

THE HARRY VAN ARSDALE JR. CENTER FOR LABOR STUDIES

LABOR **writes** 2016

TOWARD THE LIGHT

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**The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.
Center for Labor Studies
SUNY Empire State College**

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Dean's Comments

This year's "Labor Writes" includes contributions from the entire range of the Van Arsdale Center's student body, from electrical and plumbing apprentices and public school classroom paraprofessionals in New York City to members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers across the United States and Canada. It is a diverse body of writing and artistic expression by a diverse group of people, all nonetheless concerned together to understand the circumstances of their common world and how to make it better.

The cover for this issue also captures the purpose and ambitions of "Labor Writes" and a Van Arsdale Center education more generally. The center's students receive what is, for their trades, a nontraditional liberal arts education. The goal of this education is to enable them to see possibilities that might otherwise be overlooked: to see beauty where others may see only drabness; to find truth where others may find only confusion; to embrace hope where others are embraced by despair. "Art Trouve" by IBEW Local 3 electrical apprentice Angela Marta Neuhaus is such a seeing, a finding, embrace. Look closely and you will see evidence of a familiar problem. Look again, with the eyes Ms. Neuhaus's framing gives us, and the beauty, truth and hope of the world is, for the moment, redeemed.

This is the last "Labor Writes" I will have the honor and pleasure of presenting to the public. I therefore want to take the occasion to thank all those with whom I have had the privilege of working these past 12 years for their hard work and support, and especially the students, from whom I have learned so much.

Solidarity Forever

Michael Merrill

Dean

June 2016

“GETTING THERE ...”

Where Flight Begins

MARIE COX

*My life begins in tool prep where I stay for a few days,
I'm cleaned and dressed and taken care of in so many ways.
Lay magnolia, all pink and pretty,
Hardens in seconds you better keep busy.
When all is completed, cover me protect me, move me on down the line,
After all I'm now FOD free and just in time.
This is it, oh wait. Was I covered three times with release agent?
I sure hope so or my panels not going to make it.
Moving, constantly moving, No time to breathe, no time to think,
Its go go go in this place "Where Flight Begins."*

*I'm on my way now, moving on into this huge white room.
Is it time to be born? What's happening now in this womb?
I'm sitting, waiting, looking around, there are people everywhere.
I can hear them talking about me. With paper in hand their coming over here.
FOD check done, lasers on, oh wow I'm in the spotlight now.
I'm going to be the best Panel ever, I'll show you how.
Light up those lasers, slap on that adhesive kit, and get me ready for my next shift.
Here they come all bright and cheery; all the ladies want to be near me.
My prep work is done; it's time for my FOD check. Call Quality, get her over here.
She sits above me looking for anything not wanted on me.
There it is, get it off of here it don't belong.
It's done; I am once again FOD free.
Guys put those stringers in the grooves, make them fit me.
Compact me to form the perfect panel.
Pull that release film, check for FOD.
Oh wait, it's my favorite QA. I'm on third shift now.
She goes up on the rainbow with flashlight in hand, looking carefully finding
The tiniest of foreign debris.
Yes, this QA is great I agree.
Bladders are installed with such care, I feel at ease when this team is here.
Noodles, oh how I love the noodles, they are put in all the right places.
Compact me once more then it's moving, constantly moving,
No time to breathe, no time to think, its go go go in this place Where Flight Begins.*

*It's time, I'm moving; I see the light at the end of the tunnel, well, across the room to be exact.
I'm parked in my new space now at an EI machine in back.
These guys are going to work night and day to make me, grow me. That's it, a revelation,
I've gone into semester two. I'm growing. Sequences, tows one after the other, then
That long stick thing with a white pencil. You know the tickle stick, yes the tickle stick. Go*

Ahead, mark me if you wish I'm going to stay right here and take it cause I'm a bigger part now.

For days the same process is done, layers on layers, yes I'm growing. I'm heavier, bigger, and stronger. I can't wait to move any longer.

It's time; I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go In this place where flight begins.

This is it; I'm almost done in this big white room. Now do your work people, get me ready for my crown. I'm king of this white room with my crown placed upon my head.

Move me out to my next area. Oh yes, its Autoclave time where I'm cured.

Oh the heat, it feels so good. Cooking, baking curing like I knew it would, making me even stronger. The doors are open, it's time to move on out. Hey guys it's time to remove this crown of mine. Get those bladders out so I can breathe cause I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Move me, set me up in place at trim and drill. Lights, mirrors, lasers it's all for show.

That man up there looking down over me knows how it goes. Drill those holes, make those cut-outs, do it grand. I'll sit right here as you wish until the end.

You see, I'm Moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Slide me on over to Pre NDE. These guys will make me shine in my new body. They fix me, repair me, edge seal my ends. When all is done I get a warm wash and diestone cleaning.

That's it; I'm ready for the final fabrication, the toughest of all NDI. Slide me right over, through the back door, set me up and watch me shine. Get that scan ready boys, this panel is perfect, no defects you'll find. That's it, it's over I've grown so strong I've passed the scan. Fabrication good-bye, I'm on my way I'm going to make it out one day. I'm Moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Moving on over to the superstore, Here I'm going to get lit up like a Christmas tree. Those lasers are shining on my radiant skin telling these guys where to mark on me, draw on me, make me beautiful for the world to see. Not here too long if there's an open spot because I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think. Its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Take me off the headers, load me on that tool, and roll me over to my new place I'll dwell.

Gentle boys I'm stronger than you, place me on those huge headers where work is due. Strap me on tight make sure I don't move. Now come on over here brown machine, do your best. Show me like all the rest. Place the holes in all the right spots, give those workers a run for their money. Climb on board those lifts, listen to your music, and laugh because something is funny. Get those brackets drilled right, inspected and installed. Cover me; paint me with blue and green. Just as long as you wipe me clean. Do your best work gentlemen; make me proud because the ladies coming behind you are going to show you how it's done. Everything's on me I think, I feel so good. I think my next stop is paint prep. I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Hey, I'm over here in the prep booth. These guys are getting me ready for primer. They are doing such a good job. The paper is taped to my skin just fine, no primer is going there this time. The sanding is done, the adhesive promoter is on, I'm ready for that inspector, where has she gone?

Call her. Oh here she comes. She'll look me over and give that smile, I'll know then, that primer comes. Now I've got to wait five hours for a tape test to be done. I look radiant now in my new color. What is it? Yellow, pale; I'm not sure but I know I shine just as well. Tape test is done and I'm moving out because I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Moving over to shipping corner, here anything that wasn't correct or put on me is completed. Any defects created will be fixed. My flaws at this point will be my strongest. I am still strong and grand yet everything is not perfect. I can only be as good as my creators. Here, in this place my creators will work to perfect me. When they are done my flaws will be no more, my perfection will shine through. I will be placed on a transport tool for shipping and plastic placed around me for protection of outside elements because I'm perfect in my life here for I'm moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think, its go go go in this place where flight begins.

Before I leave to journey on I would like to thank those who helped in creating me, this perfect panel, had it not been for the care taken by each in the work they do behind the scenes I would not be possible. I have traveled through this place where flight begins and I've seen a beautiful caterpillar changed into a butterfly, an old skeleton sitting back in a chair, a lovely grey cloud blowing in the wind, a small fish spawning as she passes by and a locker with the names of Marie, Maryland, Margarite and Mary Margaret on it moved from one building to another holding her names strong. I've seen eye exams, mopar forms, MVP, mass confusion, yet it all works together. Walk, ride a bike, get on a lift, moving constantly moving, no time to breathe no time to think. Its go go go in this place where flight begins. You see, I am created here, I leave to start a new life at the next location but in reality, once my tool is moved to tool prep my life begins again for I am a panel, a creation that these people put together time and time again in this place where flight begins. I hear struggles, words of encouragement, arguments and words of help through my journey here. I see and hear it all but your troubles and anguish, thoughts and actions will remain with me for I know how hard it is sometimes to create perfection when something isn't right. I know that you put all that aside and focus on me. I thank you for making me perfect as can be and making the flight as safe as possible for me and those held within me. Your secrets will be embedded into my skin forever, making me stronger in this place where flight begins.

NOTE ON ACRONYMS

FOD are Foreign Object Debris, any objects, big or small, that do not belong to the immediate process of building the aircraft and can cause accidental damage to equipment, personnel or the aircraft integrity during its construction.

QA assures quality inspections by employees trained and certified by federal guidelines to apply administrative and analytic techniques to insure product quality and reliability.

EI Machine is an ElectroImpact Machine that is used in the process of building automated fiber placement systems used to produce carbon-fiber composite wings and body panels of large passenger airplanes.

PRE- NDE refers to the process of conducting Non Destructive Examinations on parts and systems, evaluating components without compromising their integrity or future performance.

NDI is a Non Destructive Inspection process similar to the NDE though with finer calibrated machinery and systems with more complex controls.

MVP is the Mechanic Verification Process that includes training, testing, and professional qualifications in accordance with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules and guidelines.



Marie Cox – “I am created here” (photo)

Why I Joined Local 3

KENT PERREIRA

I was suddenly awoken by the horrid sound, echoing from the bathroom, of my three-year old son Kyle screaming and crying in pain. The result of an electrical shock, that left him on the floor trembling with fear and red with pain. The devious work, of a lazy non-union electrician. Thank God it wasn't fatal. There are just too many similar cases out there. This happens way too often. Surely, I thought, if I had the necessary electrical training I could make a difference.

My uncle Chris, a proud member of Local 3, steals every opportunity he can to share his 25 years of wisdom and experience in "the business" as he calls it. Whether it be at a grand Thanksgiving dinner or just a random social family gathering. I've heard too many morbid stories of deaths or serious injury due to malpractice and failure to follow the proper electrical code by these non-union Electricians. Electricians, that lack the necessary training and expertise, to be involved in such a dangerous field. They put themselves and too many other people in daily hazardous situations with high probability of injury. I remember reading about a union electrician who was called in to troubleshoot a job conducted by a non-union company on Northern Boulevard, in Queens. They had an issue with the emergency backup lighting fixtures. The union electrician was on a ladder, replacing the ballast on a defective lighting fixture when he received an electrical shock. The blast knocked him from the ladder causing him to break both of his legs. The reason he experienced an electrical shock was due to the fact that the wires were not properly grounded. Coincidentally, this is the same reason my son Kyle was shocked. The electrician later went on to sue the building owner and the general contractor for over three million dollars. So in their endeavor to save money by choosing the non-union route, it cost them way more in the long run. I knew this was an existing problem but it wasn't until it affected me directly, leaving my son with a temporary phobia of showering and me with the vivid memories of his ear bleeding screams, that I made the definitive decision to pursue electric work as a profession.

My pursuit however, was a lot easier said than done though. I went on the painstaking quest to determine where I could find the most professional electrical training. I started off with trade schools. Apex Technical School was my first avenue of choice. The program was extremely expensive, with semesters totaling over twelve thousand dollars but they made claims of guaranteed job placement at the program's completion. Luckily for me, my friend Garcia had recently completed the same program. I gave her a call and to my disappointment, she was struggling to find a union job. I could hear the frustration in her voice oozing through the phone. She advised me against Apex and me being one to gladly learn from someone else's misfortune rather than my own, I immediately heeded her warning. I scratched trade schools off the list and decided to give good old Uncle Chris a call, at the risk of being on the receiving end of a lecture

size length conversation. Even now I 'scrange' in despair at the thought of his incessant babbling. However, it was well worth it. He told me all about Local 3. The one of a kind benefits, such as reimbursement of college tuition, 401K and pension to name a mere few. The outstanding pay rate and the way the union functions as a brotherhood. Each member not just considered a colleague but rather a part of the family. Uncle Chris had me sold. I was ready to apply and all in perfect timing. Local 3 had just released the notice for open application for new apprentices. I got an application from Uncle Chris, and even though it stated they were accepting applications for a two week duration, he told me to submit my application on the very first opening day.

I can still remember it now, there was torrential rain fall that day accompanied by storm speed winds. I had to get my application to the post office. My so called storm umbrella was dismantled with the first gust of wind. I had the envelope bearing my application in the left inside pocket of my baby blue raincoat, close to my heart and safe from the elements. I made it to the post office in the city on 34th street. My eyes must be deceiving me, there was a line of hopeful and determined people out the door and down the stairs. I joined the line and asked the guy in front of me. "Are you on line to mail an application for the joint apprentice program?" He immediately glared at me for a quick second as a possible competitor and with a stolid expression said "Yes. I am." He didn't seem like the chatty type so I kept to myself for the duration of my wait, a solid two hours at that. Finally, the Post Office clerk said next, and he was actually speaking to me. He seemed just as exhausted as I was. Sitting there behind the foggy glass, dripping with condensation, compliments of the cold air blasting from the air conditioner affixed to the wall to the left of him. I asked him which was the best service to use to send off my apprentice application. He seemed somewhat annoyed at the question as he blurted out "Send it Priority! That's how the five hundred people before you sent it." "Sure sir, Priority it is." I replied with a smile, just happy to be out the line even though inclement weather awaits me outside. Now I just have to wait for a response.

It seemed like an eternity and I still hadn't heard any news, whether it be good or bad. I just wanted to hear something. I felt stuck in limbo. Then I finally received a call from my Uncle Chris, a hiring freeze, he said it was. Too many workers and due to the economic recession, there were not enough jobs. The freeze was indefinite, but Uncle Chris said it would be for at least a few years. My relentless efforts were all in vain. I was completely disappointed and frustrated to the point of anger. That was back in 2010. I had no choice but to side track for a while, so I got involved in fire safety. The time flew by, I soon became an Emergency Evacuation and Fire Safety Supervisor. I was doing good. In March of 2014, I bought a house. I was comfortable.

