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OUT OF WORK: “Human Damage, You Might Say”

People change during long months of joblessness. Their confidence waxes or wanes; their goals shift; they discover unsuspected sides of themselves. Their attitudes toward work, society, and life are shaped anew. The people in this chapter talk about those changes and reveal a tremendous variety of reactions to unemployment.

JIM HUGHES

A green house surrounded by cornfields on the outskirts of a small town in Indiana. The house is so close to the road that passing cars almost drown out conversation. It is a sweltering July day. Jim comes to the door shirtless, a paunchy man of thirty-five with longish sandy hair and mustache. Except for his years in the Marines he has lived his whole life within ten miles of this house. He is a welder. At night he takes classes in X-ray technology. "My education will be completed in August of next year. Unless I decide to go further, but I don't think I will. Then I feel I'll be able to find work without any problem."

He chain-smokes. His wife sits down to listen in between chores. His five-year-old daughter peeks out from the kitchen.

He is "a die-hard Republican. I kinda follow Reagan more than I do Ford. Though if Jerry Brown had won the Democratic nomination, I'd have crossed over. He seems to be on the ball. But that's about as far as it goes for politics with me. I don't think much of politicians. If they'd have seen this recession comin', maybe they could've done somethin' about it. But there was nothin' nobody could do about me getting fired. I don't blame it on society. . . ."



The whole thing started back when I was fired without just cause. I was working until last July in a tool and engineering shop. And the foreman for some reason—now this is my personal opinion, but a lot of the other fellows I worked with felt the same way—just picked me out and put lots of pressure on me and fired me. Right after that they came up with a big layoff. The more people they had out of the shop at that time, the better for them. So I feel it was a combination of a personal thing and the fact that he had pressure on him to get rid of people. I don't feel I was at fault.

I had some anger, really, because I had never been fired before. I felt my work performance was good. Excellent, really. But he kept putting pressure on me for more and more work. I was doing three times the work they normally wanted on the day he fired me. And he fired me for poor work performance. There was a parking violation, other little things. Like tardiness. I was buying this house at the time, and I think on three different occasions I notified him that I would have to be late. And he still used that as an excuse. So it had to be a personal thing. I liked the job. I liked the people working there. I hated to lose it.

So I went to the unemployment office. That kinda hurt my pride a

little. More than a little. I didn't really want to go, but I felt that I had to in this situation. I felt that I wanted to get them for all I could. I wanted a little bit of revenge. But even though I paid that money in, I still didn't like to go. I guess it was from the way I was brought up. Do things for yourself. Reward yourself. Nobody gives you anything for nothing. This is the attitude I had at that time. Still have that attitude somewhat. But I've had to swallow that pride.

When I first applied, the unemployment office turned me down. So I had to get a lawyer, go to hearings, subpoena witnesses. It was April when I got fired, and it wasn't until the next December that the unemployment office finally decided in my favor, that I had been fired without just cause. So I didn't get any unemployment all that time. Only welfare.

It was rough. Of course, I went out almost every day at first and tried to find work, but it was in the middle of the recession. There was just no work available. There was nothing there at all. And this came as a surprise because I had never really looked for work before. The day I graduated from high school, a friend of mine said, "Hey, we need a fellow up here." I went in the next day and had work. I got home from Vietnam on Friday, and on Monday I was back to work at the same place. They always had something for me. So this time around, first thing I did was call them. They said, "No, we don't have anything. Things have dropped." It kind of made me feel bad because I never had that experience of going out and trying to find a job. When I lost this job, it was a completely different world than before.

The first week I was out looking for something every day. Then slowly it got to where the money situation only allowed me to go out looking for work maybe once a week. Then it got to once every two weeks. I couldn't put gas in my car. I had like \$400 worth of monthly bills. I was used to making \$600 and I was cut to zero. I had money put away, enough to live on. A few dollars, not too many. It wasn't bad the first month. Well, the first two months. But after that the money depleted.

After the first thirty days it was beginning to run out. I knew in the next few weeks I was gonna be at zero. So I went to welfare. Then I really had to swallow my pride. That first day at welfare was quite a day. I've tried to push it out of my mind because they really kind of step on you. I got the feeling that they have an iron hand over you, and you're nothing. I got the feeling they didn't care. They make you sit—well, it's a common thing, even in a doctor's office you hear people complaining about this. But the sitting and waiting. Waiting for nothing. And they give you as little information as they can possibly give you. I don't think—and it's a personal opinion again—I don't think they wanted to help you as much as they should have. I mean, their job is to

help. I don't think they were doing their job. You get a feeling of rejection. Especially the feeling that they're better than you. No equality. No equality whatsoever. I waited all day and they told me I would have to come back the next day. I hated to go back but I knew I had to. And then they told me I couldn't draw anything for thirty days because I'd been fired. So I had to wait another month, and I didn't get my first check until July 30. From April to July, zero money.

Then there was a food stamp problem. I qualified for food stamps, but I actually had to go out on my own to find out my rights. They didn't tell me I didn't qualify for food stamps. They just didn't say anything about it. They only tell you what you ask. Which I guess is all right. They're not breaking any rules. But they're not helping you either, and this is what they're for. So I had to get kind of forceful with 'em. I don't feel that I'm better than anybody else, but I didn't feel like I was gonna be pushed around. And I finally did get someplace. I said, "Look, I either get food stamps or I'm gonna make some phone calls." I actually had to raise my voice. A few swear words. Threaten to call a few people, like my congressman. I've met the man, talked to him. And it seems if you threaten them a little bit, they bend a little more and say, "Well, OK, we'll give you something."

It wasn't long before everything was gone. I had swallowed my pride and I was upset about everything. Welfare started giving us \$224 a month; but they always gave you a hard time, and you had to go there almost every month for something. The fact of being off work and just laying around with no money. No money to put in the gas tank of the car to go look for work. There was the threat of the utility companies turning the electricity off. The telephone. Furnace running out of fuel all the time. They turned the phone off during that time, but I always managed to borrow some money someplace to keep the electricity from being turned off. I average around \$36-a-month electricity, and I think at one time I had an electric bill of \$200 and some. It got awful tough. Sometimes we'd be completely flat zero broke. We ran out of food a couple of times. No money to buy food stamps. Wasn't nothing we could do. We just went without. We didn't eat. That's true. Sometimes for three and four days at a time.

And pretty soon you start creating your own problems. I drank a little heavy. Started drinking when there was nothing to do. When the money ran out I couldn't afford it, but any chance I got I did. And I had too much time on my hands. Too much of being home. I think it hurts your relationship, your marriage and so forth. I know in some cases of welfare the father has to leave the home to be able to survive. I wasn't gonna let that happen. I had that gnawing at me. And the wife and I had problems. We started to have little arguments. It wouldn't have happened if I'd been working. They were senseless. They were over little or

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nothing. We'd just bitch at each other for nothing. We had nothing else to do, just bitch at each other. I constantly raised hell because I was unhappy. She left me at one time for three or four weeks. In fact, it still affects our marriage. We see a shrink regularly. Every week. And even with going and seeing a shrink it's rough.

It's hard to even remember how I passed my time. Pushed it so far back in my mind. Even that short a time ago. You just get up in the morning and wait to go to bed at night. You can't wait till it's time to go to bed. When you go to bed you can't sleep. Worrying about things. But when you get up in the morning, you just can't wait till it's time to go to bed. You sit and wait. For what I don't know. I just kept waiting on something. That's a helluva thing to get a feeling like that. That's when it's time to see a shrink.

There wasn't nothing to do but just lay around. Try to borrow some money. By that time you'd borrowed from everybody, and they wasn't gonna give you any more, because they knew they weren't gonna get any back. If your electricity was working, you watched the TV. Or listened to the radio. And just get up in the morning and wait for bedtime.

For a while we visited friends, but it got to where we didn't have the gas to go. So most of our friends didn't have too much to do with us, I guess. There was one, of course, there's always one who sticks by you. But we didn't associate too much with people. 'Cause we didn't have money to associate and do the things we used to do. I borrowed money off of them until they wouldn't give me any more. And after that I didn't go around because you felt embarrassed, you couldn't give 'em back what you borrowed. You end up having to use your friends, and that's a bad scene. And I wouldn't tell anybody when we needed help worst, when there was no food. That's one bit of pride I had left. I wouldn't tell anybody. It was about the only thing I had left. I could do without. There'd be enough to feed the child, and even then she'd be hungry most of the time.

We had creditors after us constantly. Constantly. It got to the point where you'd look at the mail, you'd know what it was, and you just throw it aside. They just want their money, wondering when you're gonna pay. You try to explain the situation 'cause they understand to a certain point. But they're interested in their money. They don't care about you really. I can see their point somewhat. I did keep most of my bills up, just couldn't keep them all. One month it'd be somebody, and the next it'd be somebody else. I'd revolve 'em around to where they wouldn't complain too much, but there was constantly somebody complaining. They never repossessed anything. I don't know how I did it. I really don't. Somehow I did it. There was never once a threat of repossessing.

When my wife left, that was the worst. I had a little bit of money. Less than \$100. I made that last me all month, and somehow I managed to

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keep booze around pretty much of the time. I don't know how I did it. I guess by stretching a dollar. And I had no idea what was going to happen to me. No idea, no hopes, no nothing. Everything had went down the tubes. I knew things had to get better because they couldn't get worse. That's the attitude I had. It's the wrong attitude to have, I guess, but sometimes you get to a point of wanting to give up. You know you can't give up. But when you can't do anything, you have a feeling of total worthlessness. You're just worthless.

In September, after six months out of work, he found a job for \$2.50 an hour. "That was only \$5 more take-home than I would have got on unemployment. On \$2.50 an hour in this area you don't make it too good. But it was a stepping-stone." He worked there three months, then found another job as a welder at higher pay. After two months he was laid off for lack of work.

All I know is I went in one morning. There was a pink slip, and I just packed up my tool box and left. Didn't ask any questions. Went to the unemployment office. No hassles this time.

When I came home, I went out looking for work that next morning. I've had a couple of possibilities since then, thinking I was going to get a job here and there. It's taking them a little longer to say no. At least this time it's not just "Well, we're not taking applications." This time they're giving a few interviews. And giving me a little better chance. Everything is better this time. The unemployment check is coming through. No waiting period. There's enough money to cover the bills. Just barely, but there's enough to get by on. We're not starving this time. We don't run out of food like we did. And we don't have the problem of utilities. Being on unemployment isn't all that bad, compared to being on welfare.

But it's starting up again. I've been off about four months now, and it's starting again. I got to find work, even if it's digging ditches, because there's no way I'm going to go through that again. I'm foreseeing these things coming. Trying to do something about 'em before they happen this time.

But I have a different attitude now. I know my pride isn't as big as it used to be. It's made me a little short-tempered, short-fused. It's changed the relationship with my family. It's changed the whole surrounding. Before, things always rolled along real smooth. Now I've seen the rough part of life. I know what it's like now. Before, I didn't know what the rough part was. I've seen combat in Vietnam, but as far as how it is out in the world, I know what it's like. Maybe not as rough as what it was during the thirties. But I'm always gonna look back on this and say, "Hey, I've been through it. I know what it's like." It's been rough. Human damage, you might say.

RUTH PASTER

She is thirty-seven, a native Californian. She has worked in television most of her life. Her jobs have included publicity director, story developer, consultant, features editor, and producer. Her husband is a successful lawyer. Their large house is in a canyon near Los Angeles favored by professional people who like its mildly bohemian tone.

Eight months ago she was fired from a network news program along with most of the staff.



The firing itself didn't affect me. I was angry at the way it was done. It was really my first encounter with the brutality of network politics and how it can absolutely stop looking at people as people. I had never really believed that would happen. So it didn't leave me with a feeling of worthlessness—anything but that. At first I felt kind of—I don't want to say proud, but special. Yeah. Like "Fuck them."

But later on, depression is a mild word for what I felt. And it wasn't so much that I was out of work; what depressed me was that I didn't know what I wanted to do, that I was not looking for a job, that working didn't mean anything to me. It was not like the depression I had during my first stretch of unemployment, which was: "Jesus Christ, I don't know if I'll ever work again." It was more a combination of "I don't want to write the letters and I don't want to go on the interviews." For two reasons. One, they might reject me, which is unpleasant. And two, they might hire me. Nothing turned me on. No job possibilities excited me. I was depressed not because I felt "I'm unemployed, and nobody loves me." It was more like "I'm unemployed and don't care."

And it wasn't the kind of thing I could talk over very much with my husband. I was feeling like I didn't want to do anything and there wasn't anything I could do, but whenever I said that to John, he'd say it was a lot of crap. John's very practical. His attitude is: You do by doing. Also I think that there are certain kinds of depression that you can't share. One of them is that ultimate depression, not over growing old, but over "What do I really want to do with my life?" If the answer is a big zero, that's not something you can share. You've got to go through it alone.

I guess I was reacting to getting fired and to the letdown from the usual hysteria that I get into when I'm working. For the first four months I did absolutely nothing about getting work. I slept a great deal and

watched a lot of television. Really hated it. I mean, there are certain things on television that I love and wouldn't miss for the world, like "Masterpiece Theatre," but the whole soap opera scene is another thing, and I would find myself watching all day. Then I would put myself together and cook dinner for John. I'd cry a lot. After a while I sat down at my typewriter and wrote some letters. That made me feel better. But I would write the letters and then say, "Well, I certainly have to give people two weeks to receive the letter, the way the mails run. I can't call them right away." Then I'd give them a week to read the letter. So it took me three weeks even to pick up the phone. And then, if they didn't return my call, I wouldn't call them back. I remember friends calling me about jobs and saying, for example, "Ruth, there's a job open at CBS in children's programming." I would put off calling. If it was Monday, I'd say, "Well, I don't want to call on Monday because it's after the weekend and you always have a lot to do." [laughs.] So Monday would go. Then I would say, "I certainly can't call them at 11:45 because they're going out to lunch." Somehow I would miss Tuesday, and you obviously don't want to call anybody on Wednesday, and the week would go by. Finally, I realized that people would stop helping me if I didn't start making some of those phone calls. I remember I called CBS and talked to the secretary. I said, "Sarah, I hear there's a job open in children's programming." She said, "Ruth, I don't think they're going to fill it," and I said "Oh," and was relieved. I had done my little thing and didn't have to worry about it. Then I started to pace myself and say, "I'll make two phone calls a week and write two letters." Absolutely no motivation.

When I work, I work too hard. It consumes me 100 percent. Friends go out the window; my husband goes out the window; weekends go out the window. I get totally overwhelmed by the pace and the pressure. And I bring everyone into this horrendous work orbit. So being unemployed was a shock and a luxury at the same time.

But I went into therapy with this problem, this incredible work anxiety. I'm slowly discovering that it has nothing to do with work. It's really been the anxiety that has made me perform, whether it's anxiety for promotion or anxiety to please or whatever. What has depressed me is that as that anxiety goes away, I am finally faced with the choice of what I want to do. Although I can get turned on by a specific job that is offered to me, I have been chosen, I have not done the choosing. That's kind of depressing. There must be people who desperately care about what they're doing. They'd do it even if they weren't getting paid. That's a whole different definition of work, and that's really what I'd like to find.

Instead, when I lost my job, I felt like I didn't want to do anything. Well, that's not true. I read a tremendous amount. But again it was part

of this whole work thing in my head. I used to read a tremendous amount of fiction. Now I hardly read any fiction at all. I find myself reading George Sand's biography or Strachey's memoirs or Freud's biography or Virginia Woolf's letters. I am fascinated by the degree of passion that motivates people. But it's sort of unfair to myself, too. You can get very disgusted if you compare your life to George Sand's [laughs]. But I have a tremendous curiosity about whatever that thing is that people have found that keeps them interested in themselves. I think when you work, you can get so much involved that you lose sight of what's right for you and just go crashing ahead. But finally, you reach a point where you wonder what it's all about. Well, that hit me when I got fired. I guess you finally realize that there isn't an answer, but you somehow keep looking for it. And you laugh about it a lot.

It put a strain on my relationship with John. When I was unemployed years ago, he would come home and be assailed for hours with the fact that I was nothing and a nobody and would never work again. I didn't want to do that this time. So he would come home, and I'd just lie. He'd come home and say, "How was your day?" I'd say it was fine. "What did you do?" I would offer some fabrication. "Who did you call?" Sometimes I would say some names 'cause I really didn't want to go into it. And I resented doing the housework. When I have a job, all the housework is shared equally. But I feel since I'm not working, it's up to me to cook the dinner and do the laundry and shopping. And yet a part of me resents it. If it were reversed, it would be totally different. When he comes home and says, "I'm absolutely exhausted," I get very angry at the fact that he's working. And thoughts rush through my mind like: "You just wait till I'm working again; this is all gonna change."

Money is another problem. I left the job with enough money to carry me. And the fact that John's working gives me that excessive luxury of evaluating where I'm going and what I want to do, and what does television mean, and I'd rather be a painter, and all that crap. But even though I won't starve, I need my own independent money. John pays the rent and all the major bills. I have enough to pay for the groceries and for all my own needs. So it hasn't come to where I have to say to him in the morning, "I need \$5." But a while back I did need money for something important—for therapy—and John said, "Look, if it's that important to you, then look for a job." I think that's what got me moving. I realized I couldn't wrap myself up in this cocoon of dependency. I had to go out and do something. That, and I felt, "OK, God damn it, I'll show you. I'll get out and get a job, and I'll make twice as much money as you, and then we'll see who'll do the dishes."

Sooner or later, unless you are really out to destroy yourself, the pendulum swings back. You get so anxious and depressed by not doing anything that you realize you have carried it to the limit. I began to see

what I was doing. I mean, I was reading *The Savage God* and Sylvia Plath, all these books about suicide. It was getting worse and worse and worse. So finally, I started writing those letters. I remember my first interview. It was at a publishing company. I walked in, and the woman looked at me and asked, "Well, what do you want to do with mass-market paperbacks?" I couldn't think of a thing. Not a thing I wanted to do there. I somehow lied, but after that interview I was more depressed than ever. It wasn't until I had a good interview at ABC, with a man in the local news division who was interested and bright and had some respect for women, that I felt I still cared about anything. It was very exciting. I felt, "All is not lost," even though I didn't get the job. It made me see there was still some grain of passion in me somewhere.

I think what happened to me was that by being in therapy and not having to deal with the day-to-day pressures at work, I finally had to look at myself. Being fired started a lot of things going in my head that had nothing to do with my marriage or what job I would find next, just a realization that I've been on a treadmill my whole life. I've questioned things that I never questioned before. I've gone beyond that feeling of "No one is going to want me" to "What do I want?" I've also realized, after the experience with my last job, that I'll never commit myself in that way again. I guess I was burnt more than I've been willing to admit. I've learned that particularly in the networks, it doesn't really matter how hard you work. The decisions on whether you go or stay have nothing to do with your work. I'd always heard about that, but I'd never seen it happen. People's lives destroyed like that. Mine wasn't, but there were people who needed the money and who cared and who didn't want to be fired. I can honestly say that I would never again work in the entertainment department of any network. I would rather not work for another two years than take a job that I didn't like, where I would drive myself crazy over something I don't care about. Because what is the point of working that hard when it all goes down the drain? What does it really mean? What do you have to show for it? Now I no longer fly into a frenzy after every interview, wondering if I'm going to get the job or not. If I get it, OK; if not, that's OK too. I've changed.

ROBIN LANDAU

She grew up in Stamford, Connecticut. "My mother does nothing, and my father is in real estate from his father. He owns shopping centers and apartment buildings." She lives on the East Side of Manhattan

and studies child psychology part time. She has been collecting unemployment for nearly a year. Before that she worked for a company in the garment center ("I just hated the people there—they were loud; they were obnoxious") and a film production company. "I was a gal Friday and assistant film editor. I couldn't take the typing and answering phones, and I found out that editing is supertechnical. You can't be creative because the producer and director always tell you what to do." She left there for a job in publishing. She is twenty-four.



I had a friend at a big publishing company. I forget what she was, but she had a pretty important position. She told me a good job was opening up and she would help me get it. So I went there. I was happy about it and real excited about getting a new job which I could train for and maybe enjoy because I love books and I love reading. But I'm just not a business person. I can't take it. It drives me nuts. The job was in the trade sales department. And the company is like this huge publishing house on the thirty-ninth floor of this office building. You've got to zoom up at 8:30 every morning and zoom down at 5:30 [laughs].

And publishing . . . I thought publishing would be exciting because you're around all these books. What a drag publishing is. The only people who work in publishing are these creepy librarian women or au naturel girls. Like these whole-wheat girls who would look better if they put on some makeup. But no, they won't wear makeup. And they sit around and sit around, very bright, but Christ, so boring. I like to be around men, and the only men who work there are these old men who were like . . . the editors? No, not the editors, I forget what you call them. And it was really hot. It was last summer. And all I did—you had to memorize like two hundred names of people. It's so big. And these salesmen would call up from around the country and go [mocks deep voice], "Well, Brentano's in Ohio just ordered fifty thousand copies of such-and-such!" Then you'd have to call up some other woman, and it was just a lot of phone work and a lot of names and a lot of bullshit. All mass production. I quit after two weeks.

I mean, at first you're excited about a job. You think it's really something and it's going to lead someplace. But the first day you're there, to hate it? I mean to really hate it? I hated it the first day; I couldn't stand it. But my parents had said, "Robin, I don't care what you do, just get a job. Just get something so at least you're partially supporting yourself [laughs]. Because we're so sick of supporting you, and you're old enough that you have to learn responsibility." I am responsible 'cause every job I've ever had they've always liked me and I've always shown

up on time and I've always done what I was supposed to do. And I've always hated it [laughs].

Anyway, it was summertime, and my parents actually saw that I was going a little nuts and a little bit off the wall in publishing. I don't know what it is about me, like I'm materialistic and I'm bullshit, but I'm also extremely, extremely sensitive. In the business world I just can't make it unless it's fun and people are nice. But people are not nice in business that much.

I didn't collect unemployment until three months after I quit. 'Cause I'm scared to ask people for favors. I was scared to go back to the place I worked before the publishing company and say, "Could you please say that you laid me off instead of I quit?" And I left there on very good terms. I still see the people. So finally one of my friends said, "You're a stupid idiot; why don't you just go and ask?" After three months I got up enough courage to go. Otherwise I wasn't going to get unemployment. Now that I look back on it, it was so stupid of me. Why not ask? So you get a rejection? It's just that I can't take rejection either [laughs].

How did you feel about taking the unemployment money?

