letters. I wasn’t going to take “no” for an answer. I called the Vice President of the program every chance I had until I finally received an acceptance letter of my own. Two weeks prior to my orientation with construction skills, however, I sprained my left knee. Again, I walked with crutches.

But nothing was going to stop my dream, not even my clumsiness. Ten weeks flew by extremely fast, each week more informative than the other. The last four weeks were hard for me because I wasn’t able to take the Local 3 exam because of my age, and jealousy overwhelmed my judgment. Local 3 has an age requirement to take their entrance exam, and I was 17 at the time so I was not able to take it. So I had to work twice as hard as everyone there. Leaving the pre-apprenticeship, I applied to the Cooperative Technical School of Education. There I studied Electrical and Welding. In this electrical course my teacher and advisor, Mr. Fernandez, help me push my potential. I never missed a day in school but I took a sick day and missed out on an electrical job opportunity. At that point in my life I wanted ANY electrical job. Returning to school the following day, Mr. Fernandez was furious – he had wanted me and two other students to become hired by Sheridan Electric. Since my two classmates became employed, while I was still in trade school, I was devastated and began to work harder. With that hard work, I advanced in the course and was nominated and accepted to the SVA program. SVA is another apprenticeship but quite different. SVA stands for Success Via Apprentice, which is an apprenticeship to become an electrical teacher. I had a decision to make: either become a teacher or an electrician.



The next semester, I began welding, which was an incredible journey. This class gave me a new look on construction, and I fell in love again. In some ways, I thought I was cheating on my dream. But why couldn't I have two dreams that go hand in hand with one another? Welding is fusing two metals together and that's when I realized that electrical work and welding could be fused together as well. I started thinking that I could become an electrician and a welder. This class – the auto dark helmets with lightning bolts spray-painted on the side, right above the dial; the electrodes; the electrode holders; the fire-proof garment; the heat of the welds – drew me in more. Just the thrill of being alone in my welding booth with my electrode holder and my welds was a feeling that no one could take or give.

I had a passion for welding and I still do. There are many types of welding, Stick, TIG and MIG. Stick was by far the easiest because it was the basics. I only had a few lessons in TIG welding but I plan on learning TIG and MIG in the future to come. I mastered stick welding in a mere month. Staying completely steady with your hands and dragging your rod across your steel is an art. It's kind of similar to electrical wiring or bending pipe; they're all skills, like lining an electrical panel and fitting all conductors at a 90 degree angle into the circuit breaker. It takes patience, skills and a passion. Some who don't understand may say, "Oh that's boring," but it's dangerous, and it's the danger that makes it exciting. That's like saying sky divers are crazy, but I say sky divers are brilliant and brave because they are pushing past all that fear and achieving something phenomenal. I can continue to sell you on my dream and my opinions, but it's all about you and what you believe in.

Since the fall, I've been working in the electrical field and it's nothing like I imagined. This made me have more of an interest to figure out what it is all about. Since my first day on the construction site, everything and everyone had a story to tell. I had to know more and learn more. I wasn't expecting to get coffee for over 50 men! My first week was a real awakening of what an apprentice really is. I get coffee, tools and deliveries. That's at least four hours of my day, but the other four, I'm learning new things each hour. A female on the job intimidates most men and some men don't want to be in the same area as the women. The fact that I'm an African-American female on the job means that the majority of the men feel that I should be in nursing school or babysitting. I can't change their opinions, but I can make them feel wrong for judging me. I will prove myself to whomever doubts me wrong, and I will show them that a woman can do much more than nurture.

I believe that electricians are scientists of electricity and we explore electricity's possibilities each day at a time. With no hesitation, I turned down the teaching apprenticeship because, as I have said before, electrical work is my dream. It is my passion, my love, my everything. I am a Scientist of Electricity and I intend on going on to explore its capabilities every day for the next 45 years. That is why I joined Local 3.