Progressively, I moved forward but no matter what I achieved there was still a void that I could not fill. Then in September of 2014, I got the call, the freeze was lifted and applications were being processed. I resubmitted my application and in March of 2015 I received a letter to complete an aptitude test. Finally, progress was being made but I couldn't help but feel bitter sweet about it. I was established in my Fire Safety job and

I was surly making lots more than I would make as an apprentice. Usually the financial aspect wouldn't have been a detouring factor, but now I have to consider my mortgage among other bills. The timing was wrong for so many reasons but I told myself, it wouldn't be worth it, if it were easy. So I took the aptitude test and passed it. The next step was a group interview. That went smoothly and I left feeling as though I nailed it.

Then I received a letter informing me to enroll at SUNY Empire. Followed by the medical exam. The most uncomfortable medical examination I ever underwent. The doctor had beady eyes and just seemed menacing. I guess he could tell I was nervous by my uneasy posture, so he tried to lighten the mood by cracking a few jokes, needless to say he failed miserably. I pacified him with a smile as I thought to myself, thank God you have a Ph.D. in medicine, because you were not meant to be a comedian. At least it was over quickly. The process on a whole was moving along rapidly. Soon after, I was issued a welcome letter and instructions to attend two mandatory safety OSHA classes. However, the joy I should have felt reading that letter was triumphed by me being torn about the awkward timing. Then more bad news. SUNY Empire rejected my transcript because it was from a foreign country. My frustration grew. They advised me to have my transcript verified by a company called World Education Services. I followed the instructions keenly but as luck would have it, WES turned out to be the company with the longest processing time. I ended up missing my first class. The Registrar, was extremely helpful and allowed me to sit in on the second class unofficially to take notes so as to not fall too far behind. To this day I'm still unsure as to the status of my enrollment, but here I am, utterly consumed with deadly determination, doing my first assignment. I'm running on little to no sleep, and also going to college as part of the apprentice program.

It has been a truly difficult and intense voyage to get here and it's only the tip of the iceberg. Now comes the life of working two full time jobs to cover expenses and going to college, all at the same time. From now on I'll be constantly exhausted and hardly be able to see my loving wife and son as much as I would like to. I foresee hell to come. School will only get more difficult and I've already had quite the variety of characters to deal with on job sites, but it's at the hottest temperatures that the hardest steel is forged. So I'm not worried. Instead I welcome the challenge with open arms and I have my Uncle Chris to guide me along the way. Then it happened. Not even a full month on the job and I received my 1st on the job lesson about grounding. Improper grounding was the reason my son Kyle was shocked and now I'm learning how it's supposed to be done by code. This will undoubtedly avoid putting someone else in danger. In that exact moment, all the tribulations and obstacles that opposed me getting to this point became trivial in comparison to the opportunity I now have to make a difference.

Getting My Mind Back

PETER KLEM

From having to read to pass my class I have discovered a lot about myself. I went from avoiding reading at all costs to actually enjoying it. Slowly throughout the semester I have gotten more and more interested in it, also I have discovered a way to get my mind back as well.

I would like to start by introducing myself, my name is Peter Klem, I am a 25-year old Army combat veteran, I am married with two beautiful children. I entered this apprenticeship training through Helmets to Hardhats, a non-profit program getting separated veterans set up with a job in the construction industry. When I first entered this apprenticeship program I was really excited, I am a fifth-generation Local 3 electrician, this gave me a sense of pride and made me feel like a was continuing a 100-plus year legacy, also I could tell I made my father and grandfather proud. The only thing I was dreading about this program was the school portion of it, But that all eventually changed.

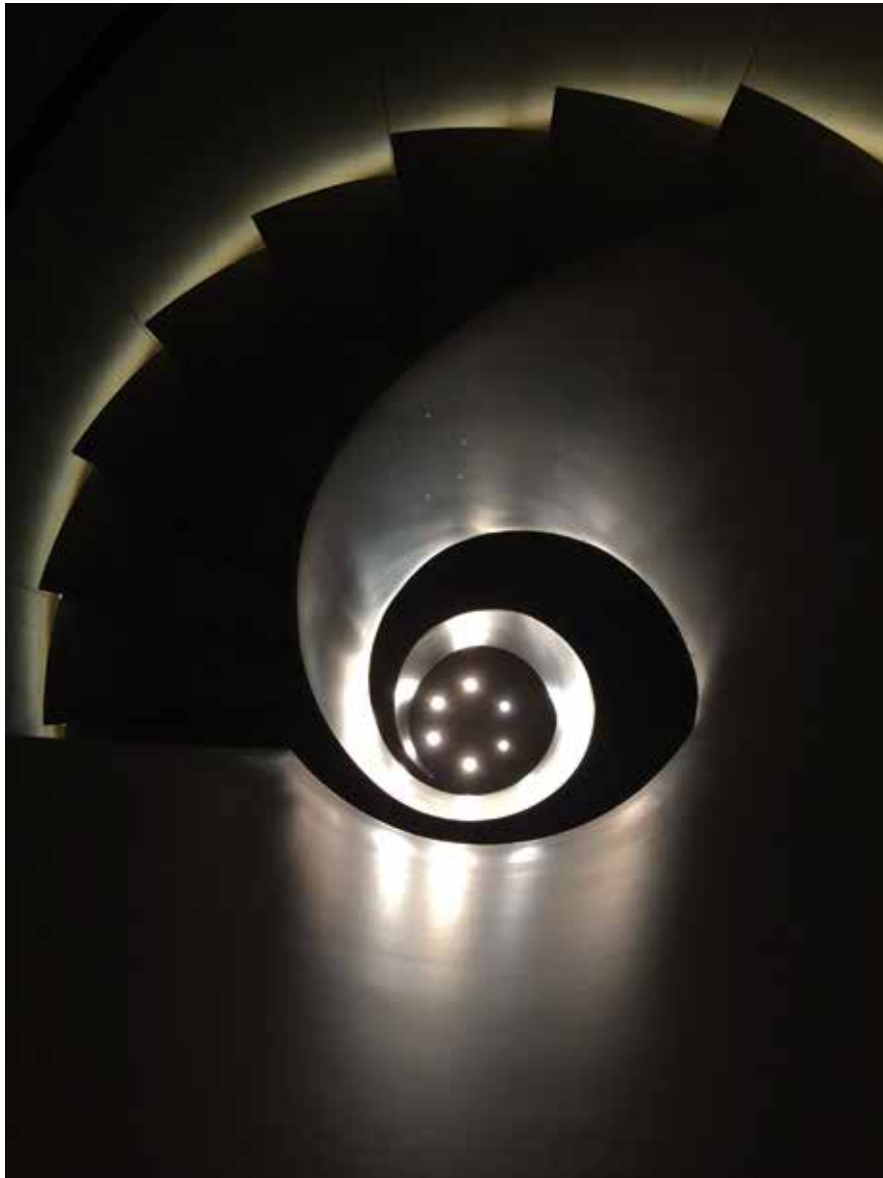
This college class has truly changed my life. I always went through school just making it by with the bare minimum. I entered this semester with the same mindset. It took me a little while to realize the severity of this class as well as this entire college degree program, it determines mine and my family's future as well as my career. Once I was finally able to have this click in my head I completely changed my whole mindset. I have been able to grow as a student and as a reader. I've figured out reading strategies as well as learning how my environment had to be conducive for reading: I need peace and quiet to read, so once my children are sleeping I am able to accomplish this even if it's just fifteen minutes at a time. Even something as small as finding out that in order to be productive at writing a paper I need to type it not hand-write it. By getting interested in reading my wife also reads her own book at night while I do. I was able to discover my strong areas of assignments as well as where I needed to work a little bit harder. For example was able to find out that I produce stronger more quality work when I can relate to and actually see something the author is talking about, than assignments like book reports that I have found out I need to take a little more time to complete them. Such as I need to pay more attention to things such as structure I also need to find out ways to elaborate on ideas better.

The biggest thing about this experience that has had an impact on my life was me being able to overcome some rather large obstacles in my life. I have suffered from severe PTSD for about the last four years. I was stuck in a "funk" where I couldn't even think for myself anymore. From taking a college class I have been forced to start actually using my mind again and having to truly sit down think and concentrate.

With all this I was able to get my mind back after a long time of truly hard struggles. Since I started this I have had close to no breakdowns which was happening to me four to five times a week before. To me all this is a huge obstacle conquered.

From doing my assignments I have discovered that I actually am smart and do have the potential to be a good student and earn a degree, something I never thought was possible. Something that surprised me was I never thought poetry would be something that would interest me, that's only because I never really knew what poetry was. To me poetry was just poems, after taking this class I was able to realize that is not the case. Poetry could be almost anything and I realized I listen to poetry every day of my life. It's music to me that is poetry and it is indeed a true art form when you listen to a song or read lyrics that have raw power and meaning behind them. I now find myself analyzing everything. Once I was introduced to what poetry truly was I find myself listening to music and trying to find out the meaning behind everything the artist says.

This class has been a huge building block for me. It's even helped with my future for my kids by giving me a better outlook on education as a whole, which will help me guide my children in the right direction, as well as by getting my own mind pointed in the right more positive direction. I know that I am not the best, or a straight-A student, but I am certainly working on that and little by little as I grow more and more as a student I feel as if I will get there one day and that makes me happy. It's something I have never felt before and I have to say it feels good.



Paul Kurland – “Spiraling Light” (photo)

Through a Struggle to a Better Life

ROMAN VERHNYAK

September 9th, 2015 was my first day on a job as a TA1 “Kid” apprentice for Local 3, but my way into the union had started before I even knew that the union existed. I was grateful to have this opportunity to not only secure a future for my family but also to be proud of building the greatest city in the world. Being a member of the union resolved such struggles as a decent-paying job, an education and security for my future family that I faced after coming to the United States.

My way into the union started when I moved to New York City from Ukraine in Mid-August of 2011. I rented a one-bedroom apartment in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. I met my landlord, Domenico, an old short guy with a strong Italian accent and a huge smile. Frankly speaking, it took me a while to adapt to his manner of speaking. After some time, Domenico said that he liked that I kept the apartment clean and didn’t cause him any troubles. He said that I became like a son to him. Domenico told me that he spent his whole life working for Local 3, and he also told me how good it was to be a part of this brotherhood. At the end of one of such conversations, he mentioned that there was supposed to be a day when Local 3 would open its application process for all those who want to become a member. Domenico promised to keep me posted about the date.

From time to time, I would hear a reminder about the registration date, and I kept passively waiting for it. “Why passively?” one may ask?. The answer would be because it seemed like it would never happen to me. While waiting for that special day, I was doing odd, low-paying jobs as most immigrants do, ranging from delivery to security. I was also enrolled into the City University of New York College of Technology, or City Tech, majoring in Mechanical Engineering – a field I liked a lot. Going to school in the morning, doing multiple jobs in the evening, paying all the bills and other expenses, and doing some volunteer work for my community here, in New York City, was a very hard task, and at one moment, I started to realize that I might not be able to survive in those conditions. I was far away from graduating the college, even though some of my credits were transferred from my previous vocational school that I successfully completed in Ukraine. I needed something that would secure my near future, and I needed it ASAP.

One day, Domenico called me up and said that the application process was about to start soon, so he told me to go to a website, download an application, fill it out, and send it back on July 21st, 2014. He warned me that I had to do it on that first day of the process, or I would lose my opportunity for the next few years. Three years had passed from the time I’ve heard about the application process to the time I was

actually able to apply, and my landlord had retired from working at the brotherhood. I applied and became more focused on the opportunity of joining Local 3, as it could be my lifesaver.

It worked: I was in as TA 1. I couldn't believe that until the moment I found out I'd passed all the tests and received my job ticket. I felt very special at that moment since I received an opportunity to become a first generation electrician. During all the orientation classes, I would hear a lot that other guys were second, third and a higher generation of electricians. In contrast, by meeting my landlord and getting into the union, I was given a chance to secure a well-being of my future family.

However, I had to sacrifice something important, at least for a nearest future: my mechanical engineering career. I had to drop City Tech in order to be enrolled into Empire State College majoring in Labor Studies, and also to be able to take my electrical theory classes. But I look at it from an extremely positive perspective: I didn't end up with my engineering career; instead, I chose to achieve hands-on experience and a degree in an electrical trade as a huge asset for my future career plans. The majority of my previous hands-on experience comes from working with a lathe, both computer numerical control (CNC) and manual milling machines back in Ukraine, and doing electrical wiring during the last summer. I recently realized that I enjoy not only job planning but also a physical work with tools.

After learning how financially beneficial it was to be a member of the union and being on the job for three days, I started to question myself whether I would like to continue my engineering career, or to stay where I was at that moment. Besides all the benefits, security for me and my future family, and a feeling of being proud for building New York that I was getting, I had a chance to witness one more benefit of being in a union that I haven't seen before: the feeling of a strong brotherhood. I have witnessed how laborers of different unions help each other on a daily basis. They willingly and without any hesitation jumped in to offer their helping hands in unloading conduits from an elevator or moving a material out of a way; they have done all that and even more for me – "Thank You!" Another vivid example of a true brotherhood I've seen on the job was that tribute to seventeen members of Local 3, as well as all victims of tragic events of September 11th. That almost twenty minute-long moment of silence with the flags lifted up in a sky above Hudson Yards showed a strong unity of the team.