Great! Oh, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was like a free \$85 a week. Just to enjoy myself and fool around with, for doing nothing. For doing nothing. I mean when I was working, I was taking home maybe \$40 more. Busting my ass. Well, not busting my ass, but just being very depressed and wasting a lot of time for \$40 more a week. And here I was collecting \$85, doing nothing. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was like a gift from heaven. Pennies from heaven. Dollars. It's terrific.

The fact is that I hate working. See, I would be good at volunteer work with children or something. But the thing I really hate about work is getting up so early. Such an ungodly hour. And it's just too much. You work, you come home, you eat dinner, you're so tired, and you have to wake up the next day. And your weekends are the big thing. Weekends are such a drag because they're just so crowded with all these crazy people who do the working and go out to unwind. You can't enjoy yourself on weekends. I would much rather go out on a weekday night. So I'm a lot happier when I'm not working.

And I certainly feel no guilt whatsoever about taking the \$85. I think this government and the whole world is crazy and war-happy, and that I wasted a large part of my life by working for these people, doing nutty jobs. That's not what life is about, sitting in an office nine hours on your ass, typing or taking orders from somebody. So I feel they owed it to me.

So during the summer I went to the pool and I played tennis and I got skinny and I got a suntan. I was living here, but my parents belong to a

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club and my friends have tennis courts and pools and I have a car, so I took the car with me and my friends to the Hamptons. I'd bop around there, and I was really relaxing and getting mellow and nice again. What my parents don't understand—but I think now they do—and what people don't believe is that . . . well, a lot of people want to be famous or they want to do something constructive in their life. But I was so happy for six months. I was doing nothing, and I think I could be happy doing nothing for the rest of my life. I have friends and I like to read and I like to go to museums and I like to paint and I like to sculpt and I like to do crafts and I like to go to theater and I like to go to movies and I like to go to parties and I like to dance and I like to have a good time and I like to travel and I also like to be serious. But I think my whole life I could do that without getting a job. People just do not understand that. They go, "Oh, Robin, you can't be happy doing nothing." And I was going, "But I am happy." For a while I was denying it: "This is wrong, Robin, you should do something constructive. Society! You should have a job or something." But finally I came to the realization—well, I always had the realization, but I finally admitted to myself that, yes, Robin is very content doing absolutely nothing. I mean not nothing, but not a job, not having to be famous, not having to be well known, not having to make money.

I guess I went back to school because of what my father said. One day he said, "Well, Robin, what's going to happen if I'm not around anymore?" When he said that, I started to cry hysterically. My father's an idol to me. I think he's wonderful, a terrific human being and wonderful about everything. I just started to cry and said, "Don't you ever say that to me again," and he goes, "It's true. What's going to happen if you don't marry somebody wealthy? What's going to happen if you never get married?" See, my whole life is dependent on a man to get married and to make sure he's wealthy. But I would never marry just for money because I couldn't do that. I would get sick to my stomach if somebody touched me who I didn't love. So like I need both. I need love and money. And it's pretty hard to find. So I said to myself, "Let's get your life together." So I bopped into school, and I'll be happy being a child psychologist every now and then.

I can't live on \$85 a week. I don't pay the rent. My parents pay the rent. I pay everything else and I still have to take money from them. It happens to be very difficult for me to live on \$85 a week. I feel horrible about taking their money. But I've gotten past the point of feeling horrible; I feel one step worse than horrible: I feel like I don't care. Like the part about being horrible is already over because I know that I'm horrible and awful. I'll never make anything out of my life, so I like to live off of other people. So I feel like the only attitude to have is to not care and be thankful that they can do it. I do appreciate it and I don't really take

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advantage. It's also . . . you know, in a certain way they never taught me responsibility with money. All of a sudden I got out of school and there was this great pressure. Now be responsible! But during my whole life there wasn't even a gradual buildup. I got everything I wanted, everything. And all of a sudden I got out of college and I was so shocked. "OK, now do it yourself." But I was never taught. You don't do that to a person. I blame them for doing that. I'm not placing the guilt on them. The thing's on me. It's my fault. But they should've taught me. They should have been more responsible in that respect.

I mean, some people function best when they work. A lot of people need work, the responsibility, something to occupy their time. Because they don't have that many outside interests, and it does take up a large part of your life. But I'm very unliberated because I think men should still support women. Unless the woman finds something that interests her and she wants to work. But she shouldn't have to. That's not really my point of view on men and women, but on men and me. I don't really believe that about women. That was wrong to say. I just think that for me it's right. I don't want to be liberated in that way.

Basically I'm happy with myself. I think Robin's a good, together, nice person. But as far as ever having a goal or as far as ever having a future, I don't think I'll ever have one. It does get depressing at times and I think that maybe I should. But I'm just not made that way and it never seems to work for me. Like I probably would be happy just getting married and having a family and being rich and having a good time. I mean, not screwing around because I'm pretty straight sex-wise. I'm pretty monogamous. I just like to fall in love and get married and be very happy. I guess I sort of live in a fantasy-type world [laughs].

ANTHONY PASTORINI

He has a round, boyish face with long reddish hair swept across his forehead. He wears blue jeans, sneakers, and a flannel shirt untucked in back. He's slightly overweight and given to fantasy. "I read everything. I must have read umpteen hundred books. Can't keep much of it in my head, but I keep enough that it helps out when the need arrives. Like, you need a bomb built? I can build a bomb 'cause I read a book on how to disarm 'em. I've lived quite a big life in twenty-one years." He has recently written a 375-page detective novel and sent it to a publisher, who suggested he take creative writing lessons.

He prefers to meet at my motel on the edge of Minneapolis. Around us, a desolate cityscape of vacant lots and small factories.



I was born in Minneapolis in '54. Dad's a mailman. Mother's a typical housewife. Normal life. Grew up, went to school. Quit school when I was fifteen and got my equivalency diploma. I bummed around for a while, worked in my dad's tree nursery up north when he retired. Then, when I was sixteen, I illegally joined the service. Lied about my age. I didn't have anything else to do. I was going nowhere. I figured it would be a good education. Maybe learn something I could use on the outside.

On the whole I had a good time in the Air Force. Did just about everything, but mostly was an engineer on aircraft. I was in Vietnam, Guam, the Philippines, Japan, California, Texas, Washington, and many other places. Continually moving around. Finished up by getting wounded in Nam. Helicopter. We were just flying a mission. We got knocked out of the air. The next thing I knew I was waking up on a transport coming back to the States. They temporarily sewed me up, then put in a pin and a joint. I used to kid the guys around base, "Man, I'm just as good as anybody else in show biz, I got a pin just like Evel Knievel." And I did.

Then I got discharged three months early. They found out what my age was. They had me up for falsifying enlistment papers. They said, "Well, you can get out or stay in and face a court-martial." So I got out with an honorable discharge and full benefits.

It's a popular belief, you know: Join the service, learn a trade. Well, you may learn a trade in the service, but you can't apply it when you're on the outside. Unless you're something like a personnel manager or an accountant. Most of the people that go into the aircraft field, if they're in anything but electronics they can't get a job on the outside. Can't qualify. Have to go for three years of college. Eight hours a day, four days a week for a P and A license. That's power plants and aircraft. It's a license to work on any kind of aircraft. You have to go through this college. You gotta get it all on paper. And nowadays most of the college kids that get diplomas, they can't get jobs.

It was a year before I found my first job. I went around to all the airports, putting applications in. I got the same reply from all of 'em: "Sorry, no previous experience, no license, I can't help you." They won't let me touch a Cessna, a \$100,000 airplane, when in the service I was working on \$7 million jets. Doing the same type of work. More complicated. More hydraulics. I can't touch a plane on the outside. And I'd say 95 percent of the people who are getting out of the service are

like that. They're out of a job. I know there's quite a bit of turnover, but the first year they're out, they reenlist. I knew quite a few while I was in. They went out and I'd run into them again at different bases, back in the service. 'Cause there's just no way to cope with the outside. If I had my choice I'd reenlist, but I can't because of me lying about my age before.

At first I lived with my uncle and aunt, rent-free. I was collecting unemployment, so I was giving them \$80 a month for food, telephone expenses, and stuff like that. I took care of their kids. They felt it was enough, but I didn't. I felt that I should give them more, but they insisted on me keeping it. Save the money for a car or something. So I saved up quite a bit of money. Got a car. And then I started really going all over the place for a job. I even went down to Ohio. They're building a nuclear reactor down there. I was trying to get a job as a construction worker, laborer, you know. No luck. Kind of hard to believe I can't even swing a shovel or a pick. I've done it before. But it was, "I can't use you. No experience—no job."

After a while you get disgusted, disappointed. You really get hyped up about a job, right? You're figuring you're going to get it. Go in there with a great attitude and everything. They come up with this thing: "No previous experience? No job." Like one job was driving truck. Little delivery van. I couldn't even get a job doing that. No previous experience. I've driven just about everything the service has. No previous experience, no job. Another thing: If you're under twenty-one, forget it, you can't get a job. Any of the security places, playing guard, you can't get a job.

You get disgusted and slack off, you know. A little thing in your head starts saying, "Why the heck should I go out there if they're gonna say the same thing the last place did?" Like I went to one place yesterday: Bell Telephone. Went in there, did it. They said they'd let me know. Most of the places say that. "We'll let you know." You go to the unemployment office every morning when it opens. Eight-thirty. You go into their card files and microfilm room. You go through them. Get everything. You call the places and make appointments. You go out and fill out applications. I must have given out fifteen hundred copies of my discharge form within the first six months. But nothing, not even a call saying that we can't hire you. I think it's pretty ridiculous. A guy's got that time under his belt, he's got a fairly good head on his shoulders, so they tell me. Fairly good education and no criminal record. I haven't had a ticket in my entire time of driving. Won't hire me. No experience. You can't get experience unless somebody breaks down and hires you.

I started to get into arguments at home. The slightest little thing would set me off. I slacked off about getting a job. I'd go to one or two places a day, where before I was going to ten, fifteen places every day. And if the kids started goofing around, I'd get mad and I'd start yelling.

Storm out of the place. A few times I just walked away. For two or three days. Walked clear into the city, walk around for seven or eight hours, talking to people. Thoughts go through your head like you haven't thought of your entire life. "I wonder where I can get a gun?" Things like that. Everybody thinks of suicide, mostly everybody, when things get down. But I used to sit around thinking of ways to do it. Painlessly, of course. Weird thoughts go through your head when you're sitting around with no money in your pocket. Every time you walk by a bank you think of somehow ripping it off. Or some way to turn a fast buck real quick. At first I was buying lottery tickets. I gave it up.

One outlet—when I was in the service I took up karate, and when I got out I took it up till about three months ago. It was an outlet to an extent. But every once in a while the instructor would get me mad and I'd go at him full force. They had to pull me off him one day. Things get built up inside of you and you gotta let them loose. And sometimes the slightest little thing will let it all out. Not anymore. I've settled down, cooled down. Takes a lot to set me off now. Takes a lot. But during that period . . . slightest little thing, I'd go right through the roof. Pretty bad.

I was going down to my old neighborhood in Minneapolis and hanging around with what the police would call unsavory characters. It was a motorcycle gang. We'd cause malicious destruction. You know, 'no irreparable harm, but we'd razz the police and cause all sorts of problems. Stop our bikes right in the middle of the road. Fifteen of us, right? Just stop right then and there, right in the middle of the road, and get off. Cause traffic jams. Ride around our bikes on people's lawns. Turn over cars. Start fires in trash cans. Not the little round ones—the dumpsters. They had to call the fire department. Rode down to City Hall, downtown, where they got the big statue. Sat up on one of the hands. Police came. Got us. Took us away. Didn't arrest us or anything 'cause they figure we're off on some locoweed or something, which none of us were. The mayor's car, we filled it up with rotten eggs. Oh, it was a mess. You should see—we got write-ups from the newspapers for some of the dumb things we did.

You figure you're doing it against the last guy that says, "No thanks, we can't hire you." Taking it out on something else besides your friends and people around you. Against the last person or last company. See, everybody was down on companies. We felt a lot of the places had a policy that you have to have experience or they won't hire you. So we were just doing it to get out the meanness, just plain meanness. Most of the guys were out of work. They were down-and-out about not having a job and just plain disgusted about everything. So they'd go out on these little binges, tear up some neighborhood. Everything that could be replaced or fixed, you know, no permanent damage. We might let the air out of tires, but we weren't gonna slash 'em.

Then I decided, well, this ain't getting me nowhere. I was looking around. Looking at myself. I was getting pretty well down physically and every other way. Pretty well down the drain. I was up to 285 pounds. I had a full beard. My hair was down to my shoulders. Unclean. I had an apartment by then, and it was a mess all the time. I was putting quite a few beers away. Hanging around at the clubhouse. So I said, "Well, I ain't getting nowhere," so I started really putting in a lot of hours looking for a job. It was partly because a friend of my uncle's who's a lieutenant on the police force was telling me about some clowns getting blown away downtown. For nothing at all. Just goofing around on a corner. Well, this shook me up a little bit. And one of the gangs in our area had their clubhouse raided by a couple of guys with sawed-off shotguns. A thing like that gets you a little nervous. Three people got killed; nine ended up in the hospital. One of them is paralyzed from the waist down. Things like that. They get you thinking, "I'd better get out of here before something like that happens to me." So I shaved everything off. Got my hair cut. Cleaned up. Sold my bike. Got a small car. Started looking for a job.

Found one in a junkyard. Nasty old place. I couldn't complain. It was a job. Paid \$3.75 an hour, which is outstanding for a junkyard. I had to lie to the guy to get it. He asked me if I had ever used a cutting torch. I had seen my dad do it, so I said, "Sure, sure, sure." He said, "All right, let's see you use one." So I went out back to start it up and started cutting. So I got hired.

I went back to the area where I was supposed to be working right? It was a pool of hydraulic fluid, oil, gasoline, everything. Highly volatile. And I was supposed to be out there cutting up cars, you know. See, they yank the engines out of the cars, and most of the time they'll break the transmission parts, the casings. All the fluid ended up right where I'm at. When I got off at night I had to take a scraper, a paint scraper, and scrape an inch of sludge off my combat boots. I told them they better get a water hose and better lines for the acetylene and oxygen or they're gonna blow me up and the whole place with me. They said all right, we'll see about it. I went at it, cutting away.

First I set a car on fire. I'd be cutting the part, and the heat and flame would go past it. And the sound-deadening material in the cars would ignite in flames real quick. One started burning and they couldn't put out the fire. Neither could I. They had to call the fire department. The firemen came out there and fined them \$250. They still wouldn't run a hose out. Gave me a bucket. I'm supposed to run 150 feet to get a bucket of water and run back while the car's on fire.

Some of the cars they never took the gas tanks off. Just drop them over there for me to cut the parts off with the gas tanks still in. Finally one exploded. A chunk of metal flew back and the tank smoldered for about

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three minutes. I didn't know it; otherwise I'd have been gone like the wind. So I cut the part off, figured I'd take it up front. Started to walk back up there, and I got about thirty feet from the thing before it went off. It picked me up about ten feet and laid me against a set of tires. I weighed 250 pounds, so that's quite a bit of pressure. And I got burned by a piece of insulation that was soaked in gas. It hit my arm, and as I brushed it off the skin went right along with it. It just peeled off. So I said, "Well, I think you better put a fire extinguisher back there and a water line. Cover the area with water. Water's a little heavier than oil, and it'll keep it from igniting that much." So he said, "We'll see." I went back to work the next day. Doctor bandaged me up, and I went back. They wanted me to cut the rear end of this car. I said, "Take the gas tank out." He said, "No, no, there's no need. There's no gas in it." I turned off the torch, set it up, and said, "Give me my money. I'm quitting. Unsafe working conditions." They said, "All right." Gave me my money and I walked out the door.

This whole period has taught me not to expect too much. You hope for a job, but you don't go overboard anymore. You sort of take things as they come. You get hired, you get hired. You don't, you don't. Some people get really mean from not getting a job after that long. I was for a while. Came out of it. I'm looking for a job. It's about all I can say, looking for a job. A lot of people are rejoining the service. I even went to one of the enlistment places, right? Just to see if I could get back in. And the guy there said, "Heck, if you hadn't of gotten out of the service you would have been a great recruiter." I just said, "Thanks. Thanks a lot."

ROLAND BATALA

He is reluctant to be interviewed. Finally he agrees. But when I find his house, in a beautiful old neighborhood near a large eastern university, no one answers my knock. I call from a public phone, and he answers. "You have to come around back," he says in a strange tone. I soon see why. He is living in a tiny corner of the basement that he has divided into two "rooms" by hanging a curtain. There is hardly space in the bedroom area for a bed and chair. The ceiling is crumbling. He owns the house but has been unemployed so long that he is forced to rent it out in order to pay the mortgage.

He is a handsome African with parallel scars on each cheek. His speech is lightly accented, his grammar a bit exotic. A proud man, he is

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not happy to be seen occupying his own basement. But he is too polite to refuse. And he is eager to talk.



I came from Ghana about fourteen years ago. I'm thirty-four, so I have spent most of my working life in this country. I got my bachelor's degree in New Orleans. Then I went to school at Columbia for a master's in biochemistry. I got it in 1972. But I figure I haven't had much luck—not in the job market anyway. I've been out of work for more than a year now. My last job was with the city department of personnel. They were using federal funds in the program, and they said it ran out. So everybody had to get off of it. It wasn't just me. My manager had to leave, too, because he was on the same federal funds.

Since 1972 I've worked here and there. It's tough looking for a job, and I guess for me it's also tough keeping it. I found that many companies have hired me just . . . It's just a cover-up thing, because sometimes the heat is put on them. They don't have too many black people on their staff, and I'm a black man. And they know they have to hire somebody, you know, so they hire you for a while and then find some reason to get rid of you again.

I've worked in pharmaceutical houses, laboratories—different places. And I've had to take some companies to the Fair Employment Practices people. I didn't think I was getting fair treatment, and in the end I knew I wasn't wanted around those places anyway. The last one was here in the city. I reported them to the Fair Employment Practices people, and they didn't act on it. They didn't act on the case for about two years. Then someone, I don't know who, brought the case up to them again. They wanted me to report everybody and the money that's involved and all that. But I don't want to keep all those things in me for so long. I'll probably get ulcers [laughs]. So I try to forget these things because they are not so good. It's no good keeping in bad memories for too long. I try to forget them if I don't like them. So I just didn't respond because two years was such a long time to look into a case like that. No doubt I was disappointed in the government officials who really didn't do their job, because they were the ones who were supposed to look into this thing.

Anyway, many companies, from what I have seen, don't take all those things too seriously about hiring minorities or hiring women. A good example is the university here. The government is keeping after them year after year. "We will cut off your grant," and all that. I have been there many times, they have my applications. I'm qualified to do a lot of things. But they will never hire me. And the government knows they don't have enough black people, and that there are people like me looking for work. But nothing will be done.

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The best job I had was at a pharmaceutical house. Heavens, my supervisor did all sorts of things to make me very unhappy on the job. Like he insulted me a lot, in every way possible. He would push me. I mean, not really touch me, but making gestures like that. And he insulted everything I did. My work, my presentations. It was a sales job, you see. I had to call on doctors. And I knew my presentations were just as good as anybody else's because we used to have meetings and I saw what everybody was doing. I didn't think mine were really bad. But he condemned everything, and I knew it just wasn't fair. One time he took some of the sales that were coming out of my territory and put it somewhere else, so it would make my own territory look like it wasn't doing too well. They used to give bonuses at the end of the year, but they didn't give me any. Many, many things were done like that, which just made me feel that they were trying to push me out. I believe because I am a black man. I believe so. Because I don't see any other reason. Why else? Why couldn't I stay in?

It's very tough for me to prove what was going on. That's very tough. You have to tape things, and then try to replay them in front of the judge. And that might not be admissible evidence because maybe I taped it falsely, you see. All these companies know the laws, and they know how to get around them. So I know some black people will make it, but actually I think it's just getting worse and worse for blacks.

After leaving that place I got another job. This was in a paint store. I would have liked this job. I was put in quality control. And I didn't last on that job for more than two months [laughs]. Because I was black and all the white people were actually making the paints. You see, I had to make recommendations. I had to say, "Add this. Add that." They would bring me the sample, and I had to test it and see if this is good enough or you ought to do some more mixing or whatever. And they just couldn't stand that. They couldn't stand that. Because I was black and a supervisor. I had to leave that place because I got so much hell from the foreman, from the manager of the plant. They were just pushing me out. Two people resigned, and they said they resigned because I was black. They absolutely resigned. Then many of the rest, they made fun of me. Laughing and poking fun. And my car—one time they took off the license plates on my car and threw them away. So many little, little things that you figure if you stay on they may harm you personally. And I just knew it wouldn't work.

I even tried real estate. They can let you work six months without a license. And I tried that. You know, I got the six-month permit, and in six months I never sold one house [laughs]. I figure that for many of the clients it was tough to buy a house from a black man. Very tough. Which is very strange. I don't know why it would be. You know, I tell them, "I have this degree," and all that stuff, but still I found out it was tough for

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them to accept. Maybe they feel I would get the commission, and they don't want to help. I don't know what they are thinking.

So I've been looking for research work or maybe work in a laboratory or a hospital. And I should be able to do some teaching job. Unfortunately, though, I don't have the state teacher's certificate. But parochial schools could take me without those credentials. I have visited all the hospitals and labs and have been interviewed, but generally they tell me right away that they don't have any openings, and when an opening comes they will let me know. But they never let you know anything. I have applied in New York. I went to Philadelphia. I have my applications in in Washington. I have interviewed several times at the university. They've given me tests. They've given me ratings, and they pass me on my ratings. It's just a matter of getting some professor that I could work with. They say they have to present my name to all these people when there are openings. But heavens, with all the pressure they are getting, they just don't do a thing.

Lately things have been very quiet. I have been hitten so many times that I'm cautious now. Fed up anyway. I don't think I look so vigorously now as probably I should. Because I think I'm discouraged. I have gone so many times. I've hit my head against the stone wall too many times. I feel I should even get out of this place for a while. Go somewhere else, and then maybe later on start anew. Because it's so bad to go to an employer and show so many months that you haven't worked. If I go away to a job, then I can come back and say, "I just came back from this job." And then I can have recommendations. So this is my move. I'm looking into foreign governments now. I started applying for foreign positions. In black countries. Probably I can find one that might use my talent.

It's affected my outlook on life a lot. I don't dress so hot anymore. I just put on anything I have. Shabby clothes, shabby coat. I mean, when you don't feel too good inside and there is no money in your pocket, it's no use getting into a suit. I guess it affected the way I walk, the way I dress, and where I go. Before I used to like to dance, go to parties, go to clubs, and many of these places you have to pay \$3 or \$5 just to get in. And I find I can't go because I don't even have the money in the first place. Probably just because I didn't have the means, I became more lonesome than ordinarily. So it's really a bad psychological state. I don't feel too good about myself.