# How I Start My Day

## LATOYA WRIGHT

In general, people have different ways of starting their day and do different things in order to get prepared for the day ahead. I would call it their routines. Throughout my adult years, my day has always started at the same time. I am a morning person, so it does not bother me to wake up this early. Preparation is something we all do whenever we have an early start – it's the best work ethic anyone could ever have. My job site is located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in Greenwich Village, a residential neighborhood.

My day starts at 4:45 a.m., as soon as my alarm clock goes off. I get out my bed, turn the alarm off, then get down on my knees to pray. I pray for at least 10 minutes. I am a Christian, so that's a part of our religion, to always give God thanks for our going out and our coming in. After I'm finished praying, I grab my stuff and head to the shower. In my bathroom, I spend at least a half an hour to get myself together. That includes brushing my teeth, taking a shower, fixing my hair, and so on.

Once all that is done, I leave the shower and head straight to my kitchen to start my breakfast, which I do every morning to save money. The kettle is on to make my tea because I don't drink coffee. I gather my tea stuff and prepare everything. While all that is going on in my kitchen, I rush to my bedroom and start getting dressed. By this time, it's about 5:30 a.m. I turn my television on to see what's taking place in the outside world and what happened while I was asleep. I also watch the weather and the train schedule to see if there's any delay with the transit service. I always want to see the news before I go on the road so early in the morning. I continue to dress and the kettle starts whistling. I already have my socks on and my pants on, so I rush in the kitchen to turn off the stove because at this time in the morning I'm the only one who's up in my four bedroom apartment and it can be very disturbing to others when the kettle is making that noise.

I continue to get dressed and make my eggs and sausage on a toasted bagel. I take out fruit from my refrigerator and pack my lunch bag and take it to my room where I continue to put my things together. Time is now is 6 a.m. Time to leave my house because my train arrives at 6:15 a.m. I leave my house and I make sure that I have everything with me that I normally have, like my cell phone, my keys, my vitamins, headphone etc. I need to have all those things before I leave my house.

I try my best to catch the same train every morning, Monday through Friday, because it makes traveling a lot easier for me, and my connection to the other train works much better if every train comes on time. My travel time from my stop to Fulton Street is about 30 minutes and then I connect to the number two or number three train, which would take me to 14th St. in about 10 to 15 minutes. Sometimes the trains are delayed, so I still have to give myself a 10-minute traveling grace period.

My goal is to always get to work early or on time. As a construction worker, punctuality and attendance are key and I want to maintain that to have a good record. I never want to be the “minute man” or call out from work very often because that can affect everyone in the long run, and when it’s layoff time, that person is the first to go.

At about 7:10 a.m., I get off the train and leave the station. Workers are already outside the jobsite, some talking, some having breakfast. I say good morning to everyone. Some will answer, some won’t, but I just go about my ways, continuing my journey. I walk onto the jobsite and head toward the shanty. A shanty is a place they build for workers to change their clothes, have breakfast, eat lunch, and hold safety meetings. Some mornings when I go to the shanty, a few guys are already there. Sometimes I’m the first one to get there. I go inside, unload my stuff and sit for a few, then have my homemade breakfast. Then I change my clothes, and shoes, grab my hard hat and my gloves, and go outside to get some fresh air, talk on my phone, and maybe listen to a little music just to relax and get ready for my day.

By 7:50 a.m., all the plumbers gather in the shanty to sign in and get their assignment for the day. We all work in pairs, so everybody and their partners head to their destinations as soon as they pick up their assignment. If we need to get tools or any small material to get the job done, we will wait for our supervisor, and then we walk to the hoist and go to the floor where we need to start working.

It’s good to get to work on time so I can have a little “me time” before you start I day. By the end of the day, I’ve worked hard to get the job done with no self-injuries. Everyone is happy to be going home. The next day, I will wake up at 4:45 a.m. and do it all over again.

# Finding My Light

## CALEEN DAVIS

My normal weekday routine is almost poetic in its simplicity. I wake up, clean up, and dress up, all while having positive thoughts for the day. I do the same thing, without fail, during my first waking hour. If I'm feeling adventurous I might even cook breakfast. Being a creature of habit might not strike most people as a goal in life, but for me it's a dream. For the first time in my life I can count on basic repetitive actions and thoughts that add up to ensure my success. This is due to becoming an apprentice electrician in IBEW Local 3. Each day that I have been a member of this organization, I open myself up to numerous opportunities simply by waking up and doing my job. I never thought I could get an education, a profitable skill, or an instant second family. Now they are all a part of my daily life.