Having an opportunity to achieve a degree, and be provided with a job and benefits eliminated my biggest immigrant's struggles. I was happy to be given a chance to belong to one of the strongest unions within the city. Despite some discouraging comments about unemployment within the union from outsiders, I was glad to proceed to my new career in an electrical trade. In addition, by being given a chance to be a first generation electrician, I became a pioneer in establishing a strong foundation for future generation of electricians within my family.



Kasiem Johnson – “Interlock” (photo)

An Introduction and a System I Navigated

LOUIS VEGA MINELLA

My name is Lou and I remember the first time I learned to drive a school bus, which was actually a means to an end in order to obtain a CDL (Commercial Driver's License) so I could drive a limo. I'm sure to some people this might not seem like a very ambitious goal but I was a rash 20-year old, and the intention was to obtain a job where I could get a nice chunk of cash together for "bigger and better things." Surprisingly, obtaining a bus driver's license was the easiest path to my CDL, but bringing home a modest amount of cash was also a criteria, since I was being raised by my grandparents and needed to help with the bills. Driving a limo (predominately a cash business) was the more "ambitious" of the two, at least in my eyes, but bus driving was the means to that end (and what a grueling means it would turn out to be!) At least that's how it all began, but of course there's more to the story than just that. This is how I navigated my way through obtaining my CDL to ultimately drive a limo and what happened along the way.

Let me elaborate ... In my 20's, I was a bit directionless, like many young people and short term goals were my primary ambitions. My grandfather was a hard working custodian who had worked his whole life, through the Great Depression and fought in World War II and I wanted to show him I could work hard and help "earn my keep" My grandmother, was a wonderful homemaker and incredibly supportive. My mother, unfortunately had become a peripheral figure in my life, since my father had left when I was a baby but she was loving in her own way, nonetheless. Earning money to help my grandparents, who were predominately raising me, was a definite priority, but a job where I could get out and see things was also something I was interested in, therefore a driving job definitely fit the bill. I saw it as a way to get out of the house, a somewhat stifling environment of Catholic oppression and guilt for having the meager ambitions of being a driver and not an astronaut or brain surgeon. Who knew – at the time I was a kid (sorry, dear readers but looking back now, at 20, I was a kid, not to demean 20-somethings).

Peter Brega Bus Company was a beacon of bright yellow hope in what my grandparents certainly saw prior to me finding it, as a life stuck in a house where Atari was certainly considered some devilish plaything that entranced young teens across America to abandon their ambitions and stare at the boob tube all day, fiddling with joysticks in masturbatory oblivion. Yes, I was hooked but it definitely wasn't a waste of time – I was trying for the high score on Pong! Nonetheless, I had to get a "real job" and at this point a busboy turned waiter at Hanchars Restaurant, down the street from my house just wasn't going to cut it any more. Man, living in the burbs just isn't what it's cracked up to be, trust me. If you're lucky, there's a beat up old car in the driveway that was handed down one or more times that you're really doubting whether it'll make it the 5 mile drive to work, virtually no public transportation to speak of and if

you're unlucky, (the usual course) an equally beat up bicycle to ride those five miles in all kinds of weather. But there were plenty of "taxicabs," if you can call them that by NYC standards – barely regulated fees, so get ready to fork over everything you made for the night on a "cab" ride home. So, I use that term loosely. As I'd alluded to previously, great if you're on the receiving end of that cash. Not so great if you're the one forking it over to these car service drivers! And that's when I had my ah-ha moment! If I could get behind the wheel of one of those money making excuses for printing cash on wheels, that was my ticket out of Hanchars, the restaurant down the street where I was sort of working, the burbs and on to financial independence, (and incidentally, to of course help my wonderful grandparents) but how to do it?

Back to Peter Brega. Here were these yellow monstrosities gathered behind a fence also, only five miles away in a town called Valley Cottage near where I lived. What a pastoral name – Valley Cottage – almost sounds like there should be rolling green hills and deer grazing, only in front of this bus company, there was a pen with some beat up old goats, a mangy horse and I think a llama, if my memory serves me. So yes, although it does sound kinda hillbilly, it was more like the petting zoo in Central Park, but with the Port Authority Bus terminal behind it. It was fun when I was a little kid, going there and feeding those animals and a memory I'll never forget being a little kid from The Bronx and moving up to "the country" with my loving grandfather, who broke his ass to save his custodian's salary and get me out of a rough environment, that being The Bronx in the 70's. It really was like the country to me, being with those animals and my Gramps and him teaching me how to feed them so I didn't get my thumb bitten off. It turned out to be somewhat fitting that Peter Brega was located behind there, as it would be another object of my salvation, so to speak. This would be where I would begin my quest for the limo job. Since I needed a quick route to a CDL, a school bus company back in the 80's didn't have the strident, post-nine-eleven requirements for hiring drivers that I would assume are currently in place so getting hired there meant having a regular driver's license and a willingness to take a split morning/afternoon shift of only four hours a day – four grueling hours of dealing with screaming children, while navigating a labyrinthine maze of streets and keeping to a pickup schedule. Therefore, not too many people wanted to do this job, but nonetheless, through this, the "exchange" was that they would train me to drive the bus and acquire my CDL, which I did.

Needless to say, after six months I left the bus company with a CDL in hand and got my first limo job, again, right down the street from where I lived at A1 limousine. I got the "dream job" and went on to make the ton of cash (most of it tax free, I might add!) I was looking for. Every week I was able to help my grandparents and repay my grandfather for all those thoughtful trips to the petting zoo!



Joe Brasile – “Cartier Glass” (photo)

Union and Me

DEZHI YU

The union, for most people, is somehow strange. If you are not closer enough to it, you have no idea what “union” means. However, if you are part of it, you will be proud of its inheritance. I was one of those “most people” before I became a member of Local 3. Now, I am very proud that I am a member of Local 3 because the union for me is a great opportunity to be successful in my career, and also it is a chance for me to build up my wonderful future.

I thought that I would not join any union in my life until I met my friend at a New Year’s dinner. He told me about how hard it was for him to get into the union and how great the union was, how he found his career, and how he got support from his union to support his family, including housing, medical coverage, life insurance and a dental plan. He met many great union members who taught him work skills and helped him succeed in his apprentice program. I enjoyed his story and was happy that he got a decent job. He also tried to convince me to join the union. At the moment, I still did not want to think about the union because I had no idea what a union was. So I put this thought aside and kept working in my friend’s liquor store with a boring daily routine which was doing the same things over again and again.

A year later, I met my friend at the same party. He looked happier and better than the previous year. He kept telling me how great things were for him. He worked 7 hours a day, plus had free professional skill training and free college education courses. He would also get an Associate’s Degree when he finished his apprentice program. After he graduated, he would get promoted to Mechanic Intermediate Journeyman, Journeyman, and the salary doubled for each jump. Additionally, he got housing support from the union. He lived in a nice apartment with his family that cost him only about \$1,000 a month including utilities. When I heard about this, I was shocked because I could not image how this happened with the union. Compared to my job, his was in a Heaven; mine was in a hell. I received no benefits from my company, even though I worked hard and long hours. I envied what he had. That night I was down because of my poor company which was a small store, two men only, and long hours’ work.

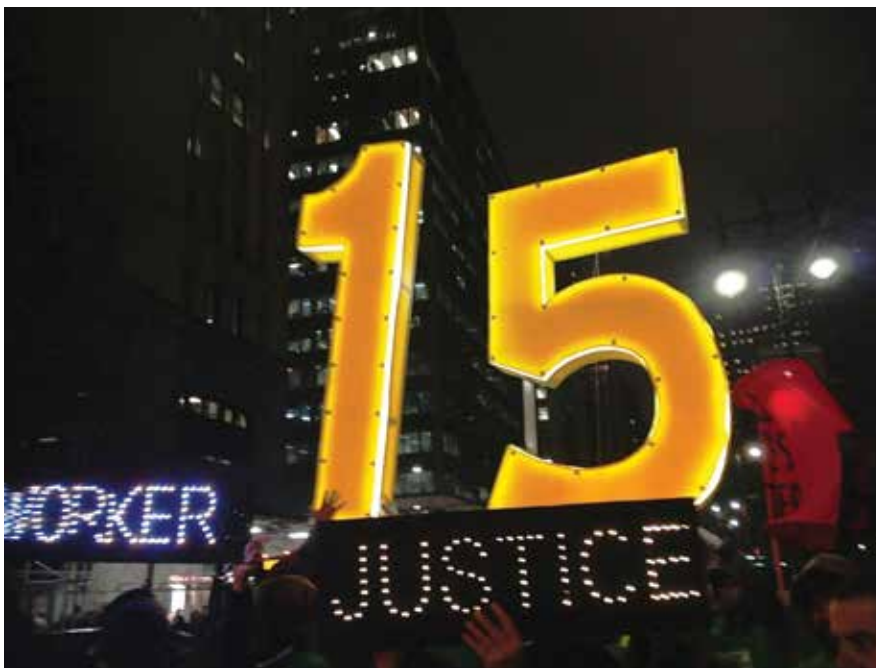
A few days later, my friend’s story constantly repeated in my head. It seemed to be a hand to push me to join the union. However, I was scared about the union because I had heard many stories from T.V. and newspaper that how bad the unions were. For example, I heard union members were lazy and always wanted a raise in their salary with more benefits. If they did not get what they wanted, they would strike. During their strike, the economic system and other people would be impacted greatly: losing money, no train or bus for work, garbage all over the street, and shipment delays on the pier. I was afraid to be a member of any union. However, I could not forget all the things that he told me. I was so confused at that time. I did my own research to find out more information about the union. The results were both pros and cons.

The advantages were job security, better pay, better compensation, equality, worker's voice. The negatives were high dues, higher cost for employers, harder to move up and a loss of autonomy. It made me more down than before. One day, my wife gave me a suggestion to ask my friend to show me how the union functioned. My mood suddenly turned up and my head got clear. Why did I put myself into a corner; I should go closer to the union to find out what I wanted to know.

On a wonderful Sunday afternoon, I made a phone call to my friend. I nicely expressed my thoughts to him. He replied to me that it was no problem. He would take me to a monthly meeting of a social club, which was under Local 3, to let me get closer to the union members and listen to what they had to say. One Friday night, I sat quietly at the back of a room and listened to the union members' expressions for the whole night. For example, the president of the club put out some important information from the Union. The business manager described activities associated with different projects while other officers spoke about safety issues; a retirement plan; and generally encouraged members to be more active on all kinds of events. At the end of meeting, my friend introduced me to people who were the senior members in the union. They were very nice and gave me a lot of information, which was different from what I had learned outside the union. For example, the union is an organization that protects its members, helped them find a right job, provided training and other necessity skills for jobs and provides medical, dental, and a retirement plan. They welcomed me into the union if I wanted to join. That night changed me a lot and gave me positive energy to push myself to fill out the apprentice application for Local 3. I knew it would take a long period to wait for a letter or phone call from the union. At least, I had made a great step forward for my better future life.

A few months later, I got a letter from the union that I could take an apprentice program test. At that moment, I was excited and worried because I had to take a test, but I had no idea how to prepare for it. Therefore, I called my friend and also my advisor, from Helmets to Hard Hats, the program that helps veterans like me to find work in building trades. They got me all kinds of study guides and provided encouragement. A few months later, I was accepted to the apprentice program of Local 3. When I was holding the letter, I was happy, and I could see I would have a brand new life's journey in the Local. Although I am paid a small salary during the apprentice program, I think it's worth it. I know I will use these five years to build up my professional skills, and advance the direction of my life. I always liked and believed my favorite quotes "No pain, No gain."

My new journey life has just started; I hope I can work safely and learn more from other members, then I can make a better future for other generations. I will try my best to pass the great inheritance of the union to my family and other members. We are all brothers and sisters, one big family. We stand together, work together, help one another and fight for our rights. As long we stand up together, we can make many things better for our union and our family. Thanks Local 3, you have given me a chance to be part of a huge family.



Workers Art Coalition (Jaime Lopez, Paul Vance, Stephanie Lawal, Sophia Santos, Kim Slovak and Tatiana Vargas) – “Fifteen” (photo)

My Journey Into Local 3

RICKEY RAMKISHUN

When you stumble on an opportunity, the best thing to do is to take the first step, and go for it, because that particular opportunity might just be the start of a very successful future. Upon graduating high school, an opportunity arose for me to join Local 3, an International Brother/Sister Hood of Electrical Workers. There are many qualities that are needed in order to fulfill the standards of an electrical worker, such as having had previous experience, going to a trade school, or even a family member that is in the field of electrical work provides advantages that may increase the likelihood of becoming a candidate. These credentials are beneficial because it illustrates a brief overview of the union and what it entails. Although the union offers financial prosperity, this is not the only basis for why I have chosen to chase this path. The possibility of obtaining adequate fortune is quite irresistible, however, the concept behind this field is what truly captivates me: the thrill of danger in each and every corner that only certain people can handle. A majority of individuals find electrical work to be extremely hazardous, but it is for this very reason that makes my career worthwhile.