But I try not to be bitter. That bitterness is just going to eat me up inside. It's going to be destructive to me. I'm probably going to get hypertension or ulcers. Because I can't just go out and start punching people in the nose. "You didn't give me a job." [laughs]. Didn't give me a job.

I was married before, you know. And when I lost that good job at the

pharmaceutical house, the wife got a divorce. So it's destroyed my family and destroyed a lot of friendship. And I own this house, but I can't live in it. I have to rent it out so that those people can pay for it, so I don't lose it. That's why I end up in the basement. I can't look many of my classmates in the face. Who are maybe doctors or who are at least working. There are many, many people who I have lost touch with. Very good friends. Because I know if they invite me to dinner, I can't bring them here. I'm really ashamed to bring anybody here. I am ashamed that my condition is so bad, compared to theirs. And that despite how much I tried, I can't get a job to earn the money to improve my standard of living. I don't think they would understand. I wouldn't want to take the chance.

And then I go into a lot of regrets. Like I'm wasting my life. So many months. Because when you go into the American system for so many years, you develop a sense of joy from accomplishment. And when I'm not accomplishing anything, I feel very sad. All the college I've been through, all to waste. I'm not really achieving anything at all. Every day is just wasted. I feel a deep sense of emptiness.

And not only that—it makes you wonder. Why go to college? Why waste all this time? Why go to all this trouble? And if you have children, what are you going to tell them? Are you going to encourage them to go to college and get their degrees? Because they are going to grow up black, and maybe they won't even get a job or they won't be able to live a decent life. So this is why I figure I have to keep on struggling. I have to keep on struggling.

CLARK HOOVER

He is forty-one—balding, slightly overweight, dressed in a sports shirt and Bermuda shorts. He is not used to talking about himself and uses awkward, quasi-bureaucratic phrases—a habit probably picked up during years of police work. He lives south of Pittsburgh in a suburban development still being carved from rolling hills. We sit on his back porch, overlooking a half acre of churned dirt that someday will be his yard.



I started working as a policeman in 1960. I spent nine years in the Pittsburgh department and then transferred to a smaller department in one of the wealthy suburbs. I spent six years there, until in the summer

of 1975 I was responding to a call at 4:00 A.M. Somebody was breaking into a house. I was the closest car to it, so I went in. And during the course of my travels to the location, even though I was traveling with the siren going and the emergency lights flashing, a car blew a stop sign and hit me broadside. I ended up with a fractured back, a brain concussion, and leg injuries. I was in the hospital for almost four months. And when I got out and went back on duty, I found out that with the injuries I had and the loss of memory that followed, I could no longer pursue my profession.

The main problem was the back injury. I couldn't protect myself any longer, in the event of a bar brawl or something like that, without a real possibility of getting badly hurt again. And there was no chance of getting a desk job. It was a small department, and the only positions available were out in the street in the squad. I worked for four months, from May of '74 through August, but it became quite obvious to me and my superiors that I was no longer competent to handle myself or protect the life and property of the citizens I was getting paid to protect. So I had to take a medical retirement. And I haven't worked since then.

This of course threw me into a dilemma. I was used to making about \$1,275 a month, and I was knocked down under \$500 a month. And I've got untold medical bills, which I hope will eventually be picked up by workmen's compensation or the insurance company of the other driver. But that's in litigation now. Workmen's comp feels that the insurance company is liable, which I'm sure they are, but the insurance company is holding off as long as they can. In the interim, workmen's comp isn't picking up any bills because of their stand, which is that the other company is liable. So in the meantime, I'm left hanging in between. I'm obligated for the doctor bills and hospital bills, which so far run over \$10,000. This has been going on since 1975, and the best information my attorney can give me is that it may be another couple of years before the thing is ever brought to court.

Where I go from here I don't know. The doctors have me under total disability now as far as any type of physical work is involved. And I'm also limited to desk jobs that don't demand too much in the way of powers of concentration because of the blow on the head and the injury to my brain in the accident. For a while I almost completely lost my ability to concentrate. I could be sitting and talking to somebody and five minutes later I couldn't recall whether I had seen them or talked to them, let alone remember what was said. The doctors said it would level off, which it has done. But my memory is still far from what it should be. I can recall my past pretty good, but recent conversations or events fade away. So I'm really not physically able to qualify for any job with any real responsibility.

When I first got out of the hospital, I started talking to friends and acquaintances to see if they knew of anything that would fit my particu-

lar need for employment. I got some pretty good leads, but one of two things always happened. In the first place, I was looking for work just when the country was heading into the recession. So the job openings just weren't there. Companies were cutting back and phasing out jobs. I don't recall coming closer to a job than being put on the waiting list. And in any case, the jobs that approached what I need in terms of salary all required a rigid physical and mental aptitude test, and I knew I couldn't pass either one. I knew I'd get washed out. Some people said, "Well, you could always get a job at a gas station or a grocery store." Maybe that's true. But I can't really be on my feet for that many hours every day. It would cost me more in medication and doctor bills to try and keep going than I would be bringing in. It's an avenue I explored, but it just wasn't to be. I talked it over with my doctors and they strongly advised against it. The work would be too hard on my back.

So it's been a very frustrating year. All of a sudden I'm not the independent individual I had grown to be in forty-one years. Just the opposite. At times I found myself almost pleading for some form of employment. And I see nothing in the future that's going to change it. I've run out of friends and relatives. Naturally I scan the newspapers and go to the state employment office, but they haven't come up with any leads at all. Jobs just aren't available. You'd think in the times we're living in that this would be one area where there wouldn't be any difficulty. There are so many things that need to be done. But industries and private businessmen can't afford to expand their payrolls. It's bad news.

I finally came to the point where there was no place to turn but the state of Pennsylvania for unemployment benefits. It took me a long time to even attempt to go down there. I felt very defeated by it. Emotionally I was down. I felt degraded. Maybe that's just the way I am, and maybe I shouldn't feel that way. Maybe I should feel grateful that I've received some help from the state. And I am grateful that I've received some help from the state. And I am grateful for what I've gotten. But I went through—well, I guess I'd call it agony before I could bring myself to go down there. I'm sure some of it was pride. I wasn't prepared to accept the—I was going to say humiliation, but I guess I won't use that word. It's a helpless feeling. Like you're using the last resort. I would find myself thinking, "Gee, I hope I don't meet anybody I know." Of course, the people where I had been working knew about it because they had to send in a report. I felt that was degrading, too, but you can't feed your family on pride.

So I found myself down there in line with the 7 percent or 8 percent—I don't know what the exact percentage is now—of unemployed people in this state. My position is probably a lot different from the ordinary working individual who's unemployed, because of my limitations. Nevertheless, I'm standing right alongside of him in line down at the unemployment office. Why I'm there, why he's there is

basically immaterial. The fact is we're there going through the same thing. And it's very distasteful. When I get down there, I almost have the feeling that the people behind the counter are saying, "Well, here's another bloodsucker." Maybe this isn't fair to the people down there. It could be that I'm too sensitive. But the way they look at you and talk to you, it's the feeling I get.

I've always worked. All my adult life. I've been very active. Even when I was in school I did a lot of part-time work and enjoyed it. So it's been quite an emotional adjustment to have it pulled out from under me all of a sudden—my power to earn, my power to go out and support my wife and kids. It's pretty easy to fall into the attitude of feeling you're useless. I have a tendency to feel guilty because my wife goes off to work every day, and my son has been working at a little dry cleaner's trying to make a couple of bucks for himself. And here sits Dad, the old man, more of a liability than an asset. That weighs on my mind quite a bit. It's depressing for an individual who does want to get out and be independent and be the breadwinner in the family. I can't fulfill those ambitions. And I find that it's easy to start feeling sorry for yourself. It happens particularly when I come home from a stay in the hospital. You can destroy in one hour what the doctors tried to do for you in two weeks, just by sitting and succumbing to the thought that you're no good anymore. And that's the worst thing a person can do.

So I try to keep busy with little things. I don't care if it's scrubbing the floors for the wife or doing the dishes; at least it keeps my mind away from the deteriorating thoughts. I have my therapy, of course. I'm trying to strengthen myself through exercises, so that takes up part of my time. I follow up on job possibilities if I run across them. In the summer, with two teenagers at home, there always seems to be something I'm involved in. The main thing is to avoid sitting and twiddling my thumbs. If I do that, I get too depressed.

I also have a lot of faith in God. It's been a real blessing because it's pulled me out of some tailspins. The worst was when I was confronted with the fact that I couldn't continue as a policeman. That was a terrific blow. I was angry at everybody, including God. When you're so sure that you can continue, and then you find out that you can't because of your own weaknesses, it's very hard to accept. I enjoyed police work. There were a lot of times when it was difficult, sure. But I honestly tried to be a public servant. It was my life. It had been for all my married years. And it was plucked away from me in a couple of seconds, and to have to be told I couldn't continue. . . . It was a terrific emotional trauma. I'm not through it yet. I sometimes wake up at night and think of the hopeless state that I'm in, and I figure, "What the hell's the use?" But somehow I've been able to continue on and not make my condition any worse.

The financial problems are another thing. Put yourself in the position

of earning \$700 every two weeks, and all of a sudden it's cut by more than two-thirds. Well, you have obligations that you've assumed, and those people want their money. Sure, they understand your position, and they'll go along with you for a little while; but then you start getting the phone calls and the nasty letters. My wife is working, thank the good Lord; but she's a secretary, and that isn't the highest-paying work.

My biggest problems have been with the doctors and hospitals. The medical profession has applied more pressure on me than any businesses or places that I've had loans. The doctors want their money when they want it. They don't care where you get it or what you do to pay it. I talk to them and tell them my situation as far as being unemployed. They usually say, "Don't worry about it." And then you get a letter in the mail that they're turning it over to a collection agency. It's hard for me, because if I had the money I'd certainly pay them. Some of them say, "Just send in a few bucks a month." Fine. That's what I'm trying to do. And then all of a sudden you get a call from a collection agency, and they want full payment in five days, or else. Well, you can't get blood from a turnip. I tell them, "I'm unemployed. I don't have the money." They say, "Go borrow it." Go borrow it? How are you gonna borrow it if you can't pay it back? "Well, go get something from your mother. Can't you borrow from your in-laws?" Things like that. They call the wife at work, which is embarrassing for her because she can't tell them any more than I can. It's humiliating and it's nerve-racking. They know that sooner or later they'll get the money, but boy, they don't back off. I've had them call me three days in a row. And when you get two or three of those a day, that gets to you in a big hurry. You don't want to answer the phone. Because you don't know what to do. My savings are completely depleted, so I just have to tell it like it is and hope they'll understand. I suppose they could get a judgment against me and take the house. I'm not sure they won't try it. I just hope we can hang on until the lawsuit comes through. My attorneys tell me I have a good case, but I could lose everything before it gets settled.

These last few years have changed the way I feel about almost everything in this country. For one thing, I'm much more aware of the unemployed than I was when I was working. I've met a lot of people who are in a more desperate situation than I am, and I feel for them because I've seen it from the other side of the fence now. Before, unemployment was just a figure of speech or a certain percent. I'd say, "Gee, that's a shame," and then ten minutes later I'd forget about it. But when you're in that minority on the job market, you have a different view of things.

I pay much closer attention to politics than I ever did before. I read a lot more and watch all the candidates on TV. Naturally all of them are saying that more jobs will be available when they're elected. Unemployment will go down. They're gonna make a Utopia for us. I think it's a bunch of BS myself. I don't see any way they're gonna drastically

change the economy. These candidates must think the American people are ignorant imbeciles. There's no possible way they can fulfill the commitments they make, unless they go in even bigger for mass production of arms for war. And I certainly don't want to see that happen. Then everybody would lose, not just the 10 percent unemployed.

It's somewhat frightening. You don't really have the power of choice that you think you have. I hope and pray that this recession will pull out and pull out in a big hurry because the way it's going now it's damaging the real foundation of our country. It's deteriorating faster than we can build it up. I'm always reading in the paper or seeing on TV that they say unemployment is gonna drop. But every time I go down to that unemployment center there's more people there. And to see all those people and look at their faces and wonder if their position is worse than yours or whether it's better than yours, it's a hopeless feeling. It's a feeling I never thought I'd have to experience in all my working years.

Laura Gordon

She is a striking woman—dark-haired, dark-eyed, twenty-six years old—who lives in Brooklyn's Park Slope section. Formerly a school-teacher, she is now a sculptor. Her apartment, full of light and plants and pottery, gives a feeling of extraordinary calm, as she does herself. She lost her teaching job because of the New York fiscal crisis.



The school system kept me hanging for two or three months. I didn't know until school began whether or not I would have a job. The union didn't know what was happening. The city didn't know what was happening. My principal didn't know what was happening. But finally it came down to either starting the year in a slot in my school that didn't look at all secure or transferring to Manhattan to teach severely disturbed children—which I didn't feel capable of doing—or leaving. I decided to leave. I wanted to finish my master's degree, and I said, "What the hell, why take a job when I'll probably just get bumped in a few weeks?"

During those months of waiting I was looking to my principal for a lot of support. He kept telling me. "It's all right; we'll see what we can do." I don't think I realized how bad those months were until much later. In the long run what I felt was an enormous amount of rage. Feelings of rejection, of humiliation. And it was frustrating because there was nobody to let that rage out against. It was faceless. I couldn't beat my fist

against them or fight them or scream at them. It came down to my director and my principal, but they had nothing to do with it. You can think about the politicians or the society, but it's like dropping something in a lake and watching the ripples, ripples, ripples. Nothing to get a handle on.

When the first day of school came, I thought I had licked it. I thought I had worked it through and straightened everything out. But that first day came, and I woke up and of course I wasn't going. The dream I had that night was that several of the children came running to my door and rang the bell. "Miss Gordon, Miss Gordon," they shouted. "Where are you, where are you? We're waiting for you." It was a very emotional dream. I felt this tremendous sense of loss; even though I wanted to speak to them, I couldn't reach them. The school is a block from me, and I still have trouble walking down the street. I'm afraid I'll meet one of the children.

It felt like all my independence was being ripped away from me. I had lost my job. Truly lost it. Now what was I going to do? In a sense it was easier because I went back to graduate school. And at first I thought it was just the loss of money that was taking all my independence. But then I began to feel it on a psychological level. What is my identity? OK, I'm not a teacher. Am I a student? It's difficult when you strip away all the things that supposedly hold you together in terms of an identity. Your work, your money, whatever is power to you, whatever is responsibility, whatever means freedom and choice. I had to ask myself, "Who am I now? What will I do now?"

At the same time I had a sense of partial relief. I had been teaching children with very poor self-images. They were bright, but they had difficulties, hyperactivity, things like that. And I had to work with teachers who were sometimes more disturbed than the children. So I felt an enormous relief not to have to deal with them anymore. And not to have to get up in the morning and have this whole thing structured. It began to dawn on me that I might as well face my negative feelings about teaching. I don't think I'm that kind of person. I like it much more if I can create something for myself and not have a nine-to-five job. But I don't know if I ever would have left if I hadn't lost the job. I chose it, without even thinking, because I felt that teaching was secure and structured. And now here I was for the first time having to structure my own time. Discipline myself.

At first there were a lot of times when I felt paralyzed. I was going to school part time and working on my sculpture. I got offers to substitute-teach and turned them down. I felt I'd rather do my own work. But there were times when I didn't feel like going to school. I didn't feel like working. I couldn't motivate myself. It couldn't come from inside. I felt paralyzed. It was at those moments that feelings of rejection, feelings of

being cut down, feelings of loss came over me. I felt like other people were controlling my life. I say "paralyzed," but I wouldn't necessarily stay in bed all day. I would get up, but I didn't feel like being engaged at all. Some days I'd just stay home. I got more interested in reading, music, writing, sometimes just cleaning. And this is interesting: I felt like I went through many stages of my life. I felt like I was an old person who'd lost a loved one or lost whatever it was that gave meaning to their life. I felt like I had children, which I don't. I felt like I was a housewife. I stayed home and took care of the house and thought, "It's almost three o'clock; I should pick up the children. And I have to shop because I have to cook." I lived days like that, sometimes weeks like that.

It forced me to face myself, in a way. I mean, I was facing myself before, but it got me to other levels that I might not have dealt with until much later. I thought my job defined me and gave me security, and it was like a door I never looked behind. I never said, "My God, what's behind it? What would happen if I lost the job?" As a child I never thought of how I would support myself, what I really wanted for myself. Also as a woman. For a woman to do that today, to really understand that nobody's going to come riding in on a white horse to take you away, isn't easy. That feeling still comes over me pretty often. I wish that someone would come and make all this disappear. But I chose this position. I didn't marry young. I didn't have children. So I'm alone, and it forced me to think constantly: What shall I do? What do I really want to do? What's most feasible to do? Where can I do it? Will I do it alone? Will I do it with other people?

One thing that's helped is being in therapy. That means constant dealing with my feelings and thoughts. Unemployment wasn't the first thing that really blew my mind about what I'd do when I had to face myself. But it did bring up other things. And in the therapy I had an outlet to think about them and explore them. There was somebody echoing my thoughts. There was a mirror there.

What did you learn from that?

A number of things. It was very slow. But over the months I think what I learned was about my responsibility for myself. In a deep sense. I still haven't mastered it, but I got a glimpse. I saw that no job, no person, no thing, no money, no nothing is going to do it for me. I have to do it myself. Even if I lived in a society where work was nonexistent. I'd have to produce myself. It became very clear that I had to find my own meaning of things, and I had to find new outlets for myself, even the old ones that I had forgotten. And financially—ultimately that's the big issue—I had to find a way to maintain my own independence. Also, being fired forced me to spend a lot of time alone. At a fairly early time in my life, I had to deal with what it was to be alone, to walk the streets

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alone, to eat alone, to sleep alone and think alone. I used to fear being old and alone. But now when I think about the future, I don't have that fear so much now. That's been an enormous change for me.

Now is the time that I'm really having to come to grips with all of it. School is over. My unemployment has almost run out. The last month or so has been very difficult. I wonder constantly what to do. But I've come to realize that anything I really love, I can make my work. I can do it myself if I want; I can do it with other people if I want; I can do it through a system or on my own. I guess I knew that before on some level, but I don't think I would have chanced it. Probably would have stayed in some little niche.

I still don't know precisely what I'm going to do, but I have a much stronger sense of well-being than I did a few months back. I don't feel lost. Well, I feel lost, but I don't feel my *self* is lost. You are who you are no matter what your job is. Maybe it takes people a lifetime to learn that. I hope I've gone through a big chunk of it with this experience of unemployment.

Not too long ago I went to a concert where some of my brother's friends were playing. It was like a dream, meeting all these people that I knew when I was growing up. And of course, what they asked me was: "What do you do?" That was the question. *What do you do?* What do you do with yourself? Because that's who you are. It's synonymous. And they were all responding the same way. All of them except a man who I knew as a child, who I loved very dearly. He has gone blind. And he was the one who could reach me. He couldn't even see me. He wanted to know what I did, but it didn't matter to him when I said, "I lost my job, Andrew. And I'm confused, Andrew. And it's difficult, Andrew." I had tears in my eyes, I can still feel it. He had his arms around me, and he said, "It doesn't matter. Do what you love. Just keep doing what you love." I was so touched by that and the contrast with everyone else. It kind of summed up the whole experience. What do you do? Trying to get away from that and realizing that it's all right. I mean, I don't have to wait for Andrew to throw his arms around me and say, "It's all right." I can say to myself that it's all right.

SUSAN CASEY

Another schoolteacher, also a victim—or beneficiary—of the fiscal crisis. She lives with her boyfriend, an Olympic-class track champion, on East Ninth Street in Manhattan. The apartment feels half vacant

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even though she moved in a year ago; records are piled in a corner, the walls are blank. A gaily colored hammock hangs from the living-room ceiling.



My principal warned us when we came back to school in the fall that there were definitely going to be layoffs this year. He said it was no idle threat, the way it had been in years before. The city really had no money. All this time, of course, the principal and assistant principals had no real idea what was happening. They had to get their information from other people, who also didn't know. Nobody seemed to know, except that the ax was going to fall soon. My principal had suspicions, from what the superintendents were telling him. He said he was told that about 20 percent of the school was going to be let go. Of course, none of us believed it because you can't imagine how the school's going to function with 20 percent of its staff gone and all these monies gone. Well, about a week after school began they started telling people that they were going to be excessed or sent to other schools. Then a teacher's strike came for about a week and a half, and during that strike I was sent a letter saying that I was laid off.

I was a little shocked at that, but I wasn't really depressed because it hadn't struck me yet how difficult it was going to be to survive without the salary. I knew it was going to be hard; but I thought I'd probably be able to find some other work, and the unemployment was \$95 a week. It's not a lot, but it certainly was going to pay my rent. And I had my family. I knew I wasn't going to starve. Plus I kept hoping that they would recall me, because they did say that people who were laid off were going to be put on the preferred list to be recalled. So I thought, "I'll wait. Instead of looking for another job, I'll see what happens. Maybe I'll get recalled, and then I'd just have to quit whatever job I had found." But as it turned out, from listening to the gossip, it didn't look as if they were going to be recalling people for quite a while. I finally did get recalled, just last week. After eleven months. They sent me a certified letter saying that they had positions. I'm ignoring it. My form of revolt [laughs].

But you don't sound very angry about getting laid off.

I was a little angry. But after I began hearing stories about what had happened to the teachers who were stuck in the system, I began to think that my position wasn't half bad, that I was the luckier one. The teachers who were excessed got sent to other districts, and a lot of them ended up

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in really rough areas. At least I was laid off and allowed to collect unemployment. If these other teachers didn't like their jobs, they could just quit. And many people don't feel that they're in a position to do that. They make \$17,000 a year, with every vacation day that exists. You're just not going to find that kind of job anywhere else. Even though the conditions they work under are very, very bad. I went back and visited my old school a few months ago. It's pathetic. They're running the school on 20 percent less staff. They've got forty kids piled in a classroom. They've eliminated all the extra programs: no gym, no music, no art. They shortened the schoolday. And of course, the teaching has to be minimal. I know I had a difficult time with thirty children in a classroom, and the contract said there definitely would never be more than thirty-two children in a class. Now they have forty, and if they want to make it forty-five or fifty, they can. All the teachers are depressed. The change from the way it was before—which wasn't good—is so drastic that they're discouraged.