As I look back on my life, my biggest regret is not finishing college on my first attempt. Doing well in my studies was the one thing that I really took pride in. My friends have told me that my name was brought up in arguments about school with their parents because I always got good grades. Unbeknownst to my classmates, I was so afraid of finishing high school, because I had no idea what to do with the rest of my life. Everything was going well until the spring of 2002, during the time my mother passed away. Her death made education worthless to me. Each day was filled with constant sorrow, which made remembering correct formulas seem inconsequential. I was able to finish high school but it was a struggle. My freshman year at Baruch College was filled with stumbling blocks. With no sense of direction or means of support, I had to make many decisions that conflicted with being a model student. Mainly because of my inconsistent attendance, I flunked out of school.

No matter how listless I had become, I had to work in order to eat and have a roof over my head. I always intended to get a job that would pay me well enough so I could save and go back to college. I have spent almost a decade looking for a position that would pay me enough to aid in my quest for a degree. While I was successful in finding mediocre roles that kept me out of extreme poverty, I was prevented from obtaining the amount of financial aid that needed to return to school. I was stuck in a vicious cycle. What a surprise to learn that a requirement of finishing my apprenticeship is to graduate with an associate degree.

The phrase "jack of all trades" doesn't really apply to me. The only professions I believed would make use of my natural abilities were either to become an accountant or a staff member for the gossip site TMZ – I can't deny the important lessons I got from *that* field. I became a master at dealing with difficult people, staying positive no matter what the circumstance, and time management, all which serve me well at work now. However, the fact that an associate degree is often required for most entry

positions in white collar jobs, I was unable to get my foot in the door anywhere I desired to be. I decided that if I couldn't get into school first, I would get training so I could get a semi-decent job so that I could attend later.

To the surprise of my family and friends, I entered NEW (Nontraditional Employment for Women), a blue collar prep program for women. To my surprise, I completed it. Upon graduation, I realized I was a lot tougher than I gave myself credit for. I even fought off some unconscious stereotypes that I had of women who went into trade work. Choosing to go into Local 3, my inherent math skills haven't gone to waste. The fact that I had zero experience worried me, but I was determined to get as much out of this apprenticeship as possible.

I wasn't prepared for how much I would get out of this program so soon. In five and a half months, I have acquired so much electrical knowledge (theoretical and hands-on) that my friends ask me to do work in their homes. In order to hide the fact that I still know very little in the grand scheme of things, I tell them quickly that they can't afford me. I chose Local 3's apprenticeship program because I will have a set of skills that no one can take away from me or discredit the worthiness of. There is further value, because I can use what I learn today to do more in the future when working with my tools.

Ever since I was a little girl, I have been what one could call a loner. I prefer sticking to myself so that I don't have to worry about abandonment or disappointment. It sounds rather bleak, but it's how I live my life and I am pretty content with it. Upon entering the union, I was immediately aware that I had certain responsibilities to it. If there is a call to strike I must do so in order to show my support. Likewise, I must attend meetings to stay informed of things that affect our business. It was through one of these assemblies that I decided to volunteer for the annual Christmas party, which is thrown for underprivileged youth. I thought that it would be a great way to socialize and network with apprentices at different levels while doing a good deed. During the setup for the party, I got to observe the good natured banter and the effortless interactions among those who were there. I immediately wanted to be a part of this type of connection. Since then, I have attended multiple clubs and events within the union and have met people from all walks of life who have some of the same goals as me. I go to work each day feeling that I am a part of something much bigger than the site I am at for the day. I am a part of something bigger than my own success. Each day I go to work, I am helping not my coworkers, but my sisters and brothers.