Going down memory lane, as a little kid, my uncle would take me out in his vehicle. He placed me on his lap and left me to steer around the block where we lived as I fed off of the excitement behind the wheel. My father would also do the same and as I was growing up, it also led to my early dreams of wanting to become a race car driver. Even to this day I continue to drive fast cars as it allows me to connect, not only with my memories, but also with a constant rush of elation. Although a dream indeed, cars weren't the only thing that happened to catch my attention. One particular action in which my father and uncle participated in fairly often was construction work. I would watch them renovate a house and wonder if maybe I could also do that. Before falling asleep, I would recall how they lined up the studs on the wall, how they pulled wire in the ceiling, how careful they were with all of their movements, and how excellent they were at every single action they performed. It is safe to say that my father, along with the rest of my family, were all major contributors towards everything I currently believe in such as the power to build a house or the adrenaline to drive a racecar.

My four years of high school brought both good and bad times, but the education and experiences I had gained will stay with me forever. One goal I set out to achieve within those four years was towards finding the right path for my future and it just so happened that I found something I truly loved which was being an electrician.

However, I was well aware that laying out my plans for the future was not going to be accomplished overnight, so I decided to grab hold of everything my school had to offer. I tried out for the cricket and basketball team. Unfortunately, the basketball team was full so I settled with cricket, which to my surprise turned out to be a success,

since it brushed upon leadership skills, how to handle discipline, and added pleasure after long hours of school work. However, at the same time, I was enrolled in the construction trades program doing carpentry and electrical. I found an interest in both but I enjoyed electrical work more as I encountered hands on activities, allowing masterpieces to form from all of my hard work. Escalating to sophomore year, I began low voltage electrical work, and loved every bit of it because I was watching my father and uncle rebuild our living room, making the electrical hands on process a breeze. By junior year, I had a few career options laid out in front of me including architecture, engineering, and electrical, but decided to transition into carpentry, although it appeared to be a little over my expectations. Dealing with millwork became an irritation to me since it provided no source of excitement, and oftentimes I felt no connection to such ordinary measures. As to my basic classes, I continued the same hard working attitude as I did with my career options, receiving a 3.5 GPA throughout all four years.

Consequently, I managed to stay on target with my studies, eventually benefitting me in the long run. My senior year in high school, I completed a Service Wiring class where I dealt with high voltage electrical set ups, seeing the electrical field in a whole new perspective. The work became my passion, and I was hooked on the idea that I had worked hard for a position not many can claim. I was offered an opportunity by my teacher to participate in a ten-week class to see if I could be placed for construction work, strictly union only, knowing that the union would be my best option considering the health benefits, financial stability and prideful title of being a member of the union.

Ultimately I chose Local 3 because it encompassed electrical work and at that specific moment I knew what my calling was. I completed the class and was accepted after taking a test for Local 3, achieving the goal I had set out to finish since the very first day. All of my dedication had finally paid off and I couldn't help but feel proud of myself for everything I was able to conquer. However, I could never forget the tremendous support that I had received from not only my family but from my encouraging teachers as well.

I joined the union knowing that there is a five-year apprenticeship which needs to be completed, and without hesitation was up for the offer because I've now been given the chance to explore my career, obtain a degree while going to school, and get paid to work. Although the pay is not great, I still take the experience any day. The apprenticeship requires me to go to school two nights out of the week, one for college courses and the other for electrical theory courses. Although tiring at times, no other career has every single part of me the way electrical does. I have tried other careers such as automotive, sports, and even medical but electrical seems to always win. The electrical career has become a part of my life and it has introduced me into a world of pure adventure. Not only is the work itself invigorating but the environment is as well the big city of Manhattan. I grew up in Queens, NY, and would frequently visit Manhattan, but I would always say to myself that one day, I will be working here in

the big city of Manhattan. The people I work with are very generous, which enables me to sink into my work with tremendous bliss. Along with my love for the work I do, I have great expectations for my future as well, and one of them would be that I would love to open my own electrical company and be the boss.

I really appreciate every chance I received because they all allowed me to visually see how the world works and what types of skills and people are needed in order for the world to function properly. I take my education very seriously, and throughout my years, I won't ever try to ruin it because I know that knowledge and skill is the key to success, and I strongly want to succeed the right way and not the wrong. I've had family members who have gave me such irreplaceable experiences that I can't thank them enough. I love what I do, and I do what I am doing with love and passion. A career is better than just a regular job.



Workers Art Coalition (Jaime Lopez, Paul Vance, Stephanie Lawal, Sophia Santos, Kim Slovak and Tatiana Vargas) – “Lightbox Sculpture”

The Long Road to Joining Local 3

TRAVIS BODO

As one of the older apprentices joining the union, there was a long series of events that led me to where I am today, beginning in 2015. For six years before being accepted into the apprenticeship, I had been working as a fairly successful real estate agent in Brooklyn. I ended up taking a large pay cut while locking myself into a program that, at best, will take me five and a half years to complete. Being that the pay as an apprentice isn't great, there was one main reason that I decided to make such a life altering decision, and that is security. Another important aspect that led me to my decision was my frustration with the quality of craftsmanship I was seeing in the houses and apartments that I was seeing and showing every day in real estate.

My father is a general contractor on Long Island, so needless to say I grew up on jobsites. I can remember when I was 12 years old and my father would take me to the new house he was building and would let me "work" for the day. Carrying one box up a flight of stairs was barely work, but I remember being proud of what I had done and appreciating the paycheck I would get at the end of the day, which was most likely ten dollars and a trip to McDonald's. As I grew older the tasks got more involved. By the time I was 15, I was spending every summer and every vacation working for my father, and I was building up a substantial bank account when compared to my friends who didn't work until later on. The paycheck was important, but there was a strong sense of pride I got when I saw a single family home built from the ground up, and I knew that I had some part of it. That house could very well be there way after I am long gone, and there is something to say about quality craftsmanship.

I spent the six years as a licensed real estate salesperson in the most popular parts of Brooklyn, which itself is the most active real estate market in the country. As a real estate agent I made a decent living, and I lived what most people would call a very flexible life. If I wanted to escape the city for the week I could because I was my own boss. If I wanted to sleep until noon on a weekday I could because there was no one telling me that I needed to go to work. Although I was living a very leisurely life with a lot of flexibility, there was one thing that my job lacked, and that was security. If I didn't work, I didn't get paid. I could make two-thousand one week, but that never meant that I was going to make a single dollar for the rest of the month. I remember a time that I had received an application on an apartment that was a surefire closing according to all the signs, and after taking a long weekend in the Catskills I came home to find that the clients had gotten cold feet and had decided that they no longer wanted the apartment. Had I not taken off that weekend I could have possibly convinced them that their fears of being too far from the train were unfounded and that they were walking the wrong direction which added on eight extra blocks. The eighteen hundred dollars that I was expecting upon my return had slipped through my fingers. I always wound up making money, but every week, every month, and

every year was different. That impromptu vacation I took could cost me two-thousand dollars, or it could cost me four thousand dollars if I looked at the business that I lost by not being available that week and being out of the groove the following week. On top of that any benefits I wanted or needed were put solely on me, so planning for expenses became very time consuming. It was time for a change.

Security doesn't just mean a weekly paycheck to me anymore. As I made my way into my thirties I realized that I wanted a family one day, and working sixty hours a week in the hopes that I made enough money to cover my bills didn't seem like security anymore. I began looking into what it meant to me to have a secure job. I realized that an eventual retirement was something that was extremely important to me. There was a time as a real estate agent that I needed to get dental work done and the total bill came to two-thousand dollars, which came out of pocket. Needless to say I was also sick of having a real estate agent's health care plan, which tended to be "I will hope I don't get sick, and if I do I will just go to the cheap walk-in clinic."

Throughout my years of working in real estate, I saw thousands of apartments and houses built that were constructed with little or no skilled tradesmanship, and it showed. Lighting that stopped working after three flips of the switch, and drywall that was crumbling less than a month after it was put up were just a couple of examples of what I had seen. I never let my clients know about how I felt about the apartments, but when they called complaining about a receptacle not working, or a leak in their ceiling, I was not surprised. After years of this disappointment, I began a small handyman business on the side in order to prove to myself and my clients that there were still skilled craftsmen in the world. After a year of doing handyman work as a second job I decided that it was time to take it full time. After looking into the benefits of all the possible unions I could join I decided on applying to Local 3. I chose Local 3 because of the total compensation package they offered, most of which would provide me with the security that I am now looking forward to as I grow older. After a year of applications, testing, interviews, and physicals I was finally notified that I was accepted into the program, and I began what will be a long journey.

When someone makes a life altering choice in their life there can be many reasons behind it. When I made my choice to join the union there were a few, the main one being security. I also wanted to prove to the world, and to myself that there are still skilled tradesmen. After this journey is over I will have the security that I was looking for, and I will be one of the skilled tradesman that I have always looked up to. The path will be long, and the path will not be easy but the end justifies the means in my opinion. After six months of work and school I am now confident that the decision I made a year ago was one that I will never regret.

A Mind at Work

RYAN COOKE

I'm a student at the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies. I am pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Labor Studies. Achieving a bachelor's degree is a goal I've always wanted to accomplish. I already have an Associate Degree in Science from Bronx Community College and I promised myself to finish what I started and get my bachelor's degree. Having an education is important because it opens up a lot of opportunities for me. In addition, this degree will allow me to be more versatile and marketable in a competitive job market. In today's world, most jobs require a college degree. It's kind of funny because I hated school when I was younger. Now that I'm an adult, I appreciate the value and importance of education. I took the long road to get to where I am today.

My journey began when I was born in Jamaica in 1981. I remember my first day of school like it was yesterday. It was 1986, I was five years old and my mother dropped me off to school. I cried, and I said to myself why did mom do this to me? A couple of hours went by and I found my way home. I thought my mother was going to welcome me with open arms; instead she spanked my behind and sent me back to school. From that day on I hated school. In 1988 we moved to Bronx, New York. However, this was a time in New York City and every major city throughout the United States was dealing with the devastating effects of the crack epidemic. My family and I live in a working class neighborhood but we were not immune to the crimes associated with the drug trade. I remember walking to school and seeing a sea of crack bottles that littered the school's playground. Growing up in Jamaica I've never seen crack before. It was a big culture shock for a seven-year old because I hear all the great stories about the United States but you don't hear about the problems of what was going on in the inner cities. I had to grow up fast living in that environment. Not only I was getting an education in school but I was also getting an education on what goes on in the streets. I thank my parents for teaching me about the consequences of getting involved in street life and keeping me on the straight and narrow path.

In January 1992, when I was 10, my parents decided to move to Florida. They wanted to provide a better life for me and my sister. It was also during this time that my father decided to take me to work with him. My father has worked in the construction business for over fifty years. He's 70 years old and still going strong. He is a skilled welder, carpenter, and plumber. One of the memories that stuck with me is when I spent the whole summer of 1994 working with my dad. He was working on a big construction job in North Miami building some new low income housing. Of course like every teenager I wanted to hang out with my friends. But as I looked back on that moment, I appreciated the time I spent with my father. I got to see up close and personal how hard my father and mother worked to support me and my sister. My father taught me how to sand, cut, and nail wood. In addition, he showed me how to

use power tools and I was hooked ever since. From that moment on, I liked working with my hands. That summer, I learned the value of hard work, being on time, and taking pride on the work you do.

My father also told me that if I was interested in having a career in construction, being an engineer was the way to go. He explained that engineers designed roads, buildings, and bridges and that and that job sounded pretty cool to me. He also added that in order to become an engineer you have to earn good grades in school and be good at math. Working with my father that summer inspired me to pursue a career in engineering and construction. Now that I knew what I wanted to do with my life, it was time for me to put the work in school to achieve that goal. I was a good student in elementary and middle school, but in high school I was an average student. I didn't apply myself because I did the bare minimum and I didn't put in the necessary work to excel in school. My parents knew that I could do better in school and they tried to motivate me, but I was a knuckle head. However, I manage to graduate high school with a B-C average. When I look back at that moment in time I would've been an A student if I applied myself.

After I graduated high school in June of 2000, I decided to join the United States Navy. I felt that the Navy will give me the skills and hands on experience to be an engineer. In addition, they will pay for my college tuition, the military service will look good on my resume, I will be able to travel and see the world, and it will open up some more opportunities for me. One of the hardest things I've ever done in my life was to endure nine intense weeks of basic training. There was no easy way out. So I put my mind to it and I was able to complete basic training. Completing boot camp was an achievement because it challenged me mentally and physically. Going through that process helped me become more focused and driven to take on any challenges.

After completing basic training and Machinists Mate "A" School, I reported to the nuclear powered aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman. I served aboard that ship from 2001 to 2004. I worked in the Auxiliary Division of the engineering department where we were in charge of ships air conditioners, refrigeration units, steam catapults to launch aircraft, hydraulic elevators, and service steam equipment. I was assigned to the steam catapult shop and we had to make sure that they were operational ready for the ship to carry out its mission. One of the things that the Navy emphasizes is paying attention to detail and accountability. If you don't pay attention to what you are doing, you could get yourself and other people killed. In addition, we were in charge of equipment that is worth millions of dollars. If any equipment gets damaged on a naval vessel, it will compromise the mission and the safety of the crew. The experience and training of being in high pressure situations in the Navy helped me to hold myself to a higher standard to the way I approach work.

I got out of the Navy with an honorable discharge in 2004. I came with a more positive attitude regarding education. Serving in the Navy was the wakeup call I needed. I was more focused and driven to achieve my goals. I enrolled in Bronx Community College and I majored in engineering science. Eventually I was able

to earn an associate degree in 2011. Meanwhile I was going to school; I got a full time job as cook and a cashier at Montefiore Hospital. After ten years at working at Montefiore, I wanted a career change. The job I had wasn't going anywhere and I wanted something more for myself. I signed up for the Helmets to Hardhats program, which was set up for veterans like me, who are interested in having a career in the construction field. I chose to be an electrician because it was a career that will always be in demand and you get to work with new technology. It turned out to be one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life.