So as time has passed, I've begun to realize that the board of education really did me a favor. Even though teaching is a good job in many ways, it's also a very frustrating job because you're not really teaching. You're a disciplinarian. But you choose to be a teacher, you choose to be in that system, and you choose to follow its rules. I never felt I'd be able to leave that job on my own, but having been forced out, I realize that there were any number of things I could do if I really wanted.

But being laid off must have been a lot more emotional for me than I allowed myself to feel because now I'm so violently angry at the board of ed and this lousy system they've set up that frustrates everybody who's in it. I used to be disgusted at the inefficiency of the bureaucracy. But I began to see that the evil of the whole system is its impersonalness. I mean, you can't blame any one person. I'm not angry at my principal, and I'm not angry at the other teachers who kept their jobs, because they have to feed their families. I'm not angry at the people who work at the central board because they have the same excuses for keeping their jobs. But there they are, hacking away, firing people left and right who are the sole breadwinners for their families. And they don't care. There's no compensation. "You don't like it, it's tough." They send people helter-skelter all over the place to find jobs wherever they can, and their attitude is: "If you don't like the job, you can quit." And yet there's no one person you can blame. It's that impersonal board of ed up there that's making all these decisions, and it's not even their fault. They blame the city. You know, "The City." I just feel that it's very evil. Before, I never thought about the system as being the least bit symbolic or political. I just felt, you live in the city, you adjust to the circumstances and the institutions that are there. And you work because you have to work. Now I feel much more critical about the kinds of organizations I'll work for and the kinds of things I'll support because I

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feel I must take responsibility for the kinds of jobs I have. I can't just be an impersonal, idle part of it. If you work, you contribute to a system, whether you think it's good or bad. So you have to make a choice as to what kind of system you'll work for.

A lot of my friends think I'm berserk. They say, "Look, you were offered the job back, now take it! How can you turn down \$17,000?" But I almost feel I'd be going back on my word by taking that job now. I realize that people's attitudes about the job you take have nothing to do with the quality of the job or whether it's socially useful or not; they have to do with the amount of money. It's just a question of "Well, can you maintain your life-style?" But my life-style is very much as it was before, and I've discovered I don't need to preserve it by supporting something I feel is negative. I would be very willing to teach, but not for the board of ed.

STEVE LACARRIERE

A Native American pueblo outside Albuquerque, New Mexico. A harsh landscape of dry reddish hills, dirt roads, scattered low houses of adobe with pickup trucks in front. I wait for Steve, who is in Albuquerque fetching a load of lumber. He arrives, wearing a cowboy hat and denims. He is twenty-four and looks older. "I was born in Murphy, Idaho. That's south of Boise. A little tiny town. We're from South Dakota originally. See, we're Sioux Indians, and around here is all Pueblo Indians." His brother is married to a woman from the pueblo; they have six children. Steve is single, living here until he can find a job.

He is helping build an addition on the house. "You don't want to feel like you're not pullin' your share. I don't want no pressure to build up like last time I was out of work. I'm pretty much at ease, and my brother's made it pretty easy for me. He tells me, 'Well, hang on, something will come along.' So I'm hanging on. When I turn twenty-five, I should get a trucking job. I know there's jobs out there. I'll go out and do the really long runs. I don't mind those kinds of runs. I like to drive solo..."



As soon as I graduated from high school, I went to work. This was in Boise. I started doing roofing. Ever since I was twelve I've known how to do roofing work because my father's a carpenter and all my uncles are

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carpenters and all my brothers are carpenters. I learned roofing from them. So I went on my own when I was about nineteen and worked for four years. Making good money.

But then everybody stopped buying roofing. Really, it was strange. There was a fuel shortage, and then all of a sudden everything went haywire. Nobody was buying roofs. I couldn't find work nowhere. I'd been working for this one company almost three years, and I couldn't believe it when they went into that slump. 'Cause they had kept me busy through the snow and everything. There was always work, even in the hard winter up there. And all of a sudden they hit that slump, and there was nobody hiring.

I called all the roofing outfits and they didn't need me because they already had men that had been working for them five or six years. So I went to the unemployment office and used their job service to look for a while. But the situation was just too bad. There wasn't that many openings. You had to have college education for most of them. And I was looking for anything, from car wash to anything else. I'd get out to the car wash and find thirty-year-old men washing cars. It was like everything just went crazy all of a sudden. And I started to go stir crazy. You get frustrated, going to job interview after interview with these little referral cards. You go out there and all they do is tell you, "Well, we can accept it but we can't give you a job because we already got somebody. We'll keep you on referral." In four months I must've put out over a hundred referral cards. That's just too many to get nothing, not even a response.

So what do you do all day? You go home and you sit. You become a real TV bug. And you begin to get frustrated sitting at home. Everybody in the household starts getting on edge. They start arguing with each other over stupid things 'cause they're all cramped in that space all the time. I was living with my brother and my sister and my mother. And we all got hit. My brother got laid off, and then my sister was out of work. My mother was retired. The whole family kind of got crushed by it. That's a lot of frustrated people, sitting there together so long.

To burn up your energy, you start getting crazy. I didn't like that. I felt like decking the people at the unemployment office, right? 'Cause when you had to go there and sign up for your checks, that's about the worst humiliation you ever have to go through. A lot of these people seem to feel like you're taking it out of their pocket. Actually it's the money you put away for this. But the way they treat you, you really get pretty mad. I've seen a lot of people get mad down at the unemployment office. I've seen it to the point where one guy actually knocked another guy down. But I try to forget about it [laughs]. That was a really bad time. It was just so hopeless.

I was out of work four months that time. Frustrated. Bad atmosphere

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at home. And back then I was drinking pretty heavy. Well, I was doing that ever since I was little. You get to drinking too much. I would hang out in a bar, go in there and shoot the bull with the guys, you know. Pretty soon I was drinking heavy. To the point where I was getting everybody at the house pretty well mad at me. See, I was drinking up my unemployment checks. I'd go out and fill out referral cards all day and then get drunk when I didn't find nothing. What it came down to is I was an alcoholic. That's what it came down to. You might think alcoholics are guys on skid row. Shit, no. Alcoholics can be fifteen, seventeen years old. So I found I was at the point where I was becoming an alcoholic. Where I cared more about drinking than I did about anything else. And it really got bad on unemployment. That's when I really started drinking. I mean, I'd spend \$30 a night drinking beer, and that's in 30-cent glasses. When you add up \$30 in 30-cent glasses . . . that's about as much as you can drink. I drank to the point where I'd have so much alcohol in my blood, a few more points and I'd have been in what they call a state of death [laughs]. I never could handle it. I don't understand why I drank it. Once I got into a fight with my brother about it.

Did it get to the point where your family said, "Hey, you better cut this out?"

It got to the point where I tried to commit suicide last June. And I almost did it.

See, I had been going to this program for Indians in Boise. I'd go down there for job referrals, but their jobs were just about the same as the unemployment office. It wasn't much good. But they wanted to send me for schooling because I did finish high school. That's a remarkable thing for a lot of Indians, you know. A lot of Indians don't finish high school. So they wanted to send me to school for a lot of things. Artwork and stuff like that. I didn't want to go. I figured if there's somebody out there with a really super talent, he should be the one to take the money and go. Then they asked me if I wanted to drive truck. That's something I always wanted to do. So they sent me to school for a month and a half on a program called CETA. When they came up with that I was really surprised 'cause they paid me \$3 an hour to go to school. Plus they paid for the school and everything that goes with it. Then they paid me \$100 a week until I found a job.

While I was in school, I didn't worry about drinking. I was engrossed in the truck driving. I really got into it. I didn't see no reason to drink. But when I got out, they said to put in applications at all the trucking companies. I did that, but they wouldn't hire me because I'm only twenty-three. You have to be twenty-five. Because of insurance reasons. So here I was, I had all my papers and everything, and I still couldn't get

work. Only this time I was getting \$100 from the government to do almost nothing. I was working with the program, doing little things like picking up old people that couldn't get to the hospital. And it kind of got to me again. I was getting paid for doing little things. I shouldn't have gotten paid that much. You start feeling you're taking too much for nothing. The program didn't care, but I didn't want it. Your conscience bothers you. And being unemployed again, the same syndrome happened. It was only one month, and it started getting me. I started drinking again, and that's when it really got bad.

So one night my brother came in just in time to stop me from killing myself. With a gun. He came home and found me doing it. I was drunk, drunk out of my mind, and I couldn't get the bullet in the chamber of the rifle. I don't remember very well what led up to it. But I can always remember that ugly point right before taking your life, when you're thinking about what you've actually accomplished. That split second when the barrel is in your mouth and you're trying to get the bullet in the chamber to blow your brains out. I can always sit back and remember that goddamn scary point.

It's just lucky for me that my sister and brother stuck by me at that point. I'm really glad they stayed by me. It was really a bad time, frustration added on frustration, and they helped me. That makes a hell of a lot of difference, people that care for you. I mean, they could have kicked me out when I was drinking so much, but they didn't. Or they could have said, "You lousy bum, why aren't you out working?" They could have thrown ridiculous questions at me. Instead they'd say, "Go down to the unemployment center." I'd go down and there wasn't nothing there. But they stuck by me.

Anyway, if my brother hadn't come in, I probably wouldn't be here now. He took away the rifle and flagged down the sheriff. There was this one good sheriff, too. I'll always remember him. His name was Pat Condon, and he's a really young sheriff. He said he don't usually get friendly with his prisoners, but he talked to me. And he took me up to the university hospital and they put me in a psychiatric ward. They sent a few shrinks in and they talked to me. They said, "You're not suicidal, you're just a frustrated alcoholic." That's what made me think: "Man, he called me an alcoholic." I never thought of it that way. That night I started thinking, "I have a problem. I have a real serious problem." And the next day I started calling around. They've got a rehabilitation center there in Boise. It's run by Indian people. So I went there, and I met the director of it, whose name is Martha Tucker. She's really good people. She talked to me when I was going through the shakes. And they helped me until I left Boise. They don't cast you aside. 'Cause alcoholics get into down periods just like anybody else, but I mean down periods when you're sitting there thinking about going out drinking. I try not to

let things get me down that bad anymore. Because I know how far you can go. How far I could go if I just take like two drinks. I know I could pull the trigger. No problem. That scares the hell out of me.

I'm glad I found out early, you know. I'm only twenty-four and that's pretty early. I could have gone along kidding myself until I'm forty. I wonder where I'd be then. 'Cause the first thing you got to do when you get into Alcoholics Anonymous or something like that is admit you're an alcoholic. That's the worst thing. You say, "I don't want to admit that." A lot of people won't. They made up their minds they ain't gonna admit it. But hell, the next day I was willing to say I was an alcoholic. I knew there was something wrong. When you get to the point where you're getting a gun, there's gotta be something wrong. And when the psychiatrist tells you it's not in your head, it's in your drinking, then you know something's wrong. When you drink your money up to the point where it's all gone, even if you drop to the floor pulling it out of your pocket, you know something's wrong. And there was the scary thought of knowing I might end up on skid row. Where all the people kick you when you're sleeping in doorways and stuff.

Three weeks after I stopped drinking, things started looking up. The program told me to put in an application with this trucking outfit. Next thing I knew, they hired me because I was a minority. I filled the minority bill. That's what a lot of employers hire minorities for, to get their minority quota filled up. This outfit had one black guy in Seattle and me [laughs]. We were the minority bill. That's pretty funny 'cause everybody else was Anglo. We were the only minorities there.

I drove for them a year. Hauling mail. I drove the crappiest run. Nobody wanted it. I asked them for a sleeper run, but they wouldn't put me on it because I wasn't twenty-five. And then the government started dropping runs, and everything went all to hell. I thought I was set because the mails, you know, they've got to keep moving all the time. But they kept dropping all these runs. and finally last month I got laid off. Couldn't get no work in Portland with other companies 'cause of my age, so I decided to come down here to New Mexico.

Being out of work this year's a different thing, though. It doesn't scare me that much. People are going back to work. The only places where they ain't working is the overpopulated areas. It's not like it was a year and a half ago. My whole family's working. My sister went out and got a trade. She went into dog grooming. Now she's grooming animals—poodles, they call 'em. Poodles and all them other little furry animals. And my brother's working in a gas station. I just have to wait a few months till I turn twenty-five. Then maybe I'll get a trucking job. I'm gonna keep on hanging in there till I'm twenty-five and get back out on the road again. I like living on the road. So the pressure's not building up too bad now. I'm not too frustrated.

JUAN CAMACHO

He lives in a trailer park outside Gonzales, California, with his wife, Consuela, and family. They are both farmworkers. The trailer is cramped but well kept. An image of the Virgin dominates one wall. Four small children orchestrate a constant uproar—fighting, howling, laughing, demanding food. A young man, introduced as a relative of Juan's, comes home and sits on the couch, watching the tape recorder suspiciously. Juan speaks in Spanish with the deferential, embarrassed manner of a poor man honoring a guest. Consuela sometimes breaks in to disagree, emphasize a point, or urge more potato soup upon us.



I'm forty-nine years old, and I first came here to the Salinas Valley in 1967. I was born in Mexico. My father left the family some land in a little village about eighteen hours by car from the Texas border. But the land wasn't any good and we didn't have any machinery, so the harvest wasn't enough to keep us. Finally we had to leave the land. At the age of sixteen I crossed the Texas border for the first time, a little *mojadito*.^{*} All my life I came to Texas to work in the season. Finally I found out that they were paying better wages here in California, so I emigrated and got my residence visa. That was in 1967. Since then I haven't suffered so much. I used to have to cross the river in order to get into Texas, and more than once I almost drowned. But I had to come. It was a necessity. I've worked in everything that has to do with the fields.

Right now I've been out of work for about a month. My wife can't find work either. Normally I work with a labor contractor. He hires me day by day and gets me work in the fields for a company or a rancher. At this time of year I should be working in the tomato harvest, which lasts two or three months. But last year the contractor I was working for hired me out to one company during the tomato season. There was a union election, and Cesar Chavez's union won. The company wouldn't negotiate with Chavez. So there was a strike. It lasted about two weeks. And now nobody who was there last year can get a job. The contractor made up a list of about eight hundred people. Since I had always worked for this company in the past, I was on the list. But I think the company looked at the list and threw out the people who were there last year. Maybe they

^{*}Wetback.

don't want another strike. But it seems to me—how can I put it in other words?—it seems to me like discrimination. They should give last year's people work anyway, since they won the elections. Instead, the company is working with the same contractor but with different people.

CONSUELA: With the Teamsters there's more work than with Chavez's union. Ever since Chavez came in, there's been less work.

JUAN: Well, I think Chavez is OK. It's the companies that don't want to negotiate with him because if they do, wages go up. A lot of ranchers won't agree to higher wages, so they don't plant their fields, or at least they plant crops that don't take so much work. This whole valley used to be planted in lettuce, but lettuce takes a lot of work. So now they're planting grapes, and with grapes there are only four months of work. And when the harvest comes, all sorts of people come up from Texas. They stay for the season and then go back. So I don't think it's Chavez's fault. At a lot of the companies where he won the elections, they don't want to give his union the work.

But the real problem is that there are too many people. Especially in the Salinas Valley. People come here because of the climate and because the pay is better. In this valley the pay is higher than anywhere else. Some people are earning \$3.40 and \$3.50 an hour. I've worked in other places where you get \$2.50 an hour. Just beyond Salinas, near Santa Cruz, they pay \$2.50. So everyone comes here.

I've never seen so many people looking for work as this year. You go to see a contractor, and he's got such a pile of illegals that he tells you, "Oh, I'm sorry, there's no work." The contractor I usually work for said to me, just the other day, "Hombre, where are all these people coming from?" I told him, "I don't know; I guess they're looking for work like the rest of us." [laughs.]

But you can understand it because the pay is so bad in Mexico. The field workers there earn 40 or 50 pesos^{*} a day. And life is very expensive there, too. So they come here, and they can earn almost \$4 an hour. The highest wages the contractors are paying is \$3.15 an hour. The unions are paying \$3.40, and some companies \$3.50. The contractors always pay less. I work with contractors because I can't find a job with a company. It's hard to get in, for the same reason: too many illegals.

So that's how it is. No work. If *la migra*[†] shows up today and deports some people, there'll be work tomorrow. Or if they'd just pass the law that they were talking about and that was supposed to pass, to fine the bosses who hire illegals, then I think there would be more work for us legals. What happens now is that *la migra* throws them out just over the border, and they stay a week or two and then come back. Now I hear that

^{*}About \$2.

[†]The Immigration and Naturalization Service officers.

they're dumping some of them as far away as León or Guanajuato, so they don't come back. Or at least it takes longer. But I think the solution is for the government to throw out the illegals once and for all. The way it is now, neither the illegals nor the legals get enough work. Of course, that's the way I started, too. [laughs]. I remember times in Texas when I would go for a month or two without work, just living off the grapefruits that I could steal.

As soon as one company lays me off, I go around to all the others to look for work. Normally I'd be working now for one company through the tomato season. But then I'd have to go look for other work. So that's what I do now that I'm unemployed because of the strike last year. I go out to the fields in my car. Wherever I see teams working, that's where I go. From field to field, I ask for work. I go out every day. I cover the whole area between Gonzales and Greenfield. It's about fifteen miles. Right now I'm the only one of us who's going out to look, but when I find a job, then maybe on another day there'll be work for my wife.

I go out at 5:00 A.M. When it gets to be 8:00 or 9:00, I know I don't have much of a chance to join up with a team, so I don't bother to run around anymore. Sometimes I hang around the union hall till noon to see if there's a call for people. They make a list at the hall of thirty or forty men, whoever's there. If they get a call for men, they take them off the list. Twice I missed work because I left the hall and came home just at the time that there was a call for men. You have to be there to get the work.

On Monday my contractor has promised to get me work in the chili harvest. He says it's about to begin. That's the hope I have right now. I've had bad luck for the last month. Right across the road here there was a gang, and one day *la migrá* came and took eight. They were illegals. I went to the boss and asked for work, and he said to go to the union hall in Salinas. When I got to the office, the union had already sent eight new men. So that's why I didn't get it that time [laughs].

When *la migrá* comes and takes people away, you've got the best chance to go to the field and get work. But only for a day or two or three. Then the illegals come back. The bosses don't tell you that they're letting you go to hire the others. They just say there's no more work. Do you know why they like illegals better? Because they'll put up with anything. For example, there are foremen who are always scolding. If you ask another worker for a cigarette or something, they're on your back, and they know that the illegals won't answer back a single word. The illegals just let them say what they like. And another thing: The illegals work cheaper. Even I would do it in their situation. They come from so far away, and they suffer so much to come.

Right now I have a plan. If I don't get work next week, I'm going to try in Fresno. I've heard on the radio that there's work there. I'll leave the trailer and the family and go up alone to see what God sends my way.

What are you living on these days?

While I'm on unemployment, I get \$74 every two weeks. I think I get so little because I don't work steadily. There are some people who are getting as much as \$100 a week, but they had steady jobs. We get some help from welfare for Consuela and the kids. They give us food stamps and medicaid. And sometimes they give us money if we need it. But if I get work, they subtract what I earn from the welfare check. If they're supposed to give Consuela \$200 and I earn \$50 this week, they take it out. All in all, it's barely enough. Barely enough. Sometimes there's not enough to pay the bills. We just limit ourselves and pay them somehow and get along as best we can. We just eat potatoes and beans. We don't buy anything we don't need. We buy whatever is nutritious and cheap. The thing that goes first is meat. Because meat's the same as milk, and it's better to get milk for the kids. The most important thing is to take care of them. A grown person won't be hurt if there's nothing to eat but a potato or two. But the kids can't do without milk.

CONSUELA: Every now and again we can get meat. Maybe once a week.

JUAN: Another thing I do is sleep late, until ten or eleven. That way I can avoid having three meals [laughs]. I skip lunch. Because if you get up late, you don't need it. For us just a month of unemployment is a serious thing. We fall way behind with the bills. Even a week is bad. We can't pay the electricity, the trailer, and pretty soon we get behind one bill and have to pay two together. That's the worst. Just now I fell behind one payment on the car and one on the trailer. So I got a \$300 loan from a friend. Pretty soon I'll have to pay that back. As soon as I get a steady job, I'll get the money together and pay him. I've borrowed a few times from this friend. He's got a very good job, and he speaks good English. He charges high interest, but if I tell him I need the money for four months and I pay it back before that time, he doesn't charge me all the interest that we agreed to. He just charges me one or two months.

Last year I was unemployed in the winter, and I had to do something I'd never done before: buy food on credit. The children were crying because they were hungry, and I didn't know what to do. We couldn't buy milk for them or anything. So I had to humble myself and go ask the woman in the store if she would give me some credit. I was forced to embarrass myself in front of this woman. She asked me if I had anyone around who would vouch for me. I said, "OK, I'll bring someone." And she said, "Well, an awful lot of people have run off. There was one man who spoke to me about what a terrible time he was having—like you—and asked for credit. To this day he owes me \$70. I never saw him again." But she gave us credit anyway. Since then, if I go a week or two without working and we haven't got money to buy food, she gives us credit. When I get work I go and pay her. We've maintained the credit

NOT WORKING

because it's very important to us. When I'm not working we can get food for the kids.

If I can get work even for two days a week, that's about \$50. I can budget the \$50 for milk and gas for the car, and if I owe the store I can pay them something. Or if an electricity bill arrives, that's about \$25, so we pay that and keep the other \$25 for expenses. But there have been times when we had nothing to eat at all. That's why I had to humble myself and ask for credit. I had to do it. Like I said, when you're grown up, you can live with being hungry. But not little children.

RON BRETT

He lives in a black neighborhood in Dayton, Ohio. He refuses to be interviewed at home, so we talk sitting on the grass in a park. He is shy and rather formal: "I guess I'm a loner. I don't mind it so much. I'm Christian now 'cause I have the Lord. So I don't really feel like I'm completely alone. But generally, I think I'm a loner." He has been out of work for a year and has just been "saved."



I was born in Dayton and grew up here. I went to elementary school, junior high, and then high school here. After that I went to the University of Dayton for a little while. But I found myself really needing some money [laughs]. So I decided to check out the job market. Well, it just so happens that I fell into getting unskilled work, like factory work and janitor work. That's mainly what I've been doing, is unskilled labor. Work where you can use your hands.

The last job I had was at a machine shop. I was a machine operator. You know, pushing a couple of buttons and watching to make sure the tubes went into the machine straight. Well, after two and a half years I found myself wondering, "Wow, am I just gonna do this for the rest of my life?" And I started thinking that that might happen. So I decided I better come out of there. As it turned out, I ended up not going in to work, a couple of times, and I didn't call. I did that a couple of nights in a row, and the third night I came in. The foreman was standing there at the time clock, and he said that I was terminated. Which was what I was hoping would happen.