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Education, abilities, and family – two years ago I would have never thought that I could have all these things within a single opportunity. Heck, a year ago, I was considering a second dead end job just to start saving for school. Now, just by waking up and being the best for my union (whether it's on the job or doing community outreach), I will ensure that I obtain a degree, become a skilled worker, and be united with like-minded individuals. My family and friends are all supportive of what I'm doing and can't believe how well things are turning out for me. If only they knew that this is the toughest thing I have ever had to complete. Fortunately, I have major experience with uphill battles, except this time I know that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

# Cold

## REZAR SHERI

Cold, why is it so cold

Stillness of the air

Blank stares

Lips brittle

Cracking in the middle

# The Value of Labor

## ERNIE CONNELL

Before I became an apprentice with Local 3 there were many lessons that I learned. From the neighborhood that I grew up in, to the varying job titles that I have held, to the schools that I have attended, they all played their own parts in my life. Each one of my previous experiences helped to shape the way that I look at unions and employment. When I think about my childhood neighborhood, the first thing that comes to my mind is its diversity. Within the span of just five blocks, you are able to see a sudden change in the homes of the residents.

On one block is nothing but apartment buildings that are largely inhabited by lower income families. Another block or two, and there are attached two- and three-family homes where working middle-class families lived. Not too far from these homes are enormous single-family homes with their own driveways, lawns, and backyards. This was like a constant visual reminder to me that although our family was doing well, there were those who were doing a lot better. This stuck with me, however for a different reason as well. My father did not work a unionized job and he would often have to work very long hours to make ends meet for the family. There were many times when I would not see him for a few days simply because he was leaving for work before I got up and returning after I was already asleep.

There was one day in particular that I believe really changed the way that I viewed work. My father had gotten sick and I was trying to tell him to stay home and rest so he would feel better. At this time I was in high school and had never worked before, so I assumed that things operated for workers as it did for us as students. In school we could take a sick day as long as we had some type of documentation to explain the absence. He then explained to me that if he did that he would not get paid because he did not have sick days with this job, and more importantly he risked losing his job. He also explained to me that he had been receiving the same hourly wage from the time that he started working there. My father had been working at this job before I was even born, and I believe he was entering his 20th-plus year of working there. It truly shocked me that in all that time he was never given a raise or sick days. It was then that I realized that having a job did not always guarantee the same experiences for everyone in terms of how they are treated by their employer. It also was one of the first times that I realized just how important it is to have a strong voice to speak out on unjust situations.

The other aspect of my life that helped to guide me toward Local 3 was my work experiences. In my first job I worked as a summer aide for the City of New York. In this position I was able to work alongside people who were part of a unionized workforce, although my position was not. Working with them exposed me to some of the positive and negative aspects of unionized work. Almost immediately I noticed



how well they were treated in the office. I also noticed that they were able to take off time when they were sick, they were able to have insurance for their children, and were paid overtime rates when they worked more than 40 hours in a week. All of these were issues that my father faced at his job.

I also saw some of the negative aspects that also are involved with unions. Although there were some workers that did their job to the letter, I also came across some who did whatever they wanted and knew that it was difficult to terminate them from their positions, even with cause. I remember working with some technicians who were unionized. They had an office that was in the back corner of the floor away from the other cubicles. During the day they would be on their computers, playing video games, chatting online – everything except their job. At the time I was just getting out of high school so this seemed fine to me. However whenever I look back over those times, I know that isn't the type of image that I want associated with a union that I am working for. I also learned that behavior like that not only reflects negatively against you as a worker, but it gives people looking a bad first impression of your industry if they see you acting unprofessionally.

In the book, *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*, Mike Rose examines how, culturally, certain jobs are viewed in contrast with others. In chapter eight of this book, he goes into electrical work and describes an experience that helps to shape him and the way he thinks. At a Habitat for Humanity worksite, one of the boys, Mundo, is taught to work “neatly and properly” to preserve the beauty of the house that they are working on. This lesson is one that, as an apprentice, I can definitely relate to. Quite often when working on some task with a journeyman I am reminded to work neater, and faster. From your first day on the job as an apprentice, usually one of the journeymen will inform you about what it means to work in a professional manner. This includes the aesthetic quality of the work we are doing. The other motive behind doing this is for the benefit of the clientele. The clients that we work for are most likely not that familiar with electrical work, and would not be able to determine good electrical work from bad work. What they are able to see are crooked pipes and boxes or receptacles that are not level. Like one journeyman recently told me, you can put in the straightest pipe and run the wires perfectly behind the walls. The only thing that the client is going to see and notice is a crooked outlet or switch.