Working as a Local 3 IBEW apprentice for the last nine months has been a fun and humbling experience. I actually look forward going to work and not a lot of people can say that. The skills and experience that I've received from the Navy has helped my transition into Local 3 go smoothly. I've been working with an excellent journeyman named Ung. He showed me how to properly use hand and power tools to cut and splice wires, bend pipes, read electrical blue prints, and wire electrical equipment. He showed me skills that are vital to be a successful electrician. Learning all these new things can be overwhelming. Sometimes my head is spinning because there is so much to learn. At times I get frustrated but Ung told me that, "I have to be patient and it takes time and repetition to improve your skills to be a good electrician." He also added, "Once you get more experience working with your tools and know the material, it will become second nature." I appreciate the knowledge that Ung has shared with me and I embrace the process of education and learning this trade. Not a lot of people see the amount of learning and education it requires to be an electrician.

People have the misconception of construction workers because they believe all we do is dirty work and we don't use our brains. They only see the physical aspects of the job and not the intellectual side of it. Local 3 understood the importance of education for its members because they wanted us to be more than tradesman, but be respected as professionals who make an impact in our society. Labor leaders such as Harry Van Arsdale and Tony Mazzocchi understood that the way to change people's perception of labor unions is through education. People like Mike Rose, author of *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (2004), value our work by stating in his introduction, "My purpose in writing the book, then, is to provide an alternative lens on everyday work, to aid us in seeing the commonplace with greater precision. I believe that such a change in perception could contribute to a more accurate portrayal of the full world of work, and could help us think more effectively and humanely about education, job training, and the conditions in which so many people make a living" (liv). Labor unions place in society is important because they affect changes on working conditions, wages, and benefits for the working class. Unions balance the powers between the working class and the rich.

The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies does a great job highlighting the history and contributions that labor unions have on our society. Furthermore, the courses and the discussions we have in class help raise our level of consciousness that labor unions face in the ongoing battle between corporations and anti-union

politicians. Corporations and anti-union politicians are attacking unions because they understand the power that unions have on bringing changes to society. They will do anything to undermine the power of labor unions because they believe that we affect their bottom line. These people believe that they should have all the power and nobody else matters. In fact in the article, "Standing at a Crossroads: The Building Trades in the Twenty-First Century," by Mark Erlich and Jeff Grablesky, wrote that, "According to the Building and Construction Trades Department (AFL-CIO), from 1973 to 2002 union membership declined from 1.6 to 1.2 million, while the unorganized construction workforce grew from 2.5 to 5.5 million" (5). Van Arsdale Jr. and Mazzocchi knew that the way to beat the corporations at their own game is through education. They believed that if our members are educated our unions will be prepared to take on corporations and ensure that our union's future is secure.

I believe the importance of education helps give us the knowledge we need to make a difference in people's lives. Harry Van Arsdale Jr. and Tony Mazzocchi contributions not only affected the lives of their members but also for working people. For instance, Van Arsdale Jr. was responsible for supporting the Civil Rights Movement for African Americans and minorities. Mazzocchi helped pass laws such as the OSHA Act which ensures safe working conditions for workers throughout the United States. These men understood that unions were more than organizations that represented their union members but they were also the extension of the communities they live and work in. Their contributions to the labor movement inspire me to be more than an electrician but also an advocate to help bring change to laws and fight for the rights of working people. Being educated on the issues that affect us today will help give me the tools to help solve some of those problems.

Some of the classes that I will be taking are "Labor and Politics," "Labor Law," "Economics of the Construction Industry," and the "Global Workplace." I find these classes intriguing because they are connected to one another and it pertains to how the world operates. "Labor and Politics" will give me an in depth look on the process of how labor union and pro-union politicians work together to pass laws that will benefit workers. "Labor Law" is important because you get to learn your rights as a worker and it is also give you a good understanding of laws. "Economics of the Construction Industry" will help me understand the effects that economics have on our industry. "The Global Workplace" will show me the positive and negative impact that globalization has on the job market.

All the experiences that I went through in my lifetime have made me the person I am today. I needed to go through all those trials and tribulations to be a better and wiser person. I am grateful for the opportunity that Local 3 has given me to reach my full potential. The education that I will receive from Empire State College will help me grow as a person and help reach my career goals and aspirations. I look forward to use my knowledge and experience from Local 3 and Empire State College to make a difference in this world.



Vincent Hernandez – "Starry Night (after Vincent)" (artwork)

“BEING THERE ...”

“The Brick Wall”

ROBERT BREAUX

I started this project out with a proper general direction to go in and it has sort of turned into several other things including an ongoing spin-off project that I will likely be dealing with for the next couple of years at a minimum. I think I will probably like that.

I originally thought I would take some pictures of the wonderful old brick buildings here and maybe contrast them against some of the more modern steel and glass towers and maybe pen some prose to go with it; and I may yet be able to make that happen.

I would like to share that something that I learned in our earlier classroom sessions, mildly outraged me a little and, to my surprise, woke up something within me that I thought had long since been laid to rest. Outrage is probably a little strong, but it's close enough for now. I suppose it was the elitist outlook portrayed by some of teachings of Aristotle that Mike Merrill exposed us to that initially got me riled; but it was the perspective expressed by Larry Shiner that we as a culture, had evolved past a point of considering a man's good work to be his worthy art that really got to me. Mind you that is not necessarily Shiner's personal viewpoint; he was merely commenting on a cultural paradigm.

I have been hugely blessed to take an active part in many industries and undertakings in my life and I have always been passionate about knowing how so many things were done and how men caused them to be. I can't begin to tell you how it stirs and satisfies me to watch people bend and shape, and build and fit the raw materials of our physical world into the stuff of our dreams and triumphs. We continuously create and attempt to build a hopefully better world. I don't know what it is that drives us to do so but I believe it is one of the best parts of us.

I have been an electrician, a machinist, a mechanic, a driver, and have operated heavy dirt moving equipment; I have designed machinery and written the programs that brought them to semi-sentient life; I've helped hang drywall, suspended ceilings and worked with plaster, mortar, and brick and stone; I've helped hang steel and erected towering process vessels; I've painted, sandblasted, dug ditches and run sewer lines; I've built chemical plants, power generation stations, nuclear power plants, maximum security prison systems, commercial strip centers, hospitals, and luxury high-rise dwellings for millionaires; I've been a mechanic in a bakery and a deckhand on a research vessel; I served my country as a Sonar Technician on a submarine and worked briefly in pest control; and once for eight entire hours I was a short order cook (now there's a short and drab little story).

I found beauty in everything I ever did and it was always singular and peculiar to each endeavor. More to the point I always considered the craftwork of any man's hands to be the highest expression of art we could produce as a species because if it were done right and true, not only would it be pleasing to the soul to behold, but warming to the heart to utilize; in my mind (and it is after all merely one man's opinion) beauty and wonder should be both used and used up repeatedly, so that it can be created and implemented over and over again and both the artist and the appreciator be awed and feel it's wonder again and again, time after time.

I shared with the class that I live in Oklahoma City as an adopted son (yes, I am a native Texan) of the red earth state and that the old downtown area here is referred to as "Bricktown." This is because all of the old buildings were made of brick and beams and during the lean years in Oklahoma men could always find work laying brick and stone. There has been a concerted effort to rescue these old buildings and repurpose them for modern commerce. I am very pleased with the decision to do so because I don't just regard it as a financially feasible thing to do but rather a duty to preserve the work and craft of so many hardworking men's life's work.

I believe that Bricktown embodies the very history and soul of Oklahoma; its ability to work hard and withstand the test of time; to weather the storms and tornados, the earthquakes, the prairie fires, and the ravages of financial hardship. It endures everything nature and man can throw at it and it finds a way to remain vital and relevant.

For nearly three decades of my life I was privileged to be closely associated with a family of brick and stone masons from Oklahoma. There was the patriarch himself and his several sons, cousins and uncles all of whom worked as masons. There might be brief periods in their lives when they pursued some other craft effort but inevitably the red blank-faced bricks always seemed to pull them back to their trowel and hod. They were largely of American Native descent and I often wondered if the red clay in the bricks was not as much a part of them as the rich red earth their ancestors trod for many years before them; if it didn't speak to them in some manner I could never understand.

They were full of their work and life and made sure everyone around them enjoyed themselves; they continuously gathered for large meals to which many others were informally invited to share in the fruits of their labors. They worked hard and laughed a lot and I can't ever recall them complaining about their work. They loved what they did and respected the things that each of them had built.

I learned a good many things from them; I learned how to make a buttermilk biscuit; how to look at a wall and tell if the guy laying the brick or block knew what he was doing or not; I learned that tools were not meant to last forever; I learned how to see what part my own contribution played in the chronicle of mankind's efforts to transform the world; but most importantly I learned how to appreciate my own work, and see in my craft, my own enduring art.

So ... here is my project. It is some simple prose that relates to my perception of those wonderful folk. There is a number of what might be viewed as grammatical or structural errors in it but I did this intentionally. I wrote it down just exactly the way I meant it to be. It may seem a little odd to you at first reading but if you persist it will begin to make a bit more sense.

THE BRICK WALL

Your eyesight simply says to you that I am bent and stooped, and worn and old; it wrongly asserts to you my very essence has long since been spent; and I would say to you that I am so much more than just *that* man ... for my tale is told in flesh and bone, and thousands upon thousands of brick and stone.

Understand that for my life's work, I really only built one single wall ... but it was a monumental magic wall, that myriad manifested my skill in ever so many *every where's*, each connected to each, through my hands and mind, and my heart and soul, from here to there across this EVERYMAN's land; and as men's dreams rose, so climbed my wall, reaching ever upon ever, higher still, Babel-like, in search of that which completely could and, cheerfully would, confound us once and all.

Know that in my gentle youth I inward groaned when beckoned forth from heated hearth and familiar home, by that unnamed uphill boulder of indisputable industry, and long years later, I marvel yet that it even knew my name and more amazing still that, I in fact followed its call. So perhaps then not so gently, in my ribald, rowdy, response, I shouldered my share of that unmovable load and there and then resolved that with my own hand it would, *by God move* ...

You may well ask of that now disciplined and docile rock if it knows my name, and it will wistful smile at you and share the wear and tear it bears from the relentless shaping of my ringing trowels and all the vigor ungrudging spent by these clawed and calloused hands; with earnest respect it will relate to you our intertwining tales and recount our somehow splendid saga of pain and sweat rimed glory; all resentment between us long since laid to rest, and now are, if not deepest friends, then nonetheless well fellowed travelers on a plodding pilgrimage with no one true beginning, and neither pledged nor promised end.

Be assured, oh tender craft forsaken one, that I am so much more than merely a mortal man. ... I am a builder of cities without end ... I work my art in brick and stone, and the paragraphs and phrases of my accounting, are held together by the very same mortar and sweat that forever establishes my work, until either man's time ends, or the murdering, soul stealing, wrecking ball of alleged progress comes to claim my glory, and lay to waste all my artisans pride. I know the meanings of level, plumb, square, and true, and could explain their hidden truths to even skill-less, craft-less, soul-less men like you ... but sadly you are also clueless ... and so I won't.

And I am also a labored pencil that has drawn to living life, the faint imagined dreams of well-meaning architects and engineers, and has countless times caused to be what some have pronounced outrage and futility. While uninformed others uttered it could not be done, quietly I gathered in my spirit, the insistent murmuring memories of that which has already been; and through that impassioned knowing, breathed into my unrelenting heart the pride in my craft, and the unseen subtlety of the masons art, that it might rally weary bones and aching hands, and let me wield my weighty trowel and raise that wall, dear Lord, once again; and then prayed my paltry prayer that the Creator of all men might grant me His grace, and the ability to once more, affirm myself mighty still among the rest, a trowel trades man of some significance, and truly timeless consequence.

A trowel trades man ... why yes I am ... consider you this, that I have worn down so many trowels, I have truly lost their count ... or maybe I just don't want to remember the number it took to wear my now broken body out. There were more than a just few of them, and they took far more than just a bit from me; but I wore down the tempered steely edges of each til they were naught but feeble nubs, and the mortar on my waiting board only shrugged at their diminished meager churn; and I was bemused and left bereft at each inevitable passing, to sadly proclaim my stooped immortality over their dear and bested bones, and in their many endings I eyed them not as fallen adversaries, but more brothers in arms, and faithful friends that had served me and our industry well, and like me had given their all, to the needs of the many ... and my ever growing wall.

I swear to you, there were often long days ... dear God, long, long days when every single stubborn brick I laid, was held in place only by my will, my sweat, and often times my life's own blood; but the flat and reassuring face of my immutable monument was ever there before me; eye to eye, gently urging and encouraging me to lightly lift, and flip and fit, just one more blank faced brick ... and so I did ... one after another, each distinct and individual brick among the many, oh so many thousands, beautifully buttered and lovingly laid in ... course upon course, until they rose to become my wall, and in their turn a building, then a city, and at long last a country where mighty men could stand, and judge my work, good work that stood for us all.