There wasn't any one thing that made me decide to leave. It was

OUT OF WORK

everything combined. I was having to force myself to go to work. That's really heavy, to get up and have to force yourself to go somewhere when you don't want to go. When that time rolled around and I had to go to work, I just hated to do it. I couldn't relate to most of the guys. I wouldn't talk to anybody. I'd eat my lunch alone. And then I think the foreman felt a lot of racial animosity towards me. It wasn't an outward thing, but whenever I came up on him, it would seem like he was afraid of me, and I was afraid of him. When I came out of there after eight hours, I'd be so numb that I'd feel like I left my mind elsewhere. And I'd have to find it. I felt like I just deposited my mind at the door.

But I can't put the total blame on that place because my personal life wasn't going very well at the time either. I happened to get that job at a time when my personal life was down-and-out. So it was a bad thing all around. It was a very searching year for me in 1976. I knew I was looking for something because my life was so empty. I said, "Hey, there must be something more than just doing what I'm doing." So I started searching, and I realized that maybe Jesus was the answer. So then I came to the conclusion that Jesus is the answer. But if it weren't for 1976, that terrible year I had in '76, I might not ever have come to Jesus.

What made that year so terrible?

[Laughs.] Well, I got myself caught up in some really strange desires, which it took a lot of money to satisfy. I drank pretty heavy, and on top of that I was seeing a woman who was a prostitute. So actually what I was doing was working to satisfy those two desires for drinking and sex. I would be with the woman maybe twice a week, and it cost a lot of money. And if she wasn't around, I'd be drinking. I felt myself thinking, "Wow, why am I doing this?" I was at rock bottom. So that's one more reason that I hated the job because I knew that I was just doing it to get the money for what I was doing. I was a slave to that job and to my desires. A lot of times I would go to work drunk because it made it a lot easier. Even though it was dangerous, it gave me some peace of mind. So when I got fired, I knew that something was starting to happen. Something good [laughs].

And around springtime I decided to turn to Jesus. I started going to Jesus People Church. People witnessed to me, and I realized I needed Jesus. I knew my soul needed to be revived and brought alive. So I went to church, and I got saved, and that was it.

Getting saved is when you turn to Jesus with a full commitment. In other words, Jesus is the center of your life, and you live for Him. When we talk about getting saved, we're talking about Jesus coming into your life. It's total commitment. A lot of people just believe in Jesus. They believe, but they don't live their lives for Him. That's the difference from what I've done. That's what changed my life.

How did it change?

Well, I must admit I don't have a job [laughs]. But I have peace of mind, which is something I've been looking for for a long time. Jesus helped me to enjoy life without worrying about anything. I used to always worry about money, about this, about that. . . . I'd think, "Wow, am I gonna get a job?" I still worry about it, but I know that I shouldn't because I know Jesus is right there, and He's gonna get me a job. So I don't worry that much. I go to the unemployment center, and I check out the papers. I call people up. That's what I've been doing for the last six months. Looking for work, but not real intensely. I find myself in a position where I don't want work like I had before, which is mainly what you're gonna get if you're unskilled. So I've been looking mostly for jobs outside of factory work. But I haven't had any luck.

I guess one reason why I haven't been putting that much effort into it is because I get discouraged quite a bit. I get all kinds of feelings, you know. . . . Sometimes I think it's maybe because they don't think I would fit into that job. Sometimes I think it's racial. All kinds of thoughts go through my head. A couple of times I'm sure it was a racial thing. I went into this one place, and they right away told me, "Hey, we don't have any openings." I could tell by the way the guy addressed me that there was no room for black people in the job. And I went to this other place where the man said, "Well, we're looking for a certain kind of person." What that meant, I don't know. I took it that the certain kind of person shouldn't have black skin.

That kind of thing used to make me very angry. It doesn't bother me as much now as when I was in high school. Back then I'd be walking down the street and people would be hollering, "Nigger!" That still happens. Like this guy the other day—I came out of my house, and a guy was riding by. He said, "Black boy, you come out to —" Some suburb, I don't know which one it was. "You come out there, you ain't gonna come out alive." I said, "What? This is still happening?" Those are isolated incidents, but it still enters into the picture when you go looking for a job. You go in and you see that white employer sitting there, and you just get a feeling of "Wow, is he gonna hire me?" As opposed to just coming in there and sitting down and talking to him. All those other feelings come in there because you know that he is different than you, and in a sense you can't take him as a person. You'd like to, and that's what you should do; but all this other stuff comes in.

And even that's not as discouraging as seeing how many blacks are out of work. How many black males are out of work. That's what bothers me. You wonder sometimes why this is. Why, when you go into the ghetto, you see black men just walking the streets. No jobs. It really makes you wonder. Are they going through the same things I go

through? And maybe do they not have jobs because they don't want to put up with it? I see black men all over, sitting around idle, not doing anything. It bothers me. And it scares me because I'm thirty-five years old, and unemployed, and black, and I wonder when I'm going to get that chance to be able to contribute something. Where I have a good job and I can really feel important on the job. Right now I just don't feel important. I don't feel significant. Unemployed, no money, thirty-five years old.

And then I go downtown and I see all these white dudes in suits. I'll be thinking, "Wow, they're human just like me." But . . . [laughs]. But they may be my enemies. I don't know. Every time I see a white man in a suit I go through changes. I guess I'm looking at the power structure there. When I look at all those men in suit and ties, I get to thinking, "Hmm. Would I be like that?" Not that I want to be, but I think of at least having the opportunity to get into business college or business school. I think all kinds of stuff. Like the fact that for every three or four of these white men that are dressed like that and have a business career under their belt, there may be one black man. Probably even less. One black man who is able to go through business college and get a good job. And sometimes, walking on the street, I feel like I have to step out of their way. Then I say, "The heck with that. They're gonna step out of my way." Or not even that. Shoot, why should either one of us have to step out of the way? We should just walk normally. But I really think about those guys.

Before I had Jesus, I was always angry about things like that. I always had this anger and animosity towards white people, towards society. I still get that, but it's not as intense. I used to walk around with a snarl on my face. And when I'd get high, I'd be thinking all kinds of thoughts about the white man. Like going out and killing a white man. Throwing a Molotov cocktail in somebody's window. I don't feel that now. Jesus keeps me cool. I don't have to be mad at the white man because I know anger isn't going to do me any good. To stay angry, stay bitter, isn't going to do me any good because it's a waste of energy. It's not gonna change anything anyway. The white man is always gonna discriminate, so why worry about it?

There's something else I think about. Here we are in 1977. The recession is supposed to be going down. They say that the rate of unemployment is going down. Yet I think about all the people I see at the unemployment service. And I usually go and give blood over at the blood plasma place. You get a lot of people down there without work. Hundreds come in there every day. It's crowded all the time. The place stays open from 7:30 in the morning until 5:30 at night, and you get people coming in there constantly. It's depressing. That's the only word I can think of. You get a lot of blacks and a lot of students because they're sort

of in the bottom echelon like unemployed poor people. Now I know that those people, if they didn't really have to go in there, they wouldn't do it. I know I wouldn't. If I had a choice, I wouldn't do it. But I have to get some money. So I go. First you have to sit and wait. Then they check your blood pressure and do some tests on you. Then you gotta go wait again till a table opens up. It's pretty depressing to have to go through all that just to get \$6, or \$9 they give you the second time, if you go twice a week. You figure, why go through all that? Getting pricked and having these big needles stuck in you for \$6. Every time I go in there I think, "Wow, is this really, really happening?"

Then I think of all the people who are working and never had the experience of going into a blood place and giving blood because they need the money. They've always had money. It really makes you think. I feel I'm a person who's willing to work and contribute something to the work force. But I'm not going to take just any job. I'm gonna be fussy. I think I have the right to be fussy about what kind of job I'm suited for. I'm not saying that I'm qualified, but I do have the right of choosing what area I want to go into. And I don't think the unemployment service should have the right to cut off your benefits. I think they should carry you as long as necessary. No, what do they do? They just cut off one unemployment extension. You can only have two extensions now. Because they feel that there are jobs available. But what kind of jobs are we talking about here? We're talking about dishwasher jobs, janitor jobs. Those kinds of jobs are around. But can you survive making \$2.50 an hour? No way. I couldn't. And I don't think anybody else could. And I don't think that's being unreasonable.

So it really causes you to wonder when you see all this going on around you, and they say that the unemployment rate is going down. Are they talking about the hard-core areas? The inner city? Have they been to those blood plasma places? What are they looking at, when they say that? Are they just referring to the one-third or one-fourth of the working class that maybe are out of work for two or three weeks and then they've got a job again? Who are they actually talking about?

GEORGE MURAVCHIK

He is an electrical engineer living near "Silicon Valley" in California, an area known for its large number of companies that specialize in electronic circuitry based on tiny wafers of silicon. But he is hardly the stereotype of an engineer. Whether by temperament or circumstance, he

has become a bohemian of sorts. He dates the change to 1970, when massive layoffs hit the valley: "This area was like a desert of dying engineers. The engineers in the Santa Monica unemployment office had their own special room. I saw what was happening, and I said, 'Hey, the only thing is to go back to school.' I discovered Berkeley. The college kids were rioting, and I was an engineer with a very narrow mind. A family man. I thought it was a great country. Vietnam, who cares? But these guys opened my mind so much that I was able not only to survive but adapt to the lack of a job and a new way of life." In 1971 he left California to work in Chicago—his hometown—for three years.

He talks intensely, hurrying from subject to subject. He wears a yarmulke and has a handsome pepper-and-salt beard. He is forty-six years old.



In 1974 I left Chicago and came back out to California. All I could find was a couple of temporary jobs. Through job shops. In California today most of the companies won't hire you direct. If they don't know you, they're not gonna spend the money on you. There are so many people coming to the area that they don't have to. They hire through job shops. They're like an employment agency for engineers, technicians, draftsmen, anything technical. The job shop hires you, screens you, and sends you out to whatever companies they get calls from. Say Memorex wants to hire ten electrical engineers, ten test engineers, twenty testers, some designers, et cetera. They send this entire list to the job shop, and the shop says, "I got 'em all for you." Or half. "Fine, send them down." So the job shop calls me up and all the other guys and says, "George, go see this man." If the man likes me, the job shop hires me, not the company. You get good money from the shop, but no fringe benefits. The jobs can be ninety days, thirty days, sixty days, a year. They may turn into something permanent if you're lucky.

So I had a few nice jobs. One with an electronics company. They ran out of money. Then I got a job with a computer products outfit. They ran out of parts, had to lay me off. The following year, 1975, I got a job with them again for two months. Ran out of parts. Had to let me go. Then I worked as a speed-reading instructor from April to August of '75. Since then it's been nothing.

I'm on unemployment insurance. I've got two extensions coming, thirty-two weeks. I'm on welfare. Sometimes I get government loans and grants for going to school. I get a little bit of disability. Not much, but every little bit helps. All told it comes to about \$500 a month. If they keep doing it, I can just live tax-free [laughs]. I don't like it, but they're forcing me.

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I thought you couldn't be on unemployment and welfare at the same time?

That's what you think.

How did you do that?

I'm not talking. No, I'm not gonna say. It's there. I look at it this way. Since I have a hunch that the federal government and the state government have part responsibility for this unemployment situation, it's up to me to find out how to get money and live as best I can. To fight the system. That's a right, because I'm a citizen. So I have this income, that's all. It doesn't matter how or where or when. I don't want it, but I have to have it in order to live.

What's the disability for?

Back in 1972 I was examined by a psychiatrist who said I was a manic-depressive. I didn't believe it. So I went to a medical center and stayed there for a couple of weeks. They said, "You're a manic-depressive." I believed it. Because I know those people; they're pretty straight. So I take lithium carbonate and it's under control. It's a miraculous thing they developed a few years ago. But there are some side effects from the lithium that make it difficult to do some of the things I used to do. Whether it's temporary or not, it's there, so I put a claim in for disability and I got on. It's not much, but it's enough.

Now I'm looking for a company that will hire me so I can work steadily for a minimum of five years. That's my minimum. I'd like to work longer. But the longest job I've had in engineering has been five years. I don't care if it's a big company or a small company, I want to get steady work, because the Bay Area is the place I want to live in. And I want to be a whole human being. I want to work. I don't want to be told I'm overqualified because that's bullshit. I don't even care whether it's engineering. I wouldn't mind driving a bus. The money is good, \$7.60 an hour. The only problem there is that you've got to be an ethnic minority to get in. And they tell me I'm not a minority. I tell 'em I am a minority [laughs]. But according to the government I'm not. That's crazy too. They have this affirmative action bit, which is nothing more than placing minorities. Namely blacks and Chicanos. Even if they're incapable of doing the job. And they tell me, "No, you can't do it because you're not with affirmative action." So that's one thing I'm up against. Another thing is my age.

So you go to the unemployment office. They list IBM runoffs of jobs. And if you look closely, there will be a little four-letter word saying "Mand." Mandatory listing. This job may have been filled internally two months ago, but the companies have to list it by law. The job may

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not even exist. A lot of companies will advertise openings just to get exposure, and the jobs aren't there. All kinds of funny games are going on. You don't know what's happening till you get to see the guy. There are companies that are getting eight hundred résumés a week. Some are getting two hundred, three hundred a day. They get filed in the wastebasket at the end of the week. A friend of mine gives a seminar on how to hunt for jobs. She told me, "White résumés are a waste of time. Get parchment, get yellow, get off-white, anything that will attract their eye. You have eleven seconds' reading time for someone to decide whether he wants to see you." Well, with numbers like that we're worse than cattle. They're not interested so much in who can do the job well. Not since the Depression have you had such an employer's market of all these talented people. Not only engineers and technicians. You got teachers, plumbers, electricians. . . . This is the competition I face.

I sent out about fifty résumés a week for a while. Didn't get much of a response. Then I got to the point where I figured I'm gonna refuse résumés entirely. When a man says, "I want a résumé," I'll say, "I can see you. What time can you see me? Tomorrow?" And they do. They'll see you in person. They may say, "Don't you have a résumé?" And I'll say, "I'll bring it with me, but it's a junky one. I haven't updated it." When the guy gets to the point of having fifty résumés, he either can't make a decision or he's gonna screen everybody out. I don't want to be screened out.

But I'll never get discouraged because life is meant that you shouldn't get discouraged. Sometimes it's a fight, but it doesn't hurt. It hasn't hurt me. I dump all this shit on my psychiatrist [laughs]. Mainly I feel numb to it. I know I'm gonna get a job sooner or later. Two years, three years, six months. In the meantime I know I can survive. So what have I got? I have a bicycle. And the beautiful California sunshine. And the mountains, some good food, and some good female companionship. And I have two places to stay. I used to have an apartment—\$125 a month. Finally I couldn't afford it. So I moved into a synagogue up in San Bruno. I store my clothes in a rabbi's garage. I can sleep outdoors on the lawn or indoors on a couch in the office. And then over in San Francisco I have a little yeshiva where I can stay for free. If I want to, I can contribute. They have good kosher food. Some of my food stamps are going to support the yeshiva. They don't have any money.

How do you pass your time on a typical day?

Well, I wake up about 6:00 or 6:30 and pray and do yoga. Then I bike down to a place for breakfast. You can sit by the pool and have fresh squeezed orange juice. It's delightful. When I finish there, if it's a day to go to the unemployment office to collect money, I'd bike over there and collect. Then I'd make some phone calls from there to some companies

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that may be hiring. A lot of days I pick up the paper and there are jobs listed. I say, "Hey, I'm gonna get a job. Look at all these jobs!" And I call up. They tell me to send in a résumé. That could be frustrating, but I'm used to it. I call the man up, and I say, "Hello, Joe? Hi. I'm interested in talking to you on this job. I'll bring a résumé if I have to, and I can make it between such-and-such a time." Or I say, "When is it convenient for you?" I let him have the ball, but I throw it. He either picks it up or he doesn't. If he doesn't, I say, "Well, you don't want to hire anyway, good-bye." I have to do that. I'm not gonna run out there if he's not serious.

So I look for jobs in the morning. Then I call up one of my woman friends and say, "Hey, I'll be available for lunch at such-and-such a time." I arrange to have a good lunch somewhere. Then I might go to the Berkeley campus because I get my mail there. That place is another buffer for me, besides religion. When I bike or drive or walk through the university, looking at the trees, I relax. It has a very calming effect on me. I look for my mail, and sometimes I get surprised by getting money in the mail. I know some people around there, and I talk to them about what's happening in the country. On Mondays I go to my group therapy from 2:30 to 4:30. Tuesdays I go to unemployment, and once in a while I have to go to the welfare place. Sometimes I go into San Francisco to look for work there. Or I go to the beach. It's a very easy way of life, even though it may seem to be chaotic and wasteful. I keep myself in shape by biking and mentally in shape by other things. Sooner or later things are gonna break.

If I didn't have my religion I would probably go a little kookie. I'd probably go boozing or whoring. Maybe I'd start a little riot. But the Torah is an unusual piece of work. The rabbis say if you read the Torah, study Torah, you don't need a psychiatrist. And I believe 'em. There's stability in my religion. It gives me not only a place to go on a Sabbath, but also a day of rest. From Friday night to Saturday night I have twenty-four hours of peace. No television, no telephone, no car, no bike riding, nothing but walking, praying—not in that order. Making love is legal. Lying on the grass, reading, having good kosher meals at people's homes, and just getting together with people.

I wake up very early and I pray. I go into the chapel. I put on all the prayer things and I pray. I have communion with God every day this way. Very, very enlightening. Puts me into a high, a spiritual high. That's how I'm able to go out every day and say, "Well, maybe I'll find a job."

Do you ever pray for a job?

Sure. Oh, yeah. He expects it. First I thank God for being a Jew, and then I pray. I say, "Look, I'd like to have my daughter out here to go to

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school, and I'd like to find a nice woman to marry, and it means money. I know you don't understand what money is. It's not part of your business. I would like a job, a good-paying job." So He understands. But being spiritual, He doesn't really know what money is all about [laughs].

I have a friend, Irv, who's a Ph.D. in chemistry out here. I met him on the unemployment line, and he says, "Those bastards. They think this is a welfare check they're giving me. I earned this money. I paid it." I can see it's getting to him. I say, "Irv, ignore these people. That's their job. Just be thankful that your children are alive and healthy and that you're getting some money to pay for everything." No, he's angry. Some people even refuse benefits. Well, I'm not proud. I want to live. I want to live like a human being, not like a beggar. And it doesn't get me down because I know it's not my doing. I didn't lose my job because I was a screw-up guy and got fired. I lost my job because of economic conditions. And the only thing I can do is do a little better than survive.

It's true that it's a weird life I lead. It's like the old Jewish tale of the Jews moving from one part of town to another. Being destitute. But as my psychiatrist explained, I found stability in the midst of chaos. To you it may seem unstable, but amidst all the chaos I have a place to live. Two places. In very spiritual headquarters with all the religious books I want. And the other place with all the kosher food I want. And with beautiful rabbis and people that come in who are beautiful. I can worship in either place. So it's stable. I go once a week to my group, and that's stability because I dump a lot of junk out on them. I have my psychiatrist, and I go to movies, and I have dates with divorced women. It's a very fine life.

JACK DUSTIN

He is a slender young man with long, frizzy red hair and a beard. He wears jeans, an Indian cotton gauze shirt, and a string of pukka shells around his neck. He lives with his girl friend, Vicky, in Chicago—an old neighborhood of weathered churches, huge maples, and dilapidated but handsome apartment buildings that are beginning to attract remodelers. We're in the park near his house. He seems boyishly excited about the balmy weather.

He waited three months after being fired before claiming unemployment. "I come from a very religious family. And we were very poor. My father worked three jobs. He was a teacher, a welder, and he had a

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paper route with two boys. He had high standards for everything. So I worked my ass off, following in his footsteps. I had a lawn-mowing business when I was ten with about 150 customers.

"My father would never do something like take unemployment. I felt too proud to take it, too. I'd like to justify it by saying I paid into it all the years I worked, but I still feel a little uneasy. It took a lot of talking to my friends before I went. There's the insinuation of being lower-class..."



When I was twenty I was going to the University of Chicago, and I got a summer job as a bookkeeper in a grain elevator. When the summer was over they asked me if I'd like to stay on as an assistant supervisor. I was married at the time and I was thinking about a career, being a professional, all kinds of good shit like that. So I worked there for another year and they asked me if I would be a broker for the company. I said, "Yes, of course." I worked there two more years and then got fired three months ago.

The company was one of the largest grain companies in the world. My job was to buy grain from farmers and dealers all over the West and Midwest and then sell it to other dealers. I did the whole range of speculating on the market: buying futures, taking cash positions and future positions, liquidating them, stuff like that. I did a lot of export business, too, because the company owns a big grain elevator here. Sales to the Far East, delivering rail freight.

I thought I really liked it. It was kind of a little game. I was making about twenty-five grand. I bought new cars every year, you know, and just lived the way a businessman was supposed to live [laughs]. Especially while I was still married, I found myself falling into the role of a businessman. Going out on business trips and entertaining and socializing. It was really strange because it didn't fit in with me. I didn't completely lose my identity, though. I always had my long hair. I was chastised for that in the straight businessman's world. But it was all a joke to me.

Then at the end of two years the company started a big drive to hire college graduates. They had just named a new personnel manager for the whole country, and he started flying around and talking to people in the various divisions to see what the situation was. Basically he was exercising his newfound strength in the company. To do that, he had to do something big. So he went on a recruiting drive to get people who would raise the status of the company. He hired people from the best colleges. Harvard, Yale, Cornell—a bunch of East Coast preppies. They

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may not have been the best students, but they had degrees from the name colleges.

They started trying to fit these guys into the system. And I knew the company fairly well. I knew how many offices and how much space they had. Well, they hired an awful lot of people. More than they had room for. So I was kind of gearing myself up for the end, because it was mentioned several times by my friends there that it was too bad I didn't have the education. I hung on because the money was so good. But eventually my boss said, "It's coming from the head office. They want to see these preppies get a place in the company." And I said, "That's fine. I'll leave. No problem." It was kind of mutual because I had adjusted myself to it a while before. And there was no feeling that I hadn't done an adequate job. My boss even said to me, "My God, I wish you had that degree because I don't want to get rid of you."

I still resented it a lot, though. I resented the fact that somebody I didn't know, and who didn't know me or what kind of job I could do, was dictating my life. And it was uncomfortable. It changed my life a lot because all of a sudden I didn't have the income and the life I used to have. But I wasn't unhappy. In fact, I was very happy.