The other aspect of the apprenticeship that comes to mind is how much knowledge that someone must acquire in order to become a full-fledged journeyman. The focus of *The Mind at Work* is the common misconception that physical, blue-collar labor involves or requires little intelligence. In our case nothing could be further from the truth. We are required to not only go to school for five-and-a-half years, but also attend various skill development sessions. Additionally while on the job there is a great deal of math involved with certain tasks. The one that first come to my mind is conduit bending. This skill is one that requires using math to calculate the bends and

reductions needed for each individual pipe. We also have to plan out where we are going to lay out the pipe, etc. In short there are very few tasks that we do that do not require thinking and careful planning.

All of my work experiences have made me a lot more self-conscious of how I am perceived as a worker. I have learned that your physical appearance isn't the only thing that speaks to the type of person that you are. When someone looks at poor or sloppy workmanship, one of the first questions that usually follow is, "Who did this?" We are taught to place our signature on all of our work and to have pride in what our work says about us as workers. We also represent our union with our work. Just as I am able to look back at the behavior of former co-workers and determine it is unprofessional, someone else who is not part of the union can do the same and make a generalization associating my behavior with that of all union members. I have come to understand that being a part of an organization is more than just collecting a paycheck – it involves raising standards as a worker and displaying the best that you have to offer. I choose this career because it presented me with an opportunity to join something that was bigger than me, something that demanded the best out of its workers, but also an organization that sought to give back to its members as much as it can.

In 1944 the Serviceman Readjustment Act was passed. More commonly known as the GI Bill, this act helped to change the social, economic, and educational environment in this country. For me, the educational change that it created had an enormous impact. The GI Bill provided access to college education for veterans, and this was essentially the beginning of a change from colleges being predominately for the rich upper class of the country. It essentially opened the door for middle-class students to have access to higher education. This also made it possible for immigrants and their descendants of immigrants to obtain jobs in fields that they previously did not have access to. Pre-WWII immigrants were restricted to customer service jobs. Post-war, those who were veterans were able to apply the bill toward tuition for colleges as well as trade schools in their desired fields. This change occurred for minorities as well, and many of those who returned from war became the first in their families to receive an education.

Without legislation such as the GI Bill, it is quite possible that colleges would still be reserved for those from the rich elite class. There would be limited opportunities for people such as me because there would be few options available. I certainly do not believe that this apprenticeship would have been possible in its current form if access had not already been opened up. In my opinion, I think that it is important that more labor unions have their apprentices attend colleges for two reasons. First an educated member will make their union stronger. Someone who is educated will be able to make more informed decisions regarding their union and are usually more up to date on issues in the community around them. It is through staying informed and knowledgeable about the issues surrounding them that unions will become stronger. Secondly, I believe that their presence in school alongside the decision makers of the future could help to dispel a lot of the false notions that people have about unionized blue collar workers. If, by our actions, we can begin to have others focus on the

individuals in this industry and think of us as people just like them, we can erase the broad “construction worker” label that is normally attached to people they do not care to understand or get to know.

So far in my life I have learned that value and perception of a job vary greatly. Job titles that sound great do not always lead to the best quality of life for the workers and their families. As a tax preparer, I would have to work long hours in an office that did not have heat, and at times without a break. We were not unionized and did not have any benefits or paid time off if we got sick. Another position that I held was as a program director for a nonprofit agency. There were times, working in this title, where I would have to stay overnight and even into the next day without relief, or overtime compensation. It also didn't help that the job did not pay that well either. It became clear to me that positions such as stockbrokers, and lawyers would always be paid large sums of money even though they contribute nothing of value to society. Society places prestige on the lifestyle that these workers enjoy rather than their contribution to the overall good of that society.