So open wide your unseeing inner eye and rightly realize that I have not worn wastefully away ... no sir ... rather have I been transformed and have at the last become one with my work, my living art; and I am unending embodied in every brick or stone I stoically fit; touch the wall and there feel the iron that resides yet in my hands and you will sagely appreciate the truth of that. Trust in our strength and believe in our determined will; and understand what the wall and I have long since known, that not forever will I be found among the ever pressing throng, for my time has passed and I am now both called and bound to be my *συν* concluding brick; to freely spend my last and akin to the bell-like pealing passing

of the many unnumbered trowels, to join with my enduring art. And when breath has gone and my body falls, you ask, what will be my final thought? That it is standing still, and has gone beyond me ... my gift to us ... that soaring wall.



William Catanese – “The Wine Rack” (copper sculpture)

Wine Rack

WILLIAM CATANESE

Many people don't consider the work we do, as plumbers, art, but I do.

As you can see in this photograph, with the use of some copper pipe and fittings I was able to create a wine-rack. I decided to make this wine rack because my boss (also my uncle) is an avid wine drinker. The thought of giving a plumber a wine-rack out of plumbing material was a great idea in my eyes.

So here is my idea of art.



Robert Gouldsbury – “Pipe Chair” (copper sculpture)

The Art of Pulling Data Cable

NIKOLAS DENICOLA

Pulling cable is an integral part of an electrician's job. Cable pulls can contain as few as one cable, and as many as a hundred, or more. The difficulty faced with data cables is their tendency to twist into a knot and become damaged. The two most frequent problems that arise from data cable pulls are damaged, or cut, wires and cables that are crossed over, or interwoven, with other pulls. Pulling requires preparation and keen perception, in conjunction with proper tools and supplies, to be done accurately and efficiently.

In my experience, having three workers for running cables is ideal, allowing for proper set up and monitoring. Before the pull is started, make sure to have the cable boxes, or spools of cable, set up in a manner adequate for the specific run you're attempting as well as the area available at the worksite. After a pull is completed, the entire run will need to be dressed and organized in a way that appears neat and clean, so it is recommended to have hooks and Velcro, for hanging and fastening respectively. Besides these, it's also beneficial to have ladders and side-cutting pliers. Most jobs require you keep your cables above the ceiling to avoid obstructing other workers, prevent making tripping hazards, or keep the cable from becoming an eyesore in the time before it's terminated. There are many situations during a pull that require cables to be cut, trimmed or stripped, and in order to complete that task, it is best to keep your trusty pair of side-cutting pliers handy. Upon finishing your preparation, you must assign your workers their positions along the pull path.

When organizing for a cable pull, there are typically three stations to account for: the feeding station, the pulling station and the monitoring station. The feeding station is positioned at the origin of the pull, where the cable boxes or spools are located. The feeding worker is tasked with directly pulling cable from the source and directing it towards the pull station. The pulling station is typically located at, or near, the end point of a pull. The pulling worker will be simply pulling the cable itself, usually by attaching it to a durable string called a drag and it requires a lot of strength. The final station is the monitoring station, a station that isn't required but is typically really helpful in allowing the pulls to run smoothly. This person will watch the cables as they're pulled in order to ensure there aren't any rips, tears, pinch points, woven cables with other pulls or knots along the way. Once you have your supplies and have your stations manned, you can pull your cable and prepare for the final steps of the pull.

Pulling cable isn't finished when the cable is pulled, because the pull won't look orderly and will require dressing. Dressing cable is when you take your cable bundles and place them in hooks, and tie them together with Velcro to keep a neat cluster. Hooks should be placed periodically along the pull, in varying intervals depending on the amount of cables, this allows you to raise your cable above any areas where other workers may

need access. When putting hooks into the ceiling, you sometimes may have to drill so it's best to wear a protective mask and goggles to keep the dirt and dust out of your eyes and mouth. Velcro becomes useful as a way to keep the cables fastened and tight so that nothing gets tangled in them, as well as looking much neater and more uniform. These steps are typically completed last to avoid wasting time adding to the bundles as you work.

Pulling cable is a relatively simple task, but it is easily botched. There can be plenty of dirt and ladder climbing involved so it's best to have your safety equipment on hand to prevent injuries. You should never underestimate the benefits of a neat pull, which helps in keeping the job running smoothly and efficiently. Contractors take notice to organization and will typically desire your services again in the future. Pulling cable is a basic part of the electrical industry, yet is integral in completing a job, so using the proper tools and methods will only make your job easier.



Brandon Biggio – “Foundations” (photo)

Untitled Contemporary Labor Issues Final Dialogue

L.I.

Izrite:

So did you see that building next to the bbq joint finally came down? I think there's gonna be another condo high rise.

Notsure:

Oh yeah? Maybe we'll be in the neighborhood longer than we thought. The shop seems to be picking up a lot of work this year.

Izrite:

In our dreams! You know all that work goes to non-union. All we're gonna see of that job is some Mexicans taking good American jobs. If we could get some proper security at the border maybe the union could get back some of this residential work.

Notsure:

You may be right but that work has been gone for a while now, it'll take more than that. As for the border, you know they finally built that big wall. I figure if somebody goes to all the trouble to try and get around that, things must be pretty bad where they are.

Izrite:

Sure but just because things are bad in Mexico doesn't mean they can come mess things up over here. I don't wish anyone ill but why should our families suffer because of immigrants taking good American jobs?

Notsure:

Speaking of families, is your son going to join the business? I remember you said he was interested.

Izrite:

No way, I want him to have something better than this lot! Trying to steer him toward medicine, it's a lot of school but I think it's the way to go.

Notsure:

Wait a second, just a minute ago this was a good American job to be coveted and fought for, and now it's not good enough for your son? You're giving me mixed messages here. In that case, what about the other jobs immigrants do, like dishwashing at restaurants, bike delivery for restaurants, and things like that? Are those good American jobs or is it a benefit to us to have people willing to take them? I'm not being sarcastic; I really want to know what you think.

Izrite:

Sure maybe some of those jobs aren't crucial but I can't see what you're getting at here. There's no way somebody is crossing the border because they want a job like that, it's just how it turns out. Meanwhile they bring down conditions for the rest of us.

Notsure:

That's exactly my point. While it may not be the ultimate goal, a job that you and I don't consider to be financially supportive is still so much better than the options in Mexico that not only will someone cross the border for it, but they can use it to send meaningful amounts of money to their family back home.

Izrite:

That's another thing, money made on American soil shouldn't just get shipped out like that. If things are so bad in Mexico how can they leave their families there?

Notsure:

I agree. I don't like that money leaving either, but once workers get here you know they have to feel stuck. I bet if there was an easier way for workers to move back and forth, we would actually see a decrease in immigrants, because like you said who wants to leave their family like that? But the border crossing is so dangerous now how can you leave? How can you bring your family over? All I know is they're here and that isn't changing, so we need to get these folks into the union so that they DON'T bring conditions down for us, like you said.

Izrite:

How is that going to work? If we organize immigrants our numbers will be so high the wait for work will be forever, how will we live? And will they still be sending money out of the country? I can't see how we would be able to collectively bargain for everyone's interests.

Notsure:

Okay, I'm with you on the last point. My real concern is that these workers get some representation, but perhaps it would work best for everyone if they have their own group. That way they can advocate for the things they need without compromising

the things we need. Think about this though, adding more numbers to the union doesn't create a lack of work if the people we organize are already doing work that we don't have!

Izrite:

When you put it that way I can see it a little differently. We definitely need to get immigrant workers representation so they don't bring us all down with them. I think being part of some kind of immigrant workers union should be a requirement of coming over here, regardless of what kind of work you want to do.

Notsure:

Yes! If we can level the field for everyone, we would be taking power from the real problem, which is not immigrants but the big businesses and employers that want to take advantage of us all. What you just said makes me think too that having some meaningful employment-based contingencies for entering and leaving the country would help too, that way workers could leave when they don't need to work here anymore. There wouldn't be a false surplus of workers, but there would still always be people who see those jobs that need to be done as worth doing, which frees up your son to have a higher goal for himself.

Izrite:

Well thank goodness we got that figured out! Just in time, too, coffee's over.



Shawn Barry – “Plumbing Interior Construction” (photo)

“AND BEYOND ...”

The Next Tier of Vocational Education

DANNY ADEGBIE

I believe vocational education is one of the greatest means to improve the quality of life for the poor. I understand all too well the weight of these words. My belief in this notion is cemented in my upbringing and the current work that I do. As one of five siblings raised in Harlem (and later on in the Bronx) during the crack epidemic, the word poor took on a whole new meaning. In addition to the lack of money, the environment we lived in was riddled with the stereotypes of the typical poverty-stricken neighborhoods of the 80's. There were drug dealers at the entrance of many apartment buildings and they would sell their product in broad daylight. The sounds of guns going off in the distance like firecrackers were all too familiar. It was rare for someone to stop their conversation to acknowledge the reality of what was happening in the distance. There was this lack of hope because many people didn't make it out of that environment, either they didn't possess the skills or the know-how to use them. The only way out for my neighbors and I was to obtain an education and for many of us that meant going into a trade school.

A great example of this is how my father moved us out of Harlem and into the Bronx. He drove a cab to make ends meet while running cable for a local cable company, and although the pay was low it helped to keep food on the table. One day he heard about a job that was similar to the work he was doing with the cable company. This was his first union job and he worked as an electrician (IBEW). After several months he transferred into the sheet-metal workers union (local 28). Vocational education provided my father the skills and boost in pay for him to move us to the Bronx, a place not as bad as Harlem but still plagued with similar pitfalls. The schools were a little bit better and there were less shootings, however drugs and gangs were still a problem. My father ended up leaving the union due to family issues encroaching on his performance at work and returned to driving a cab to support us, but the better quality of schools offered me better options. Several years later in junior high school, I found myself looking for a way out. Flipping through a high school catalog I found a school I felt suited me, Samuel L. Gompers High School. It was a vocational school located in the South Bronx.

Four years later in the spring of my senior year, my architecture instructor and I had a discussion on where I was going in life. He let me know of an opportunity to gain some working experience while going to school. The Substitute Vocational Assistant Program. I applied and after a rigorous screening process I was accepted, undoubtedly due to the skills I obtained at Gompers High School. This was an intense five to six-year program which immersed the applicant in educational history and practices. The resulting aims of the program were to develop competent and industry-aligned instructors fully certified to teach a trade within the NYC public school system.

There I studied architectural design and drafting and gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience in the apprenticeship, but more importantly, I gained a greater understanding of my environment from an architectural point of view.

I'm the product of vocational education and continually witness this type of education provide people with the means to be productive members of society. I teach architectural drafting at the High School for Construction Trades, Engineering and Architecture. I also coach the school's robotics team. Many of the students have improved their lives because of the education they received.

Moving forward I will attempt to explain the nuances of today's vocational education system and why I feel it may become the ultimate way to connect with students across even academic courses. I will be using quotes from Mike Rose, specifically his book, *"The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker"* (2004) to further aid in this endeavor.

Many of my students are poor minorities, and belonging to this group brings many hardships financially and emotionally. There are many ways in which labor offers a feeling of accomplishment. Vocational education was built on the notion that a person with skills can obtain a job and with it improve his or her life. Blue-collar workers are able to provide for their families. Learning skills on the job allows workers to gain employment in various geographic regions. In addition to self-development and freedom of movement, they open a path of upward mobility for their families. In his book titled *"The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker"* (Penguin Group, 2004), Rose considers the empowerment of waitresses developed in part, using an example, "how central that work was to her sense of self and engagement with the world" (3). I recall a moment last week during Career Day meeting with a former student named Tiffany, who is now an alum. She was sitting in the front of a classroom with two other architects answering questions and sharing her experiences with my current architectural students. One of the students asked about the benefits and motivations for reaching such a milestone of being an architect and she responded by saying that she was the first to go to college in her family and that her education acquired at the High School for Construction Trades, Engineering and Architecture helped open doors into that career, or as she put it, "there are not many women in architecture."

I have many examples of this over my career as an instructor. In many cases' students like Tiffany come back to help uplift their communities which are an extension of their families. In another example, a former robotics club member Kevin graduated and during his first year attending NYU-Poly returned to aid the robotics team in completing a robot to compete in that year's First Tech Challenge. This is the true power of vocational education, but it is not without its critics.

Although many people see vocational education as a means for opening doors to the poor and minorities, others see it as a means of herding people they feel are not intelligent or incapable of competing in post-secondary classes. This effectively restricts

how they develop. I have observed how those that are labeled negatively underperform due to low self-esteem. Animosity is also generated when these negative views are attached to whole groups of people. Many arguments on this developed over the years pitting academics against vocational proponents and creating a societal stigma that blue-collar jobs unlike white-collar jobs do not require intelligence. The earliest stages of vocational education came in the form of apprenticeships and during that time the term “Scientific Management” (142) emerged. This type of management deals with breaking a worker’s job into smaller, simpler tasks effectively making the argument that not much intelligence is required for the job. Mike Rose makes it clear that, “once jobs like these are mastered, there is little variety and little new learning” (129), and for many this was ideal for those in the lower classes, but not the members of upper and middle classes.

This concept has never been true. In another example, Rose discusses how skills possessed by hairstylists are used to create stunning hair styles which affect their clients profoundly. I know when I was growing up my sisters would do their doll’s hair and this was considered a form of play. It is very easy to see how a person not involved with the cosmetology industry would pull from their prior knowledge that hair styling is related to play. But further understanding reveals a tremendous amount of intelligence required to perform the job of a stylist. Of the many subjects, science plays a role, as Rose illustrates when one stylist, “wonders out loud if you could achieve the same effect by decreasing the level of ammonia and adding heat, which, he recalls opens the cuticle” (54). This worker is actively thinking about how harsh ammonia is yet he wants to achieve the desired effect and so he synthesizes a solution. Thought patterns like this are hidden or obscured by data collected in traditional ways.