Why so happy?

Well, that didn't come right away. At first I was depressed. God, was I depressed! In the days right after my boss talked to me, I was really down. Really, really, really down. The first thing that went on was: "What are people gonna think?" Then: "What are my parents gonna think?" I was embarrassed about the fact that I was fired, and that it was because I didn't have the education. In fact, I told a lot of people that I quit. And then I started thinking, "What's my life gonna be like? What am I gonna do without the money? I've still got bills to pay. How am I gonna meet those bills?" It was very negative, very depressing. To have to think I would have to completely leave the style of life I had lived for those years. It hurt. It hurt a lot. I'd lay in bed at night and wonder what was gonna happen.

But there were other things that were starting to happen in my life at that time. Basically I met a certain lady, and we talked about a lot of things. It made me see myself and how materialistic I was. See, it was really strange for me to be a big businessman. When I was married, I was aiming to be a very, very rich man. A very successful man that everybody would look up to. But after I got divorced, I felt that I was just out for myself. I was making money, but the job itself wasn't all that important anymore because the responsibility of having a family and building for the future wasn't there. I got married when I was nineteen. And I felt I had missed a lot. I had lived a life that was very straight. I never played

around on my wife at all. And then all of a sudden I was free. And I was twenty-two, just twenty-two. I had all this money and nothing to do with it. No support payments, nothing. So I decided I was going out to get everything I had missed. And I got it [laughs]. I got a lot of it. I went completely off the deep end.

It was funny how it started. I went to the same bar a lot, and I went out with a couple of the waitresses. Then I got a couple of phone calls from other ladies who said, "Hey, I heard about you from so-and-so." I'd say, "Who?" They'd mentioned the name, and I'd go, "Oh, OK." So we'd go out. I just fell into the role. I let myself go. I let everything go. Different women, buying sports cars, spending extravagantly. I started living in a condominium with a couple of friends. We partied and danced and got drunk and stoned all the time. It was a crowd of very physical people. Most of the women were looking for men with money, and I had the money. It was easy. One person after another would find out you had money and would want to meet you. It just went like that. It was all purely apart from any real reason to go out with someone. It was just the fact that you had money and could treat them to movies and operas and ballets and restaurants, all that shit.

I guess you'd say I was being a playboy. I figure when you're spending maybe 70 percent of your income on different women and different frivolities, you're a playboy. I wasn't thinking about personal relationships. There was no depth to anything. It was purely sexual, just the physical feelings. I even was a gigolo for a while because through the business I used to meet some of the richest people in the city. Their wives liked me because I was the oddball, the stranger, the one that made people think. I was exciting to them. I did strange things like make love in the park in the middle of the night. To them it was intriguing. And people who are looking for a little excitement do some weird stuff, let me tell you [laughs].

All that was sort of like the job—I thought I liked it at the time. Then when my boss talked to me I realized it was coming to an end. Like I say, it hurt bad for about two days. Then I resigned myself to the fact that it was over, and I was gonna go on from there. It was the end of a future. I had to start thinking about other things that would make me happy. All of a sudden the money wasn't there, so you wonder about other things. It made me go from thinking about sex all the time to more meaningful things. At least to me they're more meaningful. It completely changed my ideas of relationships. I couldn't take out women all the time and spend money on them like it was going out of style. I had to be more conservative. I had to find women who didn't expect to be taken out on the town every night. That's when I started being with Vicky a little more. We'd do things that didn't cost a lot of money. She liked it, and I liked it. It changed my whole outlook. She was the first lady I had met that I could just talk to for hours.

So when I actually quit working, I felt great. I had about two months' notice, and I had planned for it. It felt good to have all my days for me. I did a lot of thinking, a lot of working with my hands, things that made me happy when I was younger. I got back into painting and music. Vicky and I moved in together and started talking about going into real estate. She's got some money, and I have a little bit. We want to buy something, fix it up, and then sell it. Right now we're looking into some apartments in this section of the city. I used to work with my hands a lot when I was growing up. I helped build the house my family lives in. And now I've got the time to do it again. It's nice.

I had to think a lot about whether to go back to the grain business. While I was working, I had offers from other companies, and I always said, "No, I won't do it because I'm doing so well here." But afterwards I asked myself if I should go back to those companies that wanted me before, so that I wouldn't have to lose my money or my life-style. I weighed the pros and cons of it. I tried not to let the fact that I was fired affect the way I felt about the industry. I kept an open mind and said, "Maybe it's really good work. A lot of people are happy at it." So I thought about whether I really liked it. And I said, "Well, lookit, I had to make fifty to one hundred calls every day. I had to talk to the same people every day, who said the same things." Some people I enjoyed talking with, but it was maybe three calls out of the one hundred. The rest of it was business. No personal relations. There was a lot of haggling about prices. There were a lot of conversations about who was responsible for what. Why did you make this deal? Why this, why that? You had to justify everything to your superiors. As long as you could do that, it was cool. But I really felt like I was getting an ulcer. I was there for eleven or twelve hours a day, going, going, going. I just felt too mellow for that [laughs]. Some people love to be pushed all the time. I don't. That's why I never did go back or even inquire.

I've still got a little money, and I've got things I can sell. I've got thousands and thousands of dollars of personal possessions. Even if I had to sell them at a big loss, I could still make the bills. And I realize that these possessions are just worldly goods. I can get along without them. I haven't sold any yet except my car, and that was easy. I thought I loved the car, but when I sold it I felt good. I had money. I paid my bills. Everything was cool [laughs]. I think sometimes of the memories attached to my things, but I also think of why I bought them in the first place. Lots of times I'd buy things because my friends were buying them. I always wondered if I was buying friendship with my money, and I think I was.

I still feel the way I did when I stopped working, that I'm on vacation. And I hope that feeling always stays with me. Because what I'm doing now is fun. I get up around noon. Make a few phone calls about real estate. Wander down to the place we're thinking about buying. Talk to

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the residents or the contractors who are going to do the work. I spend a lot of time putting numbers down on paper to see if it's gonna be a money-maker or a money-loser. I have meetings with people in the city government—electrical inspectors, the department of buildings. . . . Or maybe during the day I'll do some painting or sketching or photography. Then in the evening we're usually over at some friend's house, or we have people over. Listen to some music, fix dinner, wash the dishes. Around midnight we take off and go play a little pool, or walk through the park, or just walk around the neighborhood. We've walked all over looking at buildings at night.

We usually hit the sack around three and talk till the sun comes up. Then sleep till noon. We play tennis a lot, too. Real tennis nuts. Do some hiking, some running.

Mainly for me it's just going out and seeing what I am. I had to get to know myself after those years at the company. So I go walking in the woods, or by the lake, and watch the colors and think about what makes me happy. What really makes me happy. And I see that living around here makes me happy. Being free to do what I want makes me happy. I've got a zillion house plants, and they make me happy. Talking makes me happy. A lot of things that don't cost money. And I don't put money down because it makes you happy, too. It's just that you have to temper all parts of your life.

In fact, I don't know when I've ever been so happy. Sitting out here, not a worry in the world. Isn't it a gorgeous day?

FREDDIE DREYFUS

He is twenty-five, a rock guitarist and singer. Other people his age might call him hyper. The interview amounts to a monologue, with a rush of ideas, memories, and stories tumbling from his lips. "I was brought up in Rye, New York. We had about ten acres, with woods and a grand old house. My father was a corporate attorney. He's very Germanic-Russian, like Dostoyevsky. He had a lot of moral conflicts. He would walk the estates. He worked and worked. And I had to cut the grass. Without a tractor. I had to cut it beautifully, formally, with sweeping curves. I did that even when I was eight years old, up until I left home, which was as soon as I could."

After a few stabs at college he dropped out to open a boardinghouse in "a big old southern mansion like Tara. It was a dilapidated crate. We

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fixed it up, and for four years the tenants had the privilege of three hundred acres run by crazies. Then we had a big yard sale for three days, sold everything, and I walked out with about \$70. And a tire iron under my arm, because me and my partner were trying to kill each other. . . ."



I moved to New York and I wanted to make it in rock music. And I wanted a really firm foundation, so I figured I'd get a job for a while and eventually get on unemployment. That was my idea. It's what I've always wanted as an artist. I wanted to establish a firm home that was safe, and I was willing to work twenty or thirty weeks to get it together. And then have just enough money coming in to live on and perform my art.

The job I got was as superintendent and handyman at this disco place on the East Side. It's all mirrors and plastic vines and flowers hanging from the ceilings and colored lights on the vines. And it gets ripped up every night. Linoleum on the dance floors gets knocked out; chairs are broken; sometimes there's blood on the carpets. Kitchen clogs up. And I have good manual skills, because I was brought up with saws and drills and plumbing and stuff. I thought on that job I might find some avenues into my career because the guys who own the club also back films and music and shows. In fact, that's one of the reasons I got fired. I was starting to get close to one of the owners. I spent two solid days working on his apartment. He would just take me out of the club, because he's the owner.

The other reason was the time clock. For the first few months I was there I just refused to punch in and out. I said, "I will not. I'm the super and my hours are sometimes very long and late, sometimes early. I demand that freedom." I had the right to be that way because that's a very strange job, being the super of a place like that. But during the last two weeks my boss, the man who directly supervised me, insisted that I use the time card. Well, I still didn't punch it half the time. I would just do my hours. The first week I recorded thirty-one and a half hours, and the next week it was thirty-five hours or something. He took me in his office and used the two events, the apartment and the time clock, as an excuse to fire me.

I only lasted eighteen weeks there, so I needed four more for unemployment. In the meantime I got a job as super of two buildings. So I had to work on these buildings. I was rehearsing almost every night with my band, Reefer Madness. Late at night, from like eleven to two. Plus I was fucking like a maniac with Nicole, and I wanted to do nothing else but

that. She's the only girl I really fell in love with here in New York. So it was a very full time.

Through *The New York Times* I got another superintendent job at a health center. I liked that job. But I had to be there at seven every morning and leave at three. It was hard, with rehearsals at night. I would be so tense from having to wake up in the morning that at eight I'd call up all my band members just to talk to them. They'd say, "What are you doing, we just came home from rehearsal!" I'd say, "I'm at work." [Laughs.]

Well, after nine weeks Dr. Adams, who is the head of the hiring, fired me. He said that I wasn't making my hours. I wasn't, it was true. Once I got caught asleep in one of the therapy rooms, with the door locked. One of the doctors opened it with a key, and there I was, curled up. I wasn't a dedicated super. Didn't give a flying fuck about the health center. And I knew that if I treated the job the way I felt about it, the deterioration curve would be about right to get me on unemployment. I wouldn't have to make it happen. The only way to get on unemployment is by natural process. So I did. I was hassling them for a raise, and finally Dr. Adams came to me and said, "What would you do if you were in my position? You don't always come exactly on time, and you want a raise. So why don't we just let it go?" I said, "Fine," because that way I felt completely free of obligation. He said, "What you do is good. But you don't do that much. You just waste time and hang out." I said, "I agree." I used to go for two-hour lunches at Zum Zum [laughs].

So now I get \$60 a week unemployment. That's \$240 a month that comes in the mail. And I'm the super for these buildings, so I don't pay any rent. The apartment I live in is \$300 a month. I get \$150 off and \$5 an hour for any work I do. I always do thirty hours a month, so it comes out to a free apartment. It used to be off the books, but it's going on the books now. So every fourth week we report all four weeks as one week, and I lose my unemployment for that week. And people are starting to give me money for my art, which is the whole point of unemployment. I've got another six months to go, and so far in the last month I've gotten \$3,800 in investments in my art. Which will all have to be paid back. I'm \$3,800 in debt. But they're all loans on very good terms, from people who are interested in my music.

Lately I've been spending all my time on the phone. Hardly any socializing. Trying to make this rock thing happen. I wake up to the phone at 8:30. By myself, usually. I'm on the phone till noon. Take a walk, smoke a joint, usually come in and practice for about half an hour and get back on the phone. Rehearsal starts around one, goes to four. Come home, slowly. Visit friends. Sometimes go out at night. Usually end up playing or writing songs into the night. Don't read anymore. I used to read like a madman. Can't read. Can't harness my mind to

anything else. Occasionally I put a day or two aside and just do building work or go be with a girl. But I don't even do that too much. Spend my time on the phone or at meetings. It's my only priority. The people I've met in the last two months have been incredible. Things have intensified. Some producers are interested.

So I need unemployment. It's a definite part of the social system. It's another method of survival. But it has to be tied with some other thing to be fulfilling. In itself it's not much. It's just a way to get through a certain period. It's not a great living. I grew up in a home where my father made \$100,000 a year. So I know about things like that. But it's not important, having fine wines and the best cuts. Granted, you sure can't have it on unemployment. But the stakes are high for me because I'm trying to be a rock star. And I'm competing. The other day I was playing a new song for this producer who wrote a lot of big songs. And he said, "I don't like it. It's cheap." I was hurt. He said, "Look, if you want me to be your uncle Ted, I'll tell you it's a beautiful song and I'll suck you off if you want." Which he would. "But if you want me to talk to you professionally, then I'll just level with you. I think you're a talent, but when I listen to you I'm listening to you in comparison with McCartney and Stevie Wonder. If I say I don't think the song is good, I'm talking about really high standards, and you're gonna have to meet those standards to deal with me on a professional level. So don't be offended." This is the kind of thing I'm getting into. It's very exciting. And it's demanding. We're going on tour soon, I think. It's pretty sure. So I gotta go out and buy a six-foot mirror and stand in front of it hours every day, while my tapes are playing, and practice my moves.

It's hard to be an artist. They don't reward you much for it, unless you pull off this big gaudy scheme or after you're dead. There's so many breaks against you. If you imagine society as a body, the blood system of the society doesn't circulate to the arts until many of the cells have died. The supply of money is very sparse. And you have to work your way in, like any other profession. But it's hard to work your way in because there are no incremental salary increases. Artists have to go it on their own. That's why, when they rise up, they're with kings. Because they made it. But most of them don't. So unemployment is really important for my type of person. A lot of my friends who are actors and actresses are on it. But I can see a whole spirit in the nation welling up against people on unemployment. You know that story "The Lottery," where the girl gets stoned to death? Well, I think about some pretty, sexy actress type who just wants to live glamorously, and she's on unemployment. I can see how people could begin to hate her. But on the other hand, if she ever became Marlene Dietrich, then we'd thank God that she was allowed to live and not become a secretary.

My father climbed to the top of the world, more or less. He lived in

the most elegant town in New York State and in one of the finest homes in the town. But now he has severe heart problems. He has had operations. And his whole life is going to be like that. Chest pains and muscle spasms from tension. So I had the good grace to be born on top of the shit box, and I've seen what it takes to make it. And I could see that it's not the only thing. To get it, at least if you're working nine to five, you really have to bust ass. I know how hard my father busted ass. And I figure if I'm gonna bust ass that hard, it's fucking well gonna be doing something I like. So I'm doing rock music. It's the only thing I can do that hard.

ART FINCH

A beefy, stolid man of thirty-four. Before going to work in the Kenosha, Wisconsin, plant of the American Motors Corporation, he ran a dry-goods store, in western Wisconsin. "But we had a fire and got burned out. Lost everything we had. So that's why we moved back around here, to the area I'm familiar with. I was born just a few miles from here. And the AMC plant is probably the highest-paying in all Wisconsin. When I was laid off, I was making roughly \$6.48 an hour. Plus overtime, and I was working second shift, which means a 5 percent premium added to that \$6.48."

His wife, Nancy, listens as we talk. We're in the dining alcove of their apartment, in a newly built complex near Kenosha. Two towheaded children wander in and out. A baby sleeps in a crib.



I started with American Motors in 1974. It was easy to get work then. In fact, I would guess they hired at least a thousand people at that time, between June and September of 1974. But that was their peak period. That's when their sales were really coming on. Last year they had a record year. And now everything is down. They're the worst auto maker in the country for sales.

So I got laid off in March. The cars weren't selling. They had a big backup of cars, and they were laying off a lot of people. The idea was—or what they told us anyway—that we'd be off just long enough to bring down the inventory, sell off the '75s and '76s. So I wasn't too concerned about it at the time, for the simple reason that I had almost

four months of sub pay credits accumulated. I don't know if you're familiar with that. It means that while you're unemployed, you draw 95 percent of your pay. Your credits are accumulated by the hours worked. If you work a long time, you build up these credits. When I was laid off, I had fifty-some credits, I think. And while you're off, with each unemployment check you get one from sub pay. With my four dependents, I drew a pretty good amount. For every check they take off X number of credits.

Well, my sub pay ran out two weeks ago. Jeez, I had no idea we'd be out this long. When I was laid off, that's just about the time Ford and Chrysler were calling back, and they had been really hurting a couple of years before. So I figured to be off for a month or two. It was the spring of the year. It was OK with me. It was just like a vacation because the money was there. In fact, I probably made more money by not driving to work and using the gas. I didn't mind a bit. It was like a nice little vacation. Or so I thought at the time [laughs].

During the first few weeks it was just lazy and boring. Nothing to do. I mean, what are you going to do? You sit here and watch television for a while, and you can only stand so much of that. You can drive around, but you can only do so much of that. You take the kids fishing; you putter around. I thought I'd be back to work within a few weeks. Nothing to be concerned about. But still, I feel better when I'm working. Hell, I put on weight like you can't believe. I sit around, get lazy. I oversleep. I figure maybe I'll get up in seven hours, but then I feel so good lying there that I don't get up. I get lazier day by day. Since I've been off I put on twenty pounds. Just sitting around, you grab some cheese or something. It's the boredom of not doing anything, and no exercise at all. Just makes you feel lazy and terrible. And now it's increasing more and more. I'm getting so restless that it's hard to sit down for more than an hour. This is getting to be true even at night. I'm restless from the time I get up till the time I go to bed again.

And after a while I began to realize that maybe they weren't gonna call me back right away. I don't know exactly when it was. Maybe a month ago, I realized that I only had a few more sub pay checks coming and the prospects really looked bad for me going back to work. At the time of layoff, according to all the reports that were around, it was just a matter of clearing out the huge flow of cars that they had. Evidently they didn't clear 'em out [laughs]. They just aren't selling. And as the quarterly reports come in, talking about bad sales at American Motors, you begin to think, "My God, here they've got 300,000 cars, and it's getting to the end of the '76 season. They're gonna have to ship those cars and sell 'em." And you realize that that's just not gonna happen to a small company like AMC. You know, to Ford 300,000 cars is nothing. But to American Motors that's a lot of automobiles. After those reports came

out, that's when I felt the worst about it. Really bad depression. I got crabby and ornery.

It's not a whole lot better in any other industry. Because so much depends on auto workers, for one thing. Steel workers depend on 'em, everybody that makes the parts. So I'm certainly not alone. I would like to have more control over it. But I think the thing that this country really ought to start doing is holding all the imports down. At least until these other countries are buying what we're exporting. It's kind of ridiculous. There's probably a ratio of twenty to one against us. And it's hurting us. Of course, labor is cheap over there, which in a way I guess is our own fault. Our unions are so goddamn powerful. It's gimme, gimme, gimme. But then again you read in the papers that the major car companies are making a billion and a half dollars' profit for their shareholders. Well, Jesus, I think the worker is entitled to some of that, too. So I don't really know where the answer lies. If I did, I would be fighting right alongside Jimmy Carter or somebody. But I'd like to see the imports stopped tomorrow.

You can't really blame the company. They're trying to sell cars. They've got obligations to their stockholders. And it's not like they say, "Well, I don't like this guy, so I'm gonna slow down car sales to lay him off." I don't think it's that at all. I do think they could hold down the prices on the cars. Just about any product they could probably hold the price down. Without making the huge, huge profits that they do. That would improve things. But I see a lot of people working for American Motors—well, I'm sure any other company or industry has it—you see a lot of foreign cars pull into the parking lots. Well, that's fine. Sure, they're economical. But so are a lot of American cars. It may not be as good a quality car, but it's a little less expensive too. But these people come in their BMWs or their Audis, even Volkswagens. They're cutting their own throats and mine while they're doing it. That I really am against. I just don't think that's right.

Just about any foreign product can be made as well in this country. It's probably a little more expensive, but they could hold down the costs. I say we should stop the imports, more than anything, and put our own people back to work. It's just a stupid vicious circle. When I'm laid off, I can't buy a new car. So nobody can make one for me, and that's two more people off work there. How many people off work for one car? As each one gets laid off, it just goes further and further down. That's why I feel that the imports are what's killing our country. More so than the high union wages. Because the profits are definitely there.

For now there's not much point in me looking for another job around here. All the decent-paying plants are either laying off or are at capacity. The places that are hiring want very skilled labor, and I'm unskilled. My unemployment check is \$122 a week. Now that's not a hell of a lot of

money. But if I take a job working forty hours and bring home only \$140, I don't feel I'm gaining a damn thing. So the only thing that makes sense is to wait it out and hope to get back into AMC. You have to think awfully, awfully hard about leaving it for the simple reason that the money and the benefits are so good. I got a thirty-year plan, right? Sure, thirty years is a long time. But hell, you can retire and still be reasonably young and enjoy life and have a good income. Plus the fact that even if you're on the assembly line, doing one particular job, by the time you get in two or three years' seniority—under normal conditions, that is; the way things are now, who knows?—you can keep picking better jobs. And after ten or twelve years, or maybe fifteen, there's so many jobs that are so easy that it would be impossible to leave. So I think I would spend thirty years there.

I'd like to be back in business for myself. But the money's not there to go into it. I'm not saying it won't happen if circumstances are right. If I happen to come into some money or win a lottery or something. I don't feel that I'm a puppet or a robot to American Motors. I don't feel that way at all. But to be my own boss and do something I really, really enjoy. . . . As compared to not minding the factory. If American Motors were a job where I hated to get up in the morning, and Sunday night I'd say, "Oh, Jesus, tomorrow's Monday already," I wouldn't go. I'd work for half the money rather than do that. But I don't mind American Motors, and I don't mind getting up Monday morning and going to work. It's not like I can't wait until Monday morning gets here, either [laughs]. But I think anybody who's reasonably intelligent would much rather do things for themselves than for somebody else. Make money for themselves rather than the company.

How long do you think it'll be before you have to go to work?

Soon. Very soon.

NANCY: Yesterday. [They both laugh].

KATHY DRYSDALE

She grew up in Jackson, Tennessee, one of eight children in a poor family. "I got into the twelfth grade, lacking three months from my diploma, and I got in trouble. You know how young girls do when

they're in school?" She dropped out, had the baby, and worked five years as a clerk-typist, then came north looking for "something more exciting." There was no office work, so she took the next best thing: the assembly line at American Motors Corporation. She lives with her two daughters, aged ten and eight, in a predominantly black neighborhood of Milwaukee.