In this class I have learned that those who have the majority of wealth in this country are largely not interested in being fair in terms of the distribution of that wealth. Every time that the working class has tried to band together to get what they rightfully deserve, the wealthy elites use all of their resources to fight them. I also have learned that the fight for equality goes beyond just wages and the workplace. Socially, blue-collar workers are viewed negatively by society as a whole, especially those who jobs are labor intensive. The major assumption is that because the nature of the work is physical, there is little intelligence required. I have noticed this stigma firsthand and know that it is still very much alive in our society.

In the future, I hope to learn how I can best use the resources that have been fought for by our predecessors, and I hope to learn how I can maintain the rights that we enjoy as union members today. Lastly, I also would hope to learn enough about this industry so that I can start my own business, or reach a position where I can provide a good future for my children.

# Late Awakening

## LOUIS DOMINGUEZ

How I got here to Local 3, I would have to say was chance. I kept my appointment even though I knew that the chances of employment for someone my age, 63, were slim to none. I figured I had nothing to lose and plenty of time to spare. I was a retiree, slightly bored from following the same routine year in and year out. So I made sure I did not pass up an opportunity and kept my appointment.

That appointment had a positive effect on me, since it proved that as negative as I felt, positive things do happen. My wife and I did a favor for a friend and in return we made the acquaintance of an employee of the electrical union. This contact would steer us to the employment office, and this visit created in me an interest in joining Local 3. At this particular time there were no applications being given out.

A year went by and my brother, who is a nonprofit grant writer, was given several applications to hand out. I was able to obtain one. I filled it out, sent it in, even though I questioned myself as to whether or not I wanted to return to work. To this day, I'm still questioning myself. My application was submitted in 2009. Four years went by before I received a letter from the Joint Board scheduling me for a written exam. I was to bring the letter and two pencils, otherwise admission would be denied. I kept my appointment even though I knew my chances were slim.

I immediately went to the computer, logged into math.com and spent the next five days brushing up on my math skills. Everything I studied was on the exam. I believe my five days spent studying added 10 points to my grade. I passed the exam. I received a letter from the Joint Board a few months later scheduling me for a face-to-face interview. It was the oddest interview I ever participated in. My interviewer had only one question for me: "Would I mind getting coffee for the crew." My response was "yes, only if I have to pay." The interviewer laughed uncontrollably. It was a good sign, but the lack of questions had me thinking, "Is this it?" This interaction raised my eyebrow, me of little faith, and yet I kept my appointment.

Again, I do not remember how much time went by between the interview and the physical exam, but it had to be three to four months. I received a call from the Joint Board medical department on a Thursday, scheduling me for a physical the following Monday. They informed me that they had mailed me a written notice five weeks earlier and that they were confirming my appointment. I explained that Monday was not a good day for me, that I had not received their notice, and the reason I had not received it was because my wife and I were vacationing in Florida for the past two months.

The receptionist told me to hold while she looked upon her calendar. She informed me that she had an opening for Wednesday. I told her I could not make it. I asked her if she could reschedule me for the end of the month. She told me she had only one other opening and that was the following Monday. I told her I would be there at 8 a.m. I kept my appointment even though I knew that the chances of employment, for someone at my age of 63, were slim to none. I had little hope. The physical went well. They did not discover that there is something wrong with a man my age wanting to return to work, especially when financially he does not have to. No information as to my standing was given. I was told they would notify me. A couple of months passed before I received a letter from the Joint Board to attend an orientation. The job was mine, if I wanted it. I kept the appointment and left the negative feeling that at 63 years of age the chances of getting employment were slim to none, behind.

This vacation from the vacation is wonderful, no pressures, no worries, I am not in it for the money. A first year apprentice makes \$12.50 an hour. This barely covers my travel, gas, breakfast, and lunch expenses. I have no pressure. If I am fired, I am no worse off. So why, after 14 years? I think it has to do with keeping the mind and body engaged and challenged. I was in need of an intervention. Change the situation and you change the disposition.