There are also manipulative techniques and calculative methods that are similar to those in academically accepted fields. Take for example how carpentry students must plan, calculate and then cut pieces of wood for a cabinet. One carpentry student is described as, “moving [a piece of wood] slowly and precisely, [making] a series of ‘relief cuts’ into the section of the panel that will be cut away, essentially breaking up the curve into smaller units, cutting each in turn” (83). This amount of skill is similar for workers in the medical field. They plan, gather and think through the procedure. They must have keen manipulative skills as well. “You need to get a feel for all the feels” (156) a physical therapist explains further emphasizing how hard it is “to separate hand from idea” (156). It now becomes clear that many of the blue-collar intelligences are viable in post-secondary settings.

Today’s vocational education classes are a hybrid of traditional academic and vocational classes. The policies passed over the last twenty or so years have made various literacy teaching methods commonplace. I fully understand the need to enforce literacy, but I also see how precious time is lost implementing these methods. For example, the time it takes to have the student compose a narrative of a design project could be used to delve into other content. This is especially true now due to increasingly complex techniques utilized by today’s workforce. Vocational educators

of the past might have been resistant to this but in today's environment we find ways to include both vocational and academic methods of learning for students. This pushes their level of intelligence and engages them on multiple levels, "to foster cross-disciplinary discussions that could expand and enlighten" (178). This ultimately generates sensations that are clearly obtained from being rigorously involved intellectually with their duties.

This is very similar to the awareness Jerry Devries has acquired when as Rose states, "the sound of the saw caught Jerry's ear" (73). It is in that moment Devries' heightened level of environmental understanding leads to a teachable moment. He spends the next few moments getting the students to understand how to fix the bowing wood.

This brings to mind a time when I observed two students working on a micro-house design project, the constraints of which were 300 square feet. They were talking about the layout and how they would fit a 10'x10' bathroom into their micro house. My awareness of space alerted me to a fault in their design. So I ask the students to stop their discussion and measure off a 300 square foot space and inside that place a 10'x10' room within the first space. They did this using the industry technique of counting floor tiles, each of which were 1'x1' and marking-off the corners. A reaction was immediate as one of the student, Wilfredo, replied, "Damn, that's mad big." The students then spent the next few minutes researching the smallest functional bathroom size (5'x8') and its layout configurations. Experiences like this are commonplace in vocational education further illustrating its importance in fostering cognitive growth.

In closing, I believe that vocational education is headed in the right direction. There is still work to be done, but instructors both academic and vocational are working together to address some of the issues that would hinder the impact of this type of education on many individuals. We're utilizing the fluid mentoring techniques found in vocational education that foster rapport and professionalism across all classes enabling students to become actively engaged within their environment before, during and after work hours. An example would be the alum who returned to provide insight into the field of architecture for a junior class of architecture students. We are increasing literacy standards while connecting to real world applications and academic concepts which are required in the evolving landscape of the labor industry.



Chris Briscoe – “Alignment #1 (Eight Cylinders)” (photo)

Art as Business – Business as Art

GURJINDER GREWAL

The following journal entries date to the period of a course in “Public Art as Social Practice.” The intention of my project was to ask what fundamentally defines the term “art.”

February 02, 2016: Sent a draft of a photo release to college professor Barrie Cline, for her input, in order to begin the project involving photographing union members on my jobsite. [The photo release made some people at that time suspect of what was going on even after explaining that everybody that was asked to sign – some didn’t even read it before signing)

[between February 10 – April 05, over 300 pictures were taken and contributions from many members were provided.]

February 10: Sent an email to fellow employees about my art project. Asked if they had anything to contribute. Follow up reply emails and discussed an array of possibilities.

February 12: Reached an agreement with the Ramp Manager to use the art project to improve work locations and promote improved moral to the workers by showcasing them in art work. The company agreed to pay for the work while I agreed to keep expenses reasonable.

Also had a phone conversation with professor Cline about the direction of the project. She suggested I had too many ideas and I’m trying to do something too big (always think big) I had a plan to work on a project that included abandoned boots and the soldiers that have moved on from our workplace but left their mark via their shoes. I thought about doing something with the laces of boots. “I thought too much and did nothing and then I stopped thinking and ideas kept coming.”

I had a plan to work making a library that would have members of the work place contribute books and install a vending machine. The profit sharing of the vending machine would pay for books and magazine subscriptions. [This project was deferred and might be completed in the summer.]

Researched the May works Halifax exhibit and all the different types of art that is showcased.

February 14: One of my partners, Brent, said he would work on something for the project.

February 17: Followed up with Larry, a photographer, and asked if my release agreement would work. He said yes. He also said he would try to find some old company hat to contribute. [On April 25 Larry brought me a “Hudson General” piece but the work was being finalized and his contribution couldn’t be included.]

February 18: Amarjit and I had coffee and chatted about the project and he sent me a bunch of pictures regularly for a few weeks.

February 24: E-mails back and forth with professor Cline discussing the project: where was it going and how to edit any changes?

March 11: Another co-worker, Mark, became involved after some hesitation. [He would play a major role in getting other members involved to participate.]

March 15: I changed direction from the Website idea due to cost and time that it would take to keep updating.

March 16: An organizing effort got company management to be involved. They agreed to pay for costs and materials and printing cost and I would supply the labor. The works showcased to improve the culture of our workforce.

Spoke to Mark about and contributions. He offered to contribute small figurines used in the day to day operation of the job and these items were passed on to Brent to make some type of animation work. The idea was to incorporate this somehow and make it work.

March 21: Billy sent me pictures of workers sleeping during their lunch breaks. There were so many and I had to choose which ones to choose. [Billy was hesitant, not wanting to get anybody in trouble – I reassured him that was not the intent and the images selected would not seem like they sleep on the job.]

March 25: Provided an update to professor Cline and set up a meeting with the print graphics company.

March 30: Went shopping for frames but they were prohibitively expensive at \$65-\$100 each. After walking around the store had an idea to use canvasses which were on sale for 40% off so I got 20 canvasses for about \$130.

Provided an updated budget to the company. The money saved on frames can be allocated to fund printing on canvasses, hopefully will make the work more serious and provide a bigger exhibit and illuminate the project in a professional manner.

April 4-5: Started working with professional editors to get the photographs on print medium.

April 15: The project was adjusted after some thought and some works were taken out and others added to showcase different parts of the work.

April 18: Had a lengthy conversation with professor Cline about the project and all the different directions it's gone. We talked of the business side of art and laughed about my idea of selling some of these works to the company, about being called an artist, and imagining applying for a sole proprietor business license effectively allowing me to write off costs and expenses for up to 3 years and begin making profits.

Is it really a crazy idea, one that would work? She said, "I figured it out." Still not sure what I exactly figured out but I think she meant that to avoid being a "starving artist," means accepting there's a business side in contemporary art. Maybe I'm in the wrong industry – I might want to cut my ear off and claim to be Vincent Van Gogh's cousin. "This project will never finish as it will stream one line into another."

April 19: Waited for Brent to send over the animation and submit project.

April 20: The project is complete and submitted to the company and a sale invoice has been presented. The works are true depictions of labor and the work and the people included.

April 22: Got a call from printer plane that everything is ready to go.

April 23: Spoke to a company about selling the work for cost, plus a \$1. We laughed.

April 27 – 28: As a business sole proprietor I am now able to write off on my taxes the space of the residence used for the business, in addition to vehicle expenses such as the depreciation of my car, gas bills, and financing, to the extent that they're part of the business use. I'm also able to write off artist's materials and other expenses.

Conclusion: As the project winds down, I reflect on the process and how the channeling of ideas came about. What does the conclusion of a work of art mean to the relationship between the creator and the creation?

The intent to show the worker in true and unadulterated way stayed intact.

I went on with the work as though I was famous artists and wanted the work to outlive me. I wanted to show-case the work with care and attention.

I forgot early on that I was really doing this for a grade, for a semester's course, for part of a degree program. It turned out that the project became part of me as I tried to get some extreme color added into a view of worker's lives and open up a little space for light to come in. Is it fair to suggest "artists" don't have activist intentions? That by including economic security into the equation it's not possible to depict humanity, or document a jobsite few outsiders will ever witness? In many respects, art is a business and there's a business of art.



Chris Briscoe – “Alignment #2 (Pipework Trench)” (photo)

The Labor Art Show

MIKE HICKS

For my social art project in the course, Public Art as Social Practice, I created an art show. I don't know why, but from the beginning of this class it felt like my destiny was to host this show. I could not think of another project to represent social art that could have the same impact in my community. To support various projects, I have created signage for businesses and completed woodworking projects for various groups, but this time I wanted to try something new. I wanted to create change. My art show was going to get others involved and become a hub of activity. This was going to be an easy project, not much different than hosting a party. Find a venue, make a plan, and invite people to participate. Easy! That was the formula I was going to use, but in reality the show was more involved, more challenging but also more rewarding.

I needed a name for the show, a theme to get people hooked, and I decided to call it "The Labor Art Show" bringing awareness to the diversity and value of labor. Participants could enter any artwork that represented labor. The creation of a flyer soon followed, this was easy because of my experience with graphic arts. With my art show flyer in hand I was ready to pitch the idea to Kathy, the office manager at my labor temple. I was nervous because I wanted to have all types of workers, union, non-union, or contractors participate. I wasn't sure how Kathy would feel about opening up the union hall to such an idea. She loved it! I reserved the conference room at the Labor Temple for April 15th and 16th. I just needed an entry form so that I could plan on how many pieces of art and what sizes they would be and any special needs to display them. After researching other art show entry forms and rules, I cut and pasted together my own. With a theme, flyer and dates for the show I was ready to start inviting people to participate.

Entry packets in hand I went to every office in the labor temple asking for their support and participation. My idea was well received by the other locals and some even announced the event on their websites and in newsletters. Nervousness behind me I was ready to present my art show information to the Southern Oregon Labor Council. This council represents all the unions at the labor temple and many community activist groups like "15 Now Oregon" (the group working for equitable wages), Oregon Strong Voice (the AFL-CIO partnership with community groups) and other unions not affiliated with the temple. However, the positive reception created more anxiety, as I started worrying that I might not have a large enough room for the show.

I posted entry packets at work, a lumber mill where we employ almost three-hundred people. The message was catching on with people and the art show became a daily topic. But after three weeks I still hadn't had any calls or entry forms returned. What if no one enters the art show? Would this reflect on the way union members feel about their culture as expressed through art - an empty room? What would that say about

the labor movement in general, I thought? In desperation I posted a notice of the show on Craigslist to try reaching out to the larger southern Oregon community for help with the Labor Art Show. Again, I swung from worry of nobody showing up to a possibility of a huge success. What was I going to do if it outgrew my venue? Could this be another Woodstock?

As the art show dates approached I knew it was going to represent more than just lovely pictures on the wall. The Art show was going to have an impact and help people with life transitions that some people have or are going through. Ray, a thirty-year employee at our plant, had been struggling with back pain for years. It was a common sight to see him hunched over as he approached his car at the end of a shift. Years of driving a Hyster, or lift truck as more commonly known, has been tough on his body. After emergency back surgery Ray woke up to the realization that he would no longer be able to work. Permanent disability was the new reality. This is a life changing event. No longer could he go to the mill and see his co-workers and friends. A large part of his social life and interaction was gone. Change can take an emotional toll on a person. Was Ray any less of a man? Of course not. But not being in control over the events that are happening in your life can be unnerving and cause a person to question their value.

I had been working with Ray and his wife through this transition when he noticed my art show flyer on the desk. Ray told me that he used to oil paint scenery until he had to give up his art space. That had been some years ago. As a thank you for helping him and his wife, Ray wanted to create a painting for show with the condition that I donate it afterwards to a children's facility. I gladly accepted the offer. A few days later I spoke with Ray and he had renewed his art supplies and started to recreate a space to work in. Painting would be a renewed outlet for Ray's energy.

As the days passed I had only heard from a few people that were going to participate. Either way I was getting mentally prepared for the big day. I decided to build some temporary wall structures to hang art work on. These walls would be more efficient than the easels that I started building out of old picket signs. I would still use some of the picket sign wood on the walls to hold the plywood in place. A quick trip to the dollar store would reward me with two dozen glasses that I could laser engrave and fill with candy. These glasses would make great gifts to participants and maybe I would sell a few, so that I could recoup some of the money I spent on the show. Laser engraving is important to me because when my dad died I bought the engraver with my inheritance money. Somehow I feel that he is with me when I share these engraved gifts.

I lost my uncle Mark in late 2012. My dad soon followed in March of 2013. Later that same year my grandmother died of a broken heart. I was able to include their memories into my art show. It was a way for me to honor the people who had influenced my life. My uncle Mark had painted three of the pictures that were on

display. My dad was represented by my laser art work and grandma was represented by the wine that I gave to first and second place winners. I felt that each one of them were with me in spirit and could enjoy the show's work and beauty.

One of the most powerful pieces of art was a sketch of Kenny. Kenny had a long battle with cancer and submitted to the disease April 4, 2016. His granddaughter, Little Monkey, sketched a picture of Kenny as he made the transition to the afterlife. The lines on her drawing captured the struggle between fighting the disease and finding peace. Knowing the story behind the sketch I was drawn to the strength that Little Monkey must have had to record this emotional event. At the art show I witnessed people being drawn to the portrait. Even though they did not know the story behind it the viewer could feel a connection.