I got hired in at American Motors in June '74. June 12, as a matter of fact. I would have been one of the lucky ones who are still working if I had gone in in February. A lot of people got hired in in February, but I didn't make it. So, after I got hired in, it was the regular thing. I guess they try you out to see if you really want to work. They put you in this unbelievable job, just to see if you can do it. They scare the heck out of you. I was on the line, and I had to get under the front of the car where the motor goes. I'd crawl under there with two guns. I had to take one and do some wiring, and then I had about seven screws to put in there. And I mean you had to do it like this, you know [snaps fingers rapidly]. Because the line would never stop. You had to be out of there within a minute. So I was really running. I'd wake up during the night almost crying and saying, "I know I can do it. I've got to do it because I got hired in. It's not going to be like this forever." That first week I was so afraid that I wasn't going to get the job. I was just frantic. Because I knew I had two little daughters, and I really had to learn the job or else get kicked out.

Finally I got that together after about a month and a half. Then later they transferred me to another section, into the inspection division. I really enjoyed that. The people were lively and everybody was pretty nice. It seemed as if the nights wouldn't just drag by.

But then came the talk about layoffs. People started coming around and saying, "Hey, how much time you have?" You say, "About two years." They say, "Hey, you're gonna get laid off." Well, I don't want to hear it, you know? It's just hearsay. But the people in the plant hear it from somebody, and they pass the word around. It's a rumor. And you get so tensed up. I learned one thing: Don't ever tell anybody you only have a year or a year and a half. 'Cause they'll tell you, "Hey, you're out, that's it." They don't wait until somebody else comes around and informs you properly. So I heard that for about two, three weeks straight. It was really beginning to upset me. Because I was thinking, "What am I going to do? I can't just sit at home." I've been working just about ever since I was thirteen years old. Now I'm twenty-seven, and sitting home

with nothing to do? Some people would try and cheer you up. They'd say, "Well, they'll probably be hiring again after vacation." And I'd say, "Yeah, I got laid off once before for about two or three weeks, and they hired me back in." But I think people could see that downfall look on my face. It's like being kept in the dark because you're wondering if they're going to get you next. Lots of people have already been laid off, and you're on that border line. You've been there before, and they didn't get you. But you know all the time that they're gonna get you next. But you don't know when.

I was frightened. I didn't want to be laid off. And then there were these people with ten, fifteen, twenty years who were saying, "I wish they'd lay me off. I'm tired of working." Well, they don't really want that. I know it's a lie. Why come to work every day if you really want to be laid off that bad? Because a person with that much time can afford to take off. They can use up their casual days or anything. But when somebody reports to you and says, "You're going to be laid off indefinitely," then hey, you feel like you're out in the world all by yourself. You wonder what you're going to do. You've been out working, struggling, trying to get . . . and you can't get. And you think, "How am I gonna get it? What am I gonna do?" It really is something to think about, something to frighten you. So I always say don't ever let people tell you what they think when it never happened to them. Let it happen to them, and they'll realize. They say all those things—"I don't want to work"—well, quit your job, so I can get it! Because I want to work! I'm one of those determined people. I enjoy working. I mean, you've got to sweat a little, you got to give a little in order to receive. 'Cause these people ain't givin' away nothin'.

So one day—it was a Thursday; they usually inform you on a Thursday—here come the foreman and the steward. My steward had been telling me he didn't know exactly what they were gonna do. But that Thursday he came around and said, "We're gonna try and get you to work next week, but then you'll be laid off indefinitely." Oh, God. I said, "All right." And the next week I only worked one day, and that was it. That was during the week in March when the real big layoff came. A lot of people got kicked out.

It wasn't so bad at first, especially after my sub pay came through. I was getting \$122 a week unemployment, plus sub pay. It came to about \$170. That was pretty good. When I was working, I was taking home about \$15 more. So I felt pretty secure when I was getting sub. But I still didn't like it. It's just the idea of sitting down. I'd rather work for what I receive. It's all right receiving it, and it's my money true enough; but yet and still, why sit down when I can be putting my body to some other use?

During the first few months I did a lot of sewing. I would do it just

about every day. I was used to doing something, and I had nothing else to do. Actually it started before I got laid off. I had this outfit I had cut out for my oldest child. It had been lying around for about two years. When I switched from working nights at the plant to working days, I needed something to do in the evenings besides watch TV. So I started sewing on that outfit, and I finished it after a week. Then I got enthused about it after I quit working because I knew Easter was coming up and I couldn't afford to buy anything. So I said, "Well, heck. Why should I just sit around? I've got a sewing machine. I gotta pay for it. Might as well go on and fix something for the kids, and me as well." So I made our Easter outfits. And people noticed. They'd say, "Hey, that's really nice. Where did you get that from?" I'd say I made it. They'd ask me to make them something, and I'd say, "Well, there will be a slight fee, but I'll make it for you."

I'd start sometime around nine. I'd get up and get the kids off to school, and then I'd start. Watch TV and sew until about eleven. But after a while I started pulling away from it. I made two outfits for two fellows I know, and the last one took me about two weeks to finish. Whereas I should be able to make two outfits in a week. It seems as if I couldn't concentrate. You have to read the stuff on the pattern to make the outfit, right? I would read it, and I would understand it; but yet and still, I wouldn't understand it. I started seeing double, I guess [laughs]. I'd be sitting there so long, and if you do anything for a certain period of time, it starts getting next to you. So I'd just kind of close my eyes a little and rub my forehead and try again. That didn't seem to work. And I started getting nervous. My doctor asked me about it. You can probably tell just sitting here. I am getting really fidgety, and I think it's because sitting around the house has started to get next to me. So I'd leave the house just to get some air. That would make me feel better after a while, but when I came back in I wouldn't feel like going back to my sewing. Gradually I started pulling away from it. And it seems like now when I go in and try to start sewing, I don't have the patience to do it. I want to do it, but I don't have the patience.

It's like something is pulling me down. I can't understand it. I don't have any energy. Something just seems like it's taking over. As if my body was useless, and I can't do anything. Sometimes I don't even get up till about twelve. And I don't want to clean up, even though I can't stand to see things out of order. I have to make myself get up and do it. Sometimes I just sit around and look at the walls until they're caving in on me.

And I've been full of worries about money. I knew the sub pay was gonna run out sooner or later, so I was trying to pay everything up. It would have been all right if the sub pay lasted as long as unemployment, but it ran out last week. And when you know it's gonna run out,

you still have to worry about how much you spend. Some people get a check and have nothing to pay out that week. They can go out and splurge a little, or they have maybe one bill to pay. But it's never that way with me. I have bills every week. And it's the little bills that worry you. Not the big ones because you know you gotta cope with them. It's the little bills that come in every once in a while. If it was just me, I wouldn't have much to worry about, but I have two kids. And they gotta have school clothes, school supplies, bikes, and they want to go places. . . . You can't help but worry about it.

I always try and add up my bills a month in advance. I keep a list, with everything I have to pay that month. That way you know, when the check comes in, you gotta pay this bill and that bill with it. I mark it off every week. I try and have enough to buy groceries after paying off the furniture, the rent, stuff like that. Sometimes I don't have enough money to give the kids an allowance. And sometimes I don't have enough to buy gas. Or I just have \$1 or \$2 left during the week if I want to buy something. So I sit and try to figure it out, and I worry so much. Just last night I was sitting up figuring, trying to go a month ahead. And I'm gonna have to stretch, scrimp, and scrape because now I'm down to \$122 from \$170. It makes a big difference. And I caught myself sitting there on the bed and staring. You know how your eyes get when you stare so much and sit so much? You can't see anything. Well, you can see, but you're not looking at anything. I noticed the clock. It was after 12:00 when I started. One time I looked and it was 1:01, and then I looked and it was 1:25, and then 1:45. I said, "Why should I sit here and worry about this when I don't really have to worry about it right now?" You shouldn't let things worry you before the time comes, but I do. How can I help it? Now I have nothing but \$122 to cope with. It's gonna be kind of hard. I'm gonna try and cope with it, but I don't know how.

I have this girl friend. She doesn't have to go back because she's got just about everything she wants. Her old man is working at AMC. He works overtime. That's one of the things that kind of get next to me. How can they afford to let them work overtime, even though they have more seniority, when all of us are being laid off and can't work at all? So my friend tells me she don't want to go back. But I do. I look forward to that day. And I hope it's not more than two months of waiting. I think I can sweat it out for at least two more months. I don't really want to, and I don't look forward to it; but I have no other choice. I just hope they come up with something because five months of sitting at home is a long time. You think, "Half a year!" Because it will be half a year on the eighth of next month. And that's one heck of a long time to sit down and wait for a job to call you back. It's enough to kind of drive you nuts. But you try not to let it get next to you. You try and block it. Try and keep the faith.

LEO JOHNSON

In recent years he has been a college student (briefly), a housebuilder, lumberjack, record salesman, farmhand, and riverboat man. Now he is hitchhiking around the country to see old friends. We're talking in a backyard in Richmond, Indiana. His pack lies nearby; later he will shoulder it and head for home in Phoenix. The interview begins at 9:00 A.M., and by the time it is over he is drinking his third beer. He is twenty-nine.



The last job I had was for an explosives company. One of the largest in America. They deal in slurry explosives, which are used in open-pit copper mines and also in coal stripping. I quit in April. Been free since then [laughs].

I had a technical job, making the explosives. It's kind of the equivalent of making a cake. You follow a recipe. You have to get it right or else it doesn't work. It won't blow up unless you have everything right. It's fairly complex, but anyone who'd had any chemistry at all would be able to grasp it. You just have to be awake most of the time. If you start dreaming, then you're gonna foul something up, and the stuff won't explode, and if the company loses enough money they could get excited about it.

Did you like the work?

OK. That's a tough question. I like to play a lot more than I like to work. I like to work as long as I'm learning something. I think most people I know are that way. Everybody in the company was that way. They used to like it and now they're bored. Most of the people I worked with had been with the company ten years or so, and they were in a different situation than I am. I'm not married. I have no kids. I can be almost as irresponsible as I choose to be, whereas most of them couldn't. So while I was learning, the job was a lot of fun. I kept it about eight months. That was the longest job I've ever had. I always seem to get bored. You learn 90 percent of what you're going to learn from a job in a short period of time. So why keep doing it? Especially when they pay you chicken feed anyway. Out in the West, wages are not very high. I was making something like \$4.50 an hour. I started bitching with them

all the time about "Come on, I want more money. I want more money." They said, "We can't possibly give it to you," and then you read their profit statements in the newspaper, and they make \$17 million. What do they mean, they can't give it to me?

So you catch on quick that you aren't gonna get it, and it becomes a joke. With me it became: How long should I stick? How much money do I want to save before I go? Meanwhile, I was negotiating with this guy from the company who wanted me to go to Pennsylvania. I wrote a letter at one point, telling him all my demands. First I wanted eight bucks an hour. I thought I'd put it high enough so that they wouldn't meet it [laughs]. Then there were certain questions on my expense account that I didn't want them to ask anymore. There were phone calls. and I wanted a certain number of plane tickets home. To my amazement he met them all. It was kind of flattering, but on the other hand I knew he needed somebody badly. He needed somebody he could trust. And I knew that as soon as I was no longer useful, they'd let me go.

So he met all the demands and said, "OK, here's the job we want you to do." They were having trouble with this mine in Pennsylvania. The equipment was always breaking down, so they weren't able to deliver explosives. The mine was pissed off. And I had to do something about it. Most of the guys who worked at that plant—there were eight of them—had worked for the company for ten years. I'd worked there for eight months. And this guy was gonna have me go in as an equipment maintenance troubleshooter, called in special to solve the problem. Now it's obvious that I know less about the equipment than those guys did. I hadn't been to the mine, but it was fairly clear to me that the reason the equipment was always breaking down is because the workers didn't give a fuck about fixing it.

At this point I was on leave from the company. I was in Los Angeles, and I was supposed to fly to Pittsburgh on a Tuesday. I was going to stop in Denver to do some business, so I called a friend there, and he said, "Listen, Bob Dylan and the Rolling Thunder Review are coming to Denver on Tuesday night and we got you a ticket in the front row if you want it." I had wanted to see Dylan all my life. So I called the guy in Pittsburgh and told him I'd be a day late. I flew to Colorado and saw Dylan. It was a great concert, and since I was back on expense account, I checked into the Holiday Inn. Talk about abysmal, man. There's nothing worse than a goddamn motel. That Holiday Inn seemed so fucking negative, and I thought about being out in Pennsylvania, and I said to myself, "I don't want to go back to that snake-pit company to while away my life." [Laughs.] So I sent them a telegram and said, "I'm sorry, due to new developments I'm not gonna be able to come there." And I didn't go. Instead, I started this tour.

When I left the company, I knew I was gonna have to go back to work

NOT WORKING

pretty soon. It's always been that way when I quit. I've never been able to quit when I had a lot of money. Maybe I had \$600, \$1,000. How long does that last in today's world? Not very goddamn long. Especially if you tend to like to spend money, which I do. If I have a lot, I get off on going out to a really great restaurant and ordering their best wine and spending \$100 on dinner. I can't do that very often, but I try not to let my lack of money stunt my tastes. Either get the best, or starve [laughs].

I figured on a two-week trip, but it's been more like two months. Met a lot of nice people. The American people are great. Really great. Very generous. But there was no work around here. I stayed for a while, ran out of money. Sold a tent. Went to Kentucky. I used to work on the riverboats there, the towboats on the Kentucky River. We would take barges of sand down the Ohio and up into central Kentucky. I checked on the boats and it looked as if I could get back on if I stuck around very long. But I wasn't really in the mood to stick around 'cause that was my second stop and I had at least three more friends I was committed to spending some time with. From there I went on to Baton Rouge. A friend of mine is a blacksmith there. Louisiana really struck me nice. I checked around for jobs on shrimp boats. I've never worked on the ocean, and I'd like to do that. I looked around and got some contacts, and if I went back there I could get on a shrimp boat. Fairly sure thing. Might take two weeks. Then I left Baton Rouge because I had promised to be in New York on the Fourth of July. Now I'm on my way back to Arizona, and then I'll probably look for work seriously.

Do you think a lot about where you're headed?

When I do, I get very depressed [laughs]. So I try not to, I guess. I try to be glad for the things I have right now. And I feel like I deserve a wonderful future, so maybe I'll have one. I just try to be as honest as I can. If I get so I don't like a job, I feel it's my responsibility to quit. Not to stick with it. I think too many people are security-oriented, where they get some rotten-tasting little slice of the pie and they figure that's what they better keep. I think that's real bullshit. If people would just quit more often when they got sick of what they're doing, that would mean you could always find work. There would be no problem [laughs].

I work for two reasons. One, for money. You gotta have money. Well, maybe you don't, you can read Ram Dass or something and reach the point where you don't need money anymore. You can be happy without it. I would like to reach that point. But I need money to do my hobbies, the things that bring me pleasure. I like to buy things for my friends. I like to go out for dinner or cook a nice meal. Nobody's giving that stuff away. I enjoy camping, so I need equipment. I need gas for my car. And I don't like to camp for the weekend; I like to camp for the winter. That

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means you gotta work and save up a couple thousand bucks. And then I also work because you get to learn new stuff. That's the other reason.

So being out of work obviously doesn't bother you?

OK. It depends. I don't have a hell of a lot of control over how I feel at this particular time. Sometimes being out of work can really be depressing. It depends on whether I feel strong at the time or not. I felt real good on this trip. It hasn't bothered me. Everything's worked out nicely. But I know at other times, being out of work has been very depressing.

What makes the difference?

I don't know. It's very subtle. You'd have to ask Ram Dass, I guess [laughs]. I don't know. It's just that I don't feel worried about being broke right now. I haven't felt worried on this whole trip. When you start to worry about whether you're in trouble or not, then you're in trouble. Because my responsibility is to be as happy as I can. I think that's everybody's responsibility. So I try to stay free enough to do what I want. If I want to quit, I quit. If I feel like I need to go back to work and that money will make me happy, then I'll do that. If I feel pissed off enough about something to demonstrate about it, I'll do that. Life is a fragile thing. I feel like if I make too many plans about what my life is, it makes it dead all of a sudden. You gotta have enough faith to do what's right, right now.

On the other hand, if I could find a company that would treat me right, what I consider to be right, I would stay with them. If they would continue to give me opportunity to grow. If they wouldn't bullshit me about little picayune items. If I could get time off when I felt like I needed it. If they would pay me a reasonable wage. Then I would stay with them. I'd see no reason to leave. But very few companies can offer that. They're trying to make a profit. If they offer those kinds of opportunities to all their people, there's not gonna be any profit. It's gonna take all their resources to do that.

The problem with work is that you're usually working for some company where you have no say over what's going on. You're expected to just be a robot. Do this, do this, do this. You're not supposed to ask why. You can be building some kind of trash and you aren't supposed to care about what you're doing. The kind of work I've enjoyed most is helping a friend to build a house or fix his irrigation ditches. Something where I feel like I'm involved in it as a total person. Where I'm not building something without knowing why.

In the West, it's really pretty, right? Well, ten years ago it was a lot prettier. Now there are houses in a lot of places where there didn't used

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to be houses. This is really disturbing to almost everybody I know. It certainly is to me. Why are we using up the earth if all we're building is garbage? Making things to throw away, to keep the economy going. It's hard to get excited about working in order to do that. I feel like our economy's mindless. There's no plan behind it. And there are so many people. When you come east from Arizona, there's a traffic jam from Topeka on. Just an ungodly number of people. And they need things and want things, and they're gonna have those things. You may not want coal stripped in Montana. But by God, if they want coal, they're gonna strip that coal. There should be some kind of national planning that says, "These mountains are to be left alone. They're too pretty to dig up. And this particular product is garbage. We won't make any more of it." But it comes down to the same old problem. The guys who own everything will not allow that to happen. They want to pump oil until the last drop is gone, so they can sell every last drop. Then they'll worry about solar energy. They're gonna dig up every goddamn pound of coal in the whole world, even if there's another way to heat that's perfectly clean and rational.

So I think that maybe there has to be a bloody revolution 'cause they're not gonna let go of the things they own. They're not gonna let go of their political power just because it makes sense that they should. It's obvious they won't do that. But I'm afraid of a revolution, and I don't think the common people are organized enough to win one at this point. I think the working people are more afraid of some kind of dictatorship of fanatics than they are of the one we have right now, which is a kind of dictatorship of greed. At least in this one they can move around a little.

One of the beauties of America is that it's still pretty inefficient. You can still find a way to get what you want just because there's a lot of incompetence around. If the boss is an asshole, you can walk off with half the shop and there's nothing they can do about it. You can steal any outfit blind. But it's like guerrilla warfare when it would be much easier to just have a democracy in the first place. Why should you have to fight all the time to get by?

I'll tell you an interesting story. I have a friend who's an excellent mechanic on foreign cars, especially Volkswagens, Porsches, those kinds of German cars. He's a very good mechanic. Very generous. He used to work at a VW dealer as a mechanic, but he was forced to do lousy work. That was the dealership's policy. You know, get the car in, make it so it runs, but don't worry about the son of a bitch. Just get it out on the road and charge the bastard his money. Well, it went against his grain. But he needed money so he worked there anyway. He did the best job he was allowed to do, and in his spare time he would fix cars for all his friends. Wouldn't charge them anything. Finally he got enough pissed off at the VW place that he quit. He went on unemployment.

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Built a little shop in the garage where he lives. And now, while he's on unemployment he fixes people's cars and does a much better job than the dealer ever did. So tell me what that means. He has to go on unemployment to reach a place where he can be productive. That's one of the paradoxes that you're faced with around here. The most competent people are held back all the time. The most generous people are held back all the time. As far as I can tell, all the people who are alive in any sense are held back most of the time. Unless they can somehow figure out a way to get around all the roadblocks.

DICK FRANCO

He is writing his first novel, a detective story. He lives with his wife, Leslie, an unemployed cellist, in a middle-class neighborhood on the outskirts of Boston. Both are twenty-five. The house is run-down, sparsely furnished. A copy of *Madame Bovary* is on the dining table. A huge, hairy dog roams about. Seven months ago he and his wife quit jobs in Vermont, "when we had enough money saved," and transferred their unemployment claims to Massachusetts. "We came here for several reasons. The major one is that it's a good city for music. It's right behind New York and Chicago, and we didn't want to go to either one of those. The car wouldn't make the trip."



Maybe my Protestant work ethic is getting to me. I always get the feeling that the people at the unemployment office think I'm a bum or something. Not that I should care, but I guess I do a little. It probably comes from my parents, who were real go-getters. They live on a farm, and there's a family on a hill around the corner that's on welfare. They've been on welfare for years. And my mother is a pretty incredible woman in terms of being vindictive and nasty and gossipy. She's constantly critical of these people because they're on welfare. That enters into everything else. The way they look, for example. Not the fact that they're dressed poorly, but the fact that they're fat. Those fat people on welfare. Those people with big noses on welfare. Those people with the big green car on welfare [laughs]. That's the kind of upbringing I had.

So I have the feeling that I should be doing anything other than

drawing money from the government. Morally I believe a little bit in that. But rationally I realize that if I was to take a job as a janitor somewhere, it won't solve anything. I mean, if everybody who had a B.A. went and took jobs as janitors, there would still be as many unemployed people because the people who would have gotten the jobs as janitors wouldn't get them. I mean, Ronald Reagan is ridiculous. But people like my mother believe that anytime you want to go get a job you can go out and get one. A lot of people believe that. And it's true for me. I don't think there's been anytime in my life that I couldn't get a job within a week or two. Some kind of job. But that doesn't mean anything about the unemployment percentage. If everybody like me found jobs tomorrow, it might lower it by half a percent. But it wouldn't change the economics at all because that half percent is probably people who are in between jobs anyway, that are in flux at any given moment. Rationally I know that, but there's something there that says, "Wow, you should be out scrubbing sidewalks, kid." I'm dealing with it, though. I'd rather be doing what I'm doing now.

I get up late usually. I hate to get up early. I probably sleep till about ten. Then I get up and doddle around, and the guilt starts about 10:30. I feel terribly guilty till about noon or one and after I start feeling really bad, then I start writing so I won't feel guilty anymore. I try to discipline myself to a ten-to-four or nine-to-four schedule, but I can't start working that early. Every once in a while I do, and I feel just fantastic. I just feel great. If I do it two days in a row, I feel like I've been doing it for months, and I just feel remarkable. What I do quite often is stop in the afternoon and then in the evening go back and write a little more. It's a lot of hours some days. Some days it's almost no hours. I wish I worked harder at it. I feel like I've got time now, so I should be working at it harder.