What makes me get up every morning at 4:30 a.m. even though I do not have to? I think it is the brotherhood and the fact that I am contributing to the job, to my team. The negative feeling of not doing anything is replaced by a positive feeling created by being a part of a team with a shared focus on accomplishing the job. The mind at work, challenged, exercised. Use it or lose it.

So keep your appointments and perhaps you will experience what I have: A revelation, an awakening, a miracle. Call it whatever you want, I just call it a positive experience.

# A Well-Fought Journey

## BAYRON ALCAINO

Winning a war is not easy, but by taking baby steps you probably win it. The only thing you need is a determined mind, encouragement, and physical strength to win a war. With those qualities I made it to the Local 3. The war was tough but each war has its battles to win. Well my war started about 19 years ago. I was the first born to my parents and after only five months of my life outside of my mom's womb, my dad came to the United States for a new life, not only for him but for me. In Chile, he had a house, two cars, a well-paid job with a good health plan, and his family. Despite all this, my dad left and decided that he liked the life in the United States and after 10 months of not seeing my mom and me, we moved to the United States. Since I was only one, I had little knowledge what my father did would have its disadvantages for me when it came to joining the union.

As time passed and I started to grow my dad started to expand the family by having my sister, I noticed a few things. One was that every friend I had travelled back to their country and visited their families. I asked my parents if they could buy me a plane ticket to Chile to see my family. Both my parents explained to me if I were to leave the United States I would not be able to come back because of my visa and also that I was not going to be able to see my parents for a long time. So I understood why, after all those years, we hadn't travelled back. Also a huge problem I had with that is, without identification in the United States or better said a "green card" you cannot work here in the United States in theory.

I was basically destined to work in a restaurant as a bus boy for the rest of my life or work in a construction company that paid you in cash. Both jobs were jobs that paid very little; it wasn't enough to live on, and these were the jobs I was destined to work in. After finding out that this was going to be my life, I basically just gave up in school and started not to get the grades I should have gotten. But something changed that turned the cards on the table.

On June 15, 2012, the Obama administration approved an act called "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival." In a short summary, the act said that all the kids that arrived to the United States at a very young age, who had lived here for "x" amount of years, and who had arrived before a certain date had the opportunity to have a workers permit and with that apply for a social security number. This act resurrected me from the dead; this act gave me chance to work and without thinking twice, I applied. After six months sleeping next to the mailbox, I got my worker's permit and two weeks later I applied for my social security number. After finishing high school in 2013, I went to a trade school called "The School of Cooperative and Technical Education" or, for short, Co-op Tech. In this school, I took the electrical class that they offered in the school and with just a few weeks in the school I got recommended to a program called

“Construction Skills.” In a short summary, the program is a pre-apprenticeship that is composed of 10 classes and they teach you what the union is and what benefits they have. I went through the program with a breeze but something had to get in my way.

When something goes good and it seems too good, suddenly with a blink of an eye something bad happens. My mom who had good health was diagnosed with breast cancer. This news choked me and the sensation of it was like taking the “Ice Bucket Challenge” in the middle of winter with just my boxers on. The week they gave us the news was one of the worst weeks I lived. I didn’t sleep, eat, and was really depressed. My mom told me to come back to my senses.

She said, “Don’t worry about me; everything is going to be fine. You just worry about getting into the union, and with you doing that you’re going to help me get better.” Those words made me fight harder to get into the union. So eventually I get a letter in the mail that said that I was invited to take the Local 3 entrance exam on July 12, 2014. I was nervous that day because the only thing I could think of was my mom and her health and my future. What made matters worse was I didn’t study for the exam. The test was the longest three hours, and I was nervous but I felt I did a good in the exam. A few weeks pass and I got a phone telling me that I passed the test and all I needed to do was pass the drug test and I also did pass that test. Now I am a TA1 for the Local 3.

Just like a war changes people, the hardship I had to go through changed me to be a hard worker and all the things I had to go through made me more mature. It also made me see things differently, like my friends who only think of themselves and spend money on crap, I use the money I win for the bills of the house. I hope these qualities make me become a good husband and father and more important, a good brother in IBEW Local 3.



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