The Art show was a success. Though not as big a success as I was hoping for. I never got an entry packet returned to me. No phone calls either. Just a few of the people that I talked to directly entered their art work. As I figured, most of the art work showed up the day before the show so I could not plan the layout. Thankfully the limited number of entries allowed me to adjust the displays appropriately. The people who attended were pleased and I welcomed their comments, especially their gratitude. Many of the attendees want to see this again next year. I heard several times comments like, "oh, this is what you were doing." I think my original vision of having an art exhibit that portrayed labor was too limiting. I'm glad I opened it up to all forms of art and recognized the job titles of the artists. It was still a show about labor. My family was a great help and spent most of the day with me. We had lunch, talked about the project and what I am going to do next semester.



Chris Briscoe – “Alignment #3 (Industrial Pipe Space)” (photo)

Urban Youth Gangs Like Labor Unions

JOHN J. PARENTE

In the film documentary, “Rubble Kings” (2015), we are given insight into an historical moment in New York City where its youth gangs were about to erupt in all-out war with each other. Instead, a miraculous turn of events had them do an about-face and in turn create a new art form, Hip hop. These kids, especially those who were teenagers in the South Bronx in the late 1970s, were victims of one of the worst waves of dereliction in New York City history. They saw evacuated buildings in their neighborhood literally burn down all around them on a day-to-day basis. Some say the events that ushered in these destitute times were caused by the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway designed by Robert Moses and the city’s urban planning committee. Many buildings were set ablaze by landlords committing insurance fraud. The fire department would remark on a regular basis, as we learn in the film, “There is a fire raging out of 30 different apartment windows but nobody lives there. What was anybody going to do to save the building?”

As a result of the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, many of the former residents moved away leaving even wider gaps in neighborhoods than the new highway did physically. Once the wealthy and middle class families began finding ways to rearrange themselves in the suburbs, all those who had the means followed suit. The decades that followed played out like classic film noir mixed with gory horror, accompanied by Shakespearean tragedy. The years of devastating neglect formed and shaped New Yorker’s opinions about leadership, politicians, civil servants, minorities, the middle class, and impoverished ghettos. An indelible stain would also be left on the memory of anyone who lived through it.

In 1977, with the gangs of the South Bronx constantly at war, a final revelation had to happen. The leading peacemaker from the gang known as Ghetto Brothers was killed by a rival gang while attempting to negotiate for peace. It is at this point that the city might have erupted in all-out war. But instead they called a city-wide truce. A sort of organization of all the local gangs happened. Instead of fighting, they began to throw parties. As “Rubble Kings” documents, there were so many parties that there was a high demand for good entertainment. The new demand gave rise to DJs (DJ: formerly “Disk Jockey”) who were experimenting (given their newfound freedom) with various musical styles and putting their interpretation and improvisational spin on them. Gang members started dressing nicer. Clean was in. Some found it interesting to delve into street art – graffiti. Learning, playing music or DJing, rapping or MCing, graffiti, dancing (known to hip-hop artists as ‘b-boyin’).

They had spent their formative years creating bonds to support and protect each other. They had also been learning, through the grueling, repetitive and monotonous cycles of poverty how to defend themselves with a rough exterior. They had been surviving. Now, all of a sudden, due to the truce, they were living free. The dark-age had lifted and they entered into a cultural renaissance.

What the gang members did was create a central union of survivors rather than workers. They were eventually able to flourish because of their union. At its core a union is a pact – an agreement among peers – exactly like the truce made on 163rd St in the Bronx by the presidents of the most influential and important gangs. Workers come together to figure out what to do when job-threatening events take place. Workers in an un-organized shop often feel afraid for their job, and sometimes take drastic actions (leaving the shop or leaving their responsibilities) which ultimately get them fired. The major difference between a gang from the Bronx in 1977 and a labor union is that when the gang member leaves the gang he can end up dead rather than fired. But the functions of both are very similar in that each unite people and save them from an oppressor.

Other documentaries on the subject of the social conditions of the Bronx in that era include “80 Blocks from Tiffany’s” (1979) and “Man Alive: The Bronx is Burning” (1972).

Just a Little Bit Better

DONALD TURNER

To explain “why” I want to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree in Labor Studies, I feel the need to share “how” I got here. I never applied myself in high school; I always took the easier way out, middle of the road classes, with an emphasis on vocational training, as that fit my plans better. I knew what I was going to be when I grew up and I didn’t need a “higher education” for it. My belief was I didn’t need all that book learning, because I was just going to be working with my hands.

After graduating high school, I was enrolled in a vocational welding school when my Grandfather passed away, I was devastated. When I was young I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. My parents worked, so when I was sick or on school breaks they would watch me and during summer vacations I would spend at least a month with them on the lake. He was a strong man with no formal education, but he was wise beyond that. Everyone always said, “he knew a lot about nothing and a little about everything.” Being a self-taught millwright, he could fix anything and I wanted to be just like him.

I had been using marijuana, alcohol and amphetamines for the preceding four years and I went off the “deep end.” I dropped out of school, moved away and proceeded to experiment with different drugs and the quantities that I could ingest. In 1983, I started my first union job with the North American Laborers Union LL 223 out of Dorchester, MA. This is where I met the love of my life, COCAINE. That love affair lasted three years, when I ended up in rehab and began the start of my new life.

After being clean (off drugs) and sober for three years I decided I wanted to go back to school and accomplish something. I wanted to prove to myself that I could start something and finish it, so I enrolled in Motorcycle Mechanics Institute (MMI) and learned how to work on Harley-Davidson motorcycles, not because I wanted to make a career of this, but for personal knowledge. I graduated from this program in the top 5 of my class and with near perfect attendance: I missed one class. It showed me that I could stick with something and do good at it also.

With no clear vision of what I wanted to do, I met up with an old friend at our tenth year class reunion. He had moved to the west coast and started a business, he offered me a job, company truck, an apartment and he had a motorcycle he wanted to turn into a drag racer. Although that job and friendship did not last, it is where I met my wife of 23 years and my step-son who is now 30 with a baby on the way.

I had a couple of jobs that were non-union and in 2001 I got a job working in a saw mill that was unionized by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW). Because I was moved from one department to another, the supervisor asked me to “agree to an extension of my probation.” When you are hired,

you start out as an “at will” employee for sixty days, they call this probation and the company can ask for up to a thirty-day extension. I went to the shop steward and started asking questions, thus began my induction into service work with the union. My prior involvement with the first union I belonged to consisted of paying dues and that was it.

Since getting clean and sober in 1986 I have been working a 12-step program, which I maintain today. I mentor men in recovery like those before me had helped me. This program which consists of steps that help to identify the underlying reasons why we used mind-altering substances. I accomplished this with the help of a sponsor, someone who had been through the steps before me and someone I respected.

In the mid-90s my son went into Boy Scouts, and I did too when I became an Assistant Scoutmaster. After being in Scouts a couple of years, I completed Wood Badge Training, which is the highest level of leadership training in the Boy Scouts of America. My schooling at MMI, my leadership training with the Boy Scouts of America and the help I got from members of the 12-step community, all coupled with the help I received from my union brother, ignited a passion in me to learn so I could help others.

I never had ambition in earlier years to help others, it was all about me. I was not a productive member of society and that is what part of being in recovery is about, it’s also about change and making amends. I took shop steward training; I got involved with the union. I became a certified forklift trainer so I could help members at work move up; I got involved with the safety committee and became a safety trainer. In 2008, with the down-turn in housing market, I found myself laid-off with a little extra time. Through some government and community programs, I was able to return to community college and get my Associates of Science degree in welding and fabrication. In 2010, I was recalled to the mill and resumed my activity in the union. Because of my commitment to the union, my members decided to send me to Leadership training at the William W. Winpisinger Training Center of the IAMAW.

I believe with a degree in Labor Studies I can be even more of a productive member in society. I have started to become more involved in local issues in my community. I have lobbied in Washington D.C. with my elected officials about issues that affect us as a society and a nation. I feel that with continuing education I can become more confident in my ability to clarify my points. I don’t tend to feel as inferior to certain people, even though I believe we are all created equal, sometimes I feel less than. I also believe that with more education, more passion becomes ignited within us as individuals and our beliefs become stronger. So if we can educate more trade unionists and ignite that passion, we will have more souls to work against those that would suppress us and keep us in their grips. In the beliefs of Aristotle, mechanics and laborers do not make good citizens; I disagree, some of the greatest ideas, innovations and inventions in history came from ordinary people and I wonder what those people could have done had they had the opportunity at a higher education. Through

education I have been exposed to new ideas, beliefs, philosophies that I would not have experienced otherwise and with that new knowledge maybe I can expose someone else and ignite a passion in them to learn new things.

As of right now I am a saw filer, this means I stand at a bench most of my shift and do repetitive work. There is an old saying in recovery “if I had known I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself.” I’m 52 years old, about to become a grampa myself and I have discovered aches and pains I used to mask. I do know that I still have some good years left ahead of me and I would like to do something to improve the lives of those around me. I would like to think that I made this world just a little bit better. When I grow up, I definitely want to be a role model for my son and grand-child, that much I know for sure.



Paul Kurland – “the world is blue and green, people don’t see color” (photo)

Pedagogy at Highlander: A Guide to Cultural Organizing

ANDREW W. SANDBERG

The Highlander Researcher and Education Center, as it is called today, started in 1932 as the Highlander Folk School (Highlander School) in Monteagle, Tennessee. Myles Horton (1905-1990) was the founder, he hoped to create a place where adults could come together and work toward improving their lives. These small groups of people would end up leaving the Highlander School with a plan of action and sometimes the plans led to efforts in social movements, such as efforts in the Civil Rights movement. This was a public place where people learned from each other and used education as the means to challenge an injustice in society. The education forms used at the Highlander School were non-hierarchical, meaning instructors taught and also learned from students. They were on the same level with their students.

When students left the school, they developed into what the government refers to as radicals. Soon after this, the government labeled the school and their students as communists. I guess anyone who knows what they want and does not conform is a communist, Myles Horton was not a communist and he was actually rejected by the communist party without even trying to become a member. This labeling led to the federal government confiscating the schools land and belongings in 1961, forcing it to move to Knoxville, Tennessee for a short time. Today, the Highlander School is in New Market, Tennessee just east of Knoxville. The government trying to shut down the Highlander School amused Myles Horton, he said, *'the school is not a place that can be shut down and confiscated, it is an idea and you cannot shut down an idea.'*

Students at the Highlander School learned how to agitate government and big businesses by learning how to organize unions and how to stick up for themselves. The students were empowered to think for themselves and come up with ideas on their own that would improve their conditions. At first, the school helped their neighbors to rise out of poverty by teaching them how to organize unions locally. Myles heart was set on social justice. This is very much like the work that labor unions do today, except as I see it labor unions today for the most part do not try to help people develop their own solutions like Myles Horton did. I feel that labor unions in these times try to impose too much of what they believe in on workers rather than have the workers develop their own plans based on their experiences and beliefs. In my mind, like Myles Horton, I believe that in order for people to be truly successful in improving their conditions, they need to take ownership of what it is they want. If we continue to give or preach, what we think they want, then people will always need to rely on someone else. If we educate them, they will be able to act and do for themselves and will only need help when expert advice is needed.

Experts were used to educate, not to tell them what course of action to take. I found an example of this in a video on YouTube where Myles explained that he brought in a lawyer to talk to a small group, after the lawyer explained the options the group had Myles quickly removed the lawyer so the group could decide the action that will be needed. After training the local neighbors, the Highlander School was predominantly used by labor unions to teach organizers how to agitate and organize workers. They also taught workers to be leaders and to teach others how to lead, in turn the labor movement grew in the South. The Highlander School organized woodcutters, coal miners, government relief workers, textile workers and farmers in the region.

The Highlander School was a place where you could learn to change the world using your culture and the culture of the group you were working with. By using music, songs and storytelling the Highlander School developed a method of “Cultural Organizing” before it was actually defined. The idea is and was that people can learn from each other’s experiences. To do this, sometimes people have to put what they have learned in public schools aside. The result is a simple philosophy, people’s lives can be improved by teaching the skills necessary to demand better living conditions and to call for social changes. Additionally, they are able to organize themselves to bring about immediate action. The struggles people have are the best catalyst to bring about change.

In today’s labor movement, I see a great deal of apathy; I believe this is due to the model of organizing that has been used in recent years. I call it a servicing model where the union representatives operate like an insurance company that the members have to wait on to get things done for them. Alternatively, an organizing model where the members can do for themselves and know what to do for the most part would be much better. Myles Horton believed in this type of organizing. If unions are ever to rise to power again in this country, we will need to move toward this type of organizing again.

In summary, Myles Horton’s method sounds simple; “I don’t know what to do, and if I did know what to do I wouldn’t tell you, because if I had to tell you today then I’d have to tell you tomorrow, and when I’m gone you’d have to get somebody else to tell you.” The hardest part of it for me will be to keep my answers to other peoples problems to myself, while trying to teach others what they need to know to make their own decisions and plans to change their lives. I am convinced that this is a remedy for greater success in the union movement. I have seen many times how the servicing model creates no sense of ownership and apathy for our members. Moving forward I plan to use and share this method to train members and leaders in the Local Lodges that I represent. I encourage you to use it too, considering that when small groups of people are empowered with the education to make the changes that they believe in, those people will make change.

MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND
IN THE SOURCES LISTED BELOW:

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Robert Leonard – “Top of the World” (photo)



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