I often think of the writing as an apology for drawing unemployment. I think, "Well, some people get grants." I always look at it as a grant. Except that I didn't win it. I didn't have to prove myself in order to get it, which doesn't really make it fair. But if the government's paying me to write my novel, I really don't mind. Whether the novel is good, bad, or indifferent, or whether I'm good or bad, doesn't even matter too much to me. We don't have the de' Medicis anymore to support artists, and I guess that's pretty much how I still look at myself. It's kind of a rationalization for writing and not getting anything for it. The idea that it takes ten years of writing before you write good novels. In a way I hope it isn't true, but it makes me feel all right when I read over something that's terrible. Still, I don't know that the people of the United States should be paying me to do it [laughs].

But if they weren't paying me, they'd probably be paying somebody else to do nothing. Maybe I'm actually being an altruist. I'm sitting here trying to live on these few measly crumbs that they throw me, and I'm

giving somebody else a chance to work as a janitor while I work on my novel. I could look at it that way. I guess that's pretty ludicrous, but I could look at it that way.

Really, the only way you can deal with drawing unemployment while you're working in the arts is to rationalize some framework. And part of my intellectual framework is that I don't feel that bad about being one of the eight or nine million unemployed. One of the reasons I don't feel bad about it is because I'm doing something I think is worthwhile. In fact, I think it's infinitely more worthwhile than building Chevy Vegas. Now I'm going to get outraged and philosophical and talk about how nonsensical it is to go out and work at all. Because what people are doing is making stuff like cars that people don't need. I like cars. I'm a car nut. But my car is a 1968, and a lot of people's cars could be 1952s—mine could, too—if they were still drivable, and there's no reason why they shouldn't be. But I know it wouldn't work that way. Then there would suddenly be all these people without work. Not that there wouldn't still be enough food, and lumber to build houses, and everything else. There's no reason for everyone in this country to work eight hours a day. There's no reason for me to do it or for anybody else to do it. But that's the way it's gonna stay. I don't think there's gonna be any massive social upheaval, and people are gonna say, "Come on, we only need to be working five hours a day to make what we need." I wonder how many hours a day it would actually boil down to.

Sometimes I think it's hysterically funny. The whole situation. That there should be any question about any individual drawing unemployment when there's nine million people unemployed and there's no jobs for them. The whole fact that Vermont would even care where you're looking for a job, that they would make you write it on a form. Of course, I don't think they really do care. The only people that care are the taxpayers. Especially if a good Republican legislator can get up and make a lot of noise about people quitting their jobs. They never get it through their heads that when somebody quits a job, somebody else gets it.

I went through a socialist period. I don't know if that would work any better. On one level I certainly feel it would have to, despite the fact that someone said the purpose of communism isn't to make the poor richer, it's to make the rich poorer. I think some Czech said that. But I don't really give a damn. In my situation I can't relate to socialism, even a very loose kind of socialism. I can't really imagine what it would be like, a situation where everybody is guaranteed employment. Do we wind up in the same boat we're in now, where everybody has meaningless employment? What are we doing, providing nine million more meaningless jobs? Of course, it's still better than having nine million people without any money. It's pretty meaningless not to have money, too.

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I guess I'm just scared because I'm kind of an elitist. I feel like I belong in some sort of special place, and I don't want to be leveled out. I feel like I'm gonna make good money at some point. There was a time when I didn't think that. I was going to be a starving artist. I was gonna write what I wanted to write. Heavy things that didn't have a plot. Then it was all right for me to think that artists should be subsidized. They should get six grand a year or some little pittance to piddle around and write heavy tomes. Now I'm starting to get the idea that maybe I'll be able to make a living, and I don't want anybody controlling my income. I want to make fifty grand and buy a sailboat.

ANNA MONTES

She is a Chilean in her mid-thirties, soft-voiced and gentle but with a quick-flashing temper. She has worked in day care centers since 1972, when she came to the United States. Though she left Chile before the military junta overthrew Salvador Allende, her leftist politics now make it dangerous for her to return. She lives with her son in a small apartment on the Lower East Side of New York City and does volunteer work—"more than full time"—with a group of exiles who are compiling a list of political prisoners in Chile, "especially the nonrecognized ones."



I lost my job last December, when New York City had the bright idea of closing its day care centers. People kept telling me the centers were going to be closed, but I didn't think it was true. It seemed inconceivable. For example, where I worked on the Lower East Side they desperately need a day care center. I don't know if you've seen those areas, but it's as if they'd been bombarded. All the buildings are destroyed. The children play in the ruins and the garbage. Most of the parents are drug addicts or alcoholics. The children have no protection, no one to look after them. The lives are actually in danger. The apartments are tiny, full of rats and cockroaches. . . . So it's sad enough as it is. I thought that given the situation, surely they wouldn't close this day care center. How could they close it? Imagine [laughs]!

Well, in November they told us it was going to be closed. People started to organize. There were demonstrations and protests. The police

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arrested some people, put them in jail, clubbed them. . . . I was in all the demonstrations except the one where they arrested people. I can't remember what I was doing that day. Anyway, the people from the city agency started to negotiate with us. They said maybe they'd let the center stay open until June, and then maybe they could prolong it even a few months after that. But those people are such hypocrites and liars. Every time there was a meeting they talked about how much they cared for the children and how worried they were. You soon found out that their worry was a complete lie. For example, if a lamp in the center broke, they might say, "This room can't be open today because there might be a short circuit and the children will touch it and get electrocuted." All you had to do was unplug the lamp and nothing would happen. But they were always inventing pretexts like that to close the center. They would close it for a day or two, and meanwhile the parents couldn't go to work, or they had to let the children wander around alone. And there was much more risk to the children in that neighborhood than in a room with a faulty fixture. But still, I thought that because of the political pressure the center would stay open. It didn't happen that way. Time passed, and we kept negotiating, and then suddenly, boom, they shut us down.

When I lost the job I wasn't so much depressed as worried. I knew I had unemployment, which would allow me to live for a year, more or less. But I had friends who had already lost their jobs in day care and who hadn't found new work. I had another friend who's a secretary, and she couldn't find work either. And when I heard that the city was planning to close eighty more day care centers, I knew there was no chance at all of getting day care work. I said to myself, "OK, I'll have to find work in something else."

There don't seem to be a lot of possibilities, because I don't have experience in anything but day care. I'm not much attracted by the idea of working in a store. I don't want to be a waitress. I don't have a profession. The other day someone told me that women who work in bars make a lot of money [laughs]. But with my political ideas I can't see myself working in some bar, trying to get men drunk.

I think the best possibility for me is to work as a nursemaid. Because in this country there are so many people with so much money—rich people who want nursemaids for their kids. I called an agency, and so far I've gone out to about twenty interviews. Of those twenty there was only one that I could have gotten that suited me. But just at that time came the elevator operator's strike, which looked as if it would last a long time, so the lady told me I might as well keep looking.

It's an amazing process. First you call the agency. They give you some names, and you call on the phone. Then the questions start. If you pass the telephone exam, you go for an interview at the house. You go in, and

you have to sit down for tea or coffee. And then it's like they're taking your confession. I swear, if I were looking for a job as president of the Chase Manhattan Bank, they wouldn't ask me so many questions. First, of course, they want to know what country I'm from. Then what experience I've had. How much they paid me. Why I left. What I did with the kids. If I smoke, if I drink. Whether I go out. What they want you to do, what they don't want you to do. The hours of the job. On and on.

Of course, whenever I go, I try to look as square as possible. I always wear a dress. I put on the best clothes I have—and well ironed, too [laughs]. I want them to think I'm very square. And from what the agency tells me, I've made a good impression on most of them. I don't really know why. I have a feeling that there's a racial thing mixed up in there somewhere. Lots of women who go for these jobs are black women, and some rich people don't want their kids to be in such direct contact with a black. Heaven forbid the child should learn that blacks are people just like them.

Frankly, if I take a job like that, I don't know how long I'm going to last. I don't have the kind of character that will stand for people pushing me around very much. I have no patience with people who bother me about little things. Sometimes I'm immediately aware that I couldn't work for the person. But by that time I'm already there, and I have to go on with the whole show. For example, I went to one interview with a woman who had a two-year-old daughter. Listen to this. She had a doorman who opened the door. She had a cook. She had another woman who took care of her other kids. She was about forty-five years old, and you know how old her husband was? Seventy-five [laughs]. She was offering \$200 a week. That's good money. But right away I knew that if it was \$500, I wouldn't do it. First of all, I saw that the other nursemaid had to go trailing around after the kids every second. It was incredible. And she was completely dependent on the mother. So I told the woman that if I took the job, I would want to make my own decisions about the little girl—whether I took her out, when I put her to bed. I didn't want to be in the position of telling her no, and then her mother would say yes. Well, I don't know how the woman really reacted to that. She said to me that of course I was right, of course. But if she saw someone being mean to her daughter, she would have to intervene.

I would never work for someone I didn't like. Some people don't understand that. But I couldn't do it. I've never worked directly for a rich person before, and I don't know how they're going to treat me. But if they insist on making me feel very subordinate, I'm not going to like it. Some of them look at you, and you can see them thinking, "This person is my employee." Then they treat you that way. So you look for someone who's more human, who treats you like a person. Not really like a friend, but . . . more kindly. A few of them are like that. They're

different. When you're talking with them, you feel like it could be with a friend. So that's what I'm looking for. Someone like that. Since I'm still getting unemployment, I don't have any reason to take a job until I find the right person.

Are you very worried about money?

Well, I don't know. Sometimes I feel that nothing worries me anymore. I always live with the knowledge of what happened in Chile and what's going on there now. So I say to myself, "Jesus, in Chile people really have no way out. There's no solution to their problems." Whereas here I may not have any money for the moment, but I can always find something that will support me. Even if I have to do something I hate, like working in a bar. I know I'll find something, so I don't worry. In fact, I've even started sending money to my family in Chile. They aren't rich, but they were never poor either. Now everybody's destitute there. It's funny: What the Allende government couldn't do in three years—get everyone to the same level—the junta did in six months. Now you're either the son of a bourgeois with huge investments, or you're poor. People in Chile are happy if they think they're going to have enough to eat today. They don't even think about tomorrow. I've never had to send my family money before. So the only thing that bothers me about not working is that I'd like to be able to send more.

One thing that's absolutely incomprehensible to me is that some people feel ashamed of losing their jobs. I find that absurd. I just can't understand it. It's the same as if you felt ashamed of wearing glasses because you're nearsighted. It's not your fault. And it's not our fault if there's an economic crisis here—whether it's artificial or not—that affects people who have to work. So I don't feel any shame. I think it's this country that's shameful. I think it's shameful that when I was walking along Thirty-fourth Street last night, I saw at least ten beggars sleeping in the street. Ten! Ten! I swear to you. They were sleeping outside the big stores with their huge neon signs and advertisements in beautiful color. That's what I think is a shame. It's something I'd like to film, so I could have proof of it and show it to people. Because a lot of people in Latin America are fooled. They don't realize how things are. They see American movies about a lovely gringo couple, who live in a beautiful house with a garden and the latest model car and two beautiful kids. . . . Everything's perfect. They don't realize that it's a lie. And the ones who haven't been here don't believe you when you tell them. They say, "You're just a communist." It's those things that are shameful. Nor am I ashamed of taking unemployment money. I think every little thing I can get out of these gringos is well taken [laughs]. I ask myself, "How many millions and millions and millions of dollars have they robbed from

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Chile?" The little bit I get from unemployment, or that I might get from welfare, is nothing. Over the years they've probably taken twenty times the entire value of Chile. Not to mention Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru. . . . So I don't have any prejudices about being unemployed. That's just one more thing they've put in your mind to make you think the way they want.

BILLY WONG

He has worked in construction for fourteen years, specializing in floor work: tile, carpet, parquet, linoleum. He is a slight man with blurred Oriental features: half Chinese, half Irish. He grew up in San Francisco's Chinatown and now lives with his wife and three children in a white working-class area of Redwood City. In the apartment he shows off the profusion of plants and two large tanks of tropical fish: He would like to find a job in horticulture, "so I can watch things grow."

On the day we talk, 24 percent of Bay Area construction workers are unemployed, and the percentage is even higher in his carpenters' union local.



I haven't worked a full week for six months. Maybe two days, three days. And I haven't worked at all the last seven weeks, not one day. There's no work. I talked to the business agent of the local, and there's nothing.

What happened when you got laid off the last time?

The job was finished. Every job you go to, you stay on till it finishes. Being that we're floor layers and we have to do a certain amount every day, we only last in the building maybe two weeks, a twenty-story building. Two, three weeks, and we wrap it right up. So then you call in to the local and put your name on a list, and they put it on a bulletin board, and you can walk into the union hall and see your name on the list. They rotate the jobs around. If you have two days, they don't count it. You stay on the same spot on the list. Only time it changes is if you have three days; then you go back down to the end. Or if somebody's

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losing their house, they can't meet their mortgage, then they jump the list. Usually you're not off work long enough to get unemployment. You're off a week, two weeks. But I'm on unemployment this time. Ninety-five dollars.

I get moody, very moody. It feels terrible. You have no ambition to do anything. You're disgusted. The only thing that's keeping me together is that my wife works. She works at a drugstore. So we make ends meet.

Sometimes I say to myself that I should have gone into something else that has more security. Because construction, when it's busy it's secure, but when it's not busy it's not secure. In a year you might work for maybe thirteen, fourteen bosses. It's crazy, y'know, 'cause you get laid off constantly. And you make big money but your expenses are really high. Because you travel from job to job. I worked as far away as Santa Cruz, it cost me \$50 a week easy, plus union dues, plus telephone calls to the union hall. So by the week you don't really make that much. I mean, they bullshit you—oh, how good you're making. Years ago I used to work on overtime jobs, but the last five years I haven't seen an overtime job. So I make \$14,000 or \$15,000. A couple of years ago I went up to about \$20,000, but you have to have the breaks, fall into it right. If you don't fall into jobs right, you make crap.

And the insecurity. It makes you feel bad in a way but good in another way, because I can put up with it, where if somebody else is working steady and gets laid off, it's a big drastic thing. I can always jump back because it's not steady. You can always jump in and out. So you get used to being laid off. At the beginning, when I first started in the trade, it bothered me very bad, but now when I'm into it, it doesn't bother me. It's just a crazy business, very cutthroat. All the bad points of a human being come out in construction. Because you're competing constantly. Everyone is competing. Not only the bosses are competing, but each man is competing down the line, right on the job. Looking for security. They got their hope that they'll have a secure job. Nail another guy. This is the way it goes. It's a rat race. You always get somebody doing tricks. That's why I dislike the business very much.

Have you looked for other work?

Yeah, I'm trying to get something in horticulture. I want to put in an application at the Arboretum. I called up a friend who works there, but he's getting laid off. This week or next week. So, wow—I feel pretty crummy going in there with an application and them getting laid off. I went to a couple of other jobs. The pay is crazy. I was asking about the starting pay, and it's like \$140. By the time they take taxes out you bring home \$95. On unemployment, doing nothing, you collect \$95. And most of the jobs are around that price. So like, wow. Just very bad. But

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even if the money was large, I'd rather work for the Arboretum because I really enjoy it. I don't care if I make under \$95. I enjoy it.

Y'know, it's very hard to find something to work at that you like. I think a lot of people really bullshit themselves. I don't know, maybe their expectations on life are very little. It's hard to understand. I got friends that love construction. I mean, how could you love that friggin' trade? You crawl around like a roach on your knees; you get arthritis in the spine, arthritis in the shoulders. I got bursitis in the knee. . . . And I'm supposed to love this job? 'Cause you're working seven hours crawling around on your knees. And you're constantly moving; you can't stop. How could you like it? There's gotta be a better way. I mean, you're not a fucking machine. But you have to do that in order to compete against the next guy.

I had one offer to work under scale off the books. They were going to pay me \$300 off the books. But I couldn't because my benefits are running out. With the union you get \$15 and change an hour. But you only see \$10.45 of it—55 cents is for vacation and the rest cash. And the other \$5 is for fringes. The boss pays into the union to cover your medical, pension, and everything else. And you're supposed to have about 450 hours a year. If you don't have it, you can't be covered. You got to keep that going. If you're working off the books, you can't keep nothing going. And even with fringes taken out, we're supposed to bring home \$400 and change. At \$300 he's making a lot of money off me. But yet he still wants the same numbers, even though he's getting your body cheaper. It's like, wow—he wants your blood, too. But my wife wanted me to take it because it looked pretty good. We always lived good, and now at \$95 a week you don't live so good. 'Cause I have a boat, we go away for the weekends, we go hunting, fishing, boating—everything. To go away and do these things costs money. And \$300 off the books, that's money. Plus what she makes, we're living pretty good again. But I can't do it. It's like cutting off my nose to spite my face. Because I work out of the hall, I'm a union man, and my benefits are running out.

So I stay home. My wife wants me to go fishing or hunting or do something because I get uptight. Not really angry. I try and calm down. I just feel uptight inside. She sees me, I'm all a bundle of nerves. Because I can't stay in the house during the week. I try to do things, get up and just take a walk or take the car and go for a ride. Just ride around. I feel terrible staying home. Some of my friends lay down in a bed and sleep all day. But I'd feel like life was passing me right by. I'd feel terrible, like it's a wasted day. At least I get out and talk to people, see them, it's not as bad. If you just sleep all day, wow. I park the car. Walk. I go window-shopping [laughs]. That's what I've been doing! I just hang around like a friggin' bum. This bugs the shit out of me. I feel really bad. I meet my friends, we're all out of work, and we go for ride, bullshit, we go have

OUT OF WORK

coffee at somebody's house. We just chew up everything. The job, the world, everything. We get pissed at everybody. Together. Then, after you leave, you feel worse than when you went in. Because everything sucks, everything [laughs].

I don't know if the kids worry. I really don't know, because they're still getting theirs, y'know what I mean? They keep asking for things: I need shoes, I need this, I need a gown, my daughter's graduation, and my two little ones made their confirmation. . . . Wow. It's crazy. But they're kids, I guess. When I was a kid, I never worried about what was going on. But I worked, I never had to worry. Always worked part time, since I was twelve. So I never needed for nothing. I always kicked into the house, gave my mother money. So I never had to ask. But you try and make things better for your children. And I don't know if that's so good. You wonder if they appreciate it. They'll tell you to go and take a walk afterwards, when they get married. Another phase of life. It's crazy. You don't know whether you're shoveling shit against the tide or what. You just want to know, when do you count? When you're in the ground?

You don't know where you're gonna go, or when it's gonna end, or what's gonna happen. And you start looking at life like—very bad. You look back on the years and you say to yourself. "What did you accomplish?" Three kids, you raised them. But what did you do for yourself? Not a fucking thing. Just broke your ass and broke your ass to be in the same place where you started when you were a kid. I try not to think too much. I try very hard. 'Cause when you think a lot, you become very critical about everything.

And the president keeps bullshitting: "We've passed the bottom; we're coming up. He's fucked up, I think. He said that a couple of months ago, too. They don't know whether they're coming or going, but they figure they'll say a few good words, maybe they got some gullible people around. I think this whole fucking thing is a plan to fuck up the workingman, so they could have you by the balls and squeeze when they want. 'Cause they're making it real easy for everyone to get welfare and everything else. And what's unemployment now, \$104? Too high! You get that kinda money, who wants to work? Start living off the government, right? So you start leaning on them, and then they got you by the balls. That's what it looks like to me. Too many things is too easy, and too many others that make for independence look too hard. Nixon started the ball rolling to wipe out the unions, and it's working. Little by little, it's working. What we're going to end up with is a socialist government, that's the only way I can see. When the government's paying your bills, you can't say too much to them. So many people on welfare, so many on unemployment, they raise this and that, and after a while they have all the workingmen on friggin' welfare and unemployment.

NOT WORKING

Then they run the show. If the government says, "Shit," you're going to turn that color. Don't it feel that way to you? It scares the shit out of me. I think it's a plan to fuck up the people of the United States. Millions of people living off the government, and that's not counting back east, they're worse than us. That's a lot of people.

It's funny, you get all kinds of theories, you don't know what to believe. But I mean the thing that worries you about it is you won't be an independent human being no more. You always want to be independent.

I don't think it's the union's fault that there's no work. All right, they have a tendency to get greedy from making too much money. But that's what comes from competition. Today everybody wants your blood. Everyplace you go, everyone is competing. Competition has become very great. A lot of times I wonder if everything collapsed, if it would be the same like in the Depression years ago. People were a lot closer then. Today nobody is nice to each other, everybody hates each other. There's no compassion. Nobody could give a fuck. They say, "Fuck you," and "Fuck it." Bad feelings all the time. Nobody couldn't care about a person he meets in the street, nobody can give a shit about what's happening, because they're dying in a shell by themselves. It's very bad. I know it wasn't that way when I was a kid. You could walk down the street and you felt a fucking glow in your whole body. Today you just keep going. And I don't know why it's changed so much. A lot of time I second-guess myself. I say, "Maybe it's me, maybe I'm fucked up." Then I say, "No way." 'Cause when I was younger, if you were in trouble, somebody would help you out; you didn't have to worry about it. Always somebody to pick you up. I wish it was back in them days.

Today it's like, wow. Competition. It stinks; it's what's fucked up this whole world. Y'know, it was good on the ballfield or something like that, but they brought it down to regular everyday living. A lot of people become animals. I'd like to withdraw from everybody, but you can't because you got to live with the wife and kids. So you have to jump on the train with everybody else. What I try to do is jump on the train a little bit and then jump off. I've been on and off so long I feel like a fucking yo-yo. To compete all the time, anything you do. You can't relax. You always gotta be on guard, somebody's trying to do you in. And it's gotten worse the last few years, or maybe—I say to myself—maybe it was always there, and I was too young to see it. But I really don't think it was there. Even when you talk to someone, they're competing with you in the conversation. It's like terrible, you never feel relaxed. Me and my friends, we all feel the same way. Everything has changed.

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SCHEMES TO GET BY: "You Can't Live on Air, Right?"

The pinch of reduced income—or no income at all—affects nearly all jobless people. Few can support themselves on unemployment checks; others aren't eligible for benefits or have exhausted them and their savings, too. To meet the need, they invent innumerable survival schemes, ranging from the most common—the illegitimate claim for benefits—to mild forms of larceny, to esoteric small enterprises. Here are seven examples, legal and illegal, of how people get by.