

but this was the mid-1970s and it seemed that very few college-educated women my age (23) were home with their kids. I felt pressure to go out and be somebody.

So I got a job. But after six months of work, we analyzed our finances and discovered that I was making about 15 cents an hour after paying for child care and transportation—and we were not very happy. Quitting the job solved those problems, but I still wanted to labor. So I went back to school and came out with a graduate degree and baby number two.

That's when I made the discovery that changed my life. Being at home was liberating. It was fun. It allowed me time to learn to do different things.

Over the next few years I helped start a local crisis pregnancy center and began homeschooling one son. We had our third baby. And I began to write. My first attempts were pitiful, but I gradually learned the discipline and the craft.

The most important thing I had to learn, though, was that life is long, and that it's not necessary to accomplish everything at once. My husband Marvin once met a Harvard professor who pointed proudly to a shelf of books he had written, explaining he had no children. He couldn't do both, he said. Each potential child would have cost him a book, he estimated, and he preferred the books. I prefer my family.

And I'm convinced that it's because of my family that I'm able to write. I've received encouragement and learned technical things from my husband, who edits a magazine. And I've learned human things from my children. That's why I take the travails that come from writing at home with a shrug. It isn't always easy, but what's the alternative?

I write mostly on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, because that's when I take my four-year-old to Mother's Day Out. Marvin and I sometimes try to write while Ben is occupied at home, but that can be frustrating. Last spring while he was supposedly being pacified by Pinocchio, Ben decided he needed to kill the whale by urinating at

the screen. The result: a shorted-out TV.

My writing ranges from columns for *World* to children's books. Some days the words come fast, other days I fritter away time and keep checking my watch to see if it's time for lunch yet. To an outside observer my life probably seems chaotic. But it works for me.

In particular, I think homemaking and writing are complementary. Housework and childrearing are never finished, and it's sometimes hard to see

AFTER SIX MONTHS OF WORK,
WE DISCOVERED THAT I WAS
MAKING ABOUT 15 CENTS AN
HOUR AFTER PAYING FOR
CHILD CARE AND TRANS-
PORTATION—AND WE WERE
NOT VERY HAPPY.

progress. Not so with writing. Each book or article has a beginning and an end. Things get published; I don't have to revisit the same topic over and over again.

At the same time, writing carries hazards that my family work counteracts. When I write my stories I have a sense of Susie in charge of the universe. If there is a character I don't like, I wipe him out. If my heroine has a besetting sin, I write it away. I bend and shape my characters until they conform to my requirements. That's fun, but that's fiction. In real life we must muddle along, and take the needs of others into account as well as our own. My time caring for my family helps me understand and accept this. It reminds me that I'm not in charge, God is—and He knows what He's doing. That is a critical life's lesson we've tried to teach our children. And it's one I'm glad to regularly re-learn myself.

Susan Olasky lives and labors in Austin, Texas.

EMPLOYER TO SCHOOLS: YOU FLUNK

by Doug Glant

To an inveterate do-gooder and committed Rotarian (Seattle #4), this sounded like the perfect combination of civic activism and good business. Our Rotary club was sponsoring a youth corps, primarily to benefit minorities, by assisting them in getting that first entry-level job. I signed up post haste.

Our first young man showed up for a \$7.50 an hour (plus medical benefits) job in our recycling plant. He had a proclivity for being late to work, but we assumed we could ease him into punctuality and so began the training process—which included learning to operate a forklift. As he had gone through 11th grade, we assumed he could read English. Wrong. So our training was done in a Homeric oral fashion. We stressed repeatedly that safety was crucial, especially when operating machinery. This message was shaken off like a bad pitch, as he preferred playing bumper car to hauling metal. After two minor scrapes and one expensive fence knockdown we reluctantly concluded that this was not going to work. Our parting seemed pleasant enough, until we received some much less friendly communication from the local Equal Opportunity Board. We were eventually exonerated, but only several months and several thousand dollars later.

I'm a stubborn guy, though, so I decided to try another lad. Though this one was a graduate of one of Seattle's finest public high schools, he couldn't even begin to read or fill out the job application form. We coached him through the process with teeth-grinding tedium. On the job, he lasted 6 hours, remarking to the superintendent on his way out the door that working in a scrapyard was hard, much too hard to be paid a measly \$7.50 an hour (this in 1975).

But, Cervantes-style, I once more surged into the battle. By now the friendly folks at the Rotary Job Office recognized my voice. And this time they said they had just the guy for us.

His name was Bill. And he was thrilled to have a \$7.50/hour job doing almost anything. He got off to a fine start, arriving 10 minutes early for his first training session.

But, alas, he (another high school graduate) read like a 3rd grader. Only with much stroking and cajoling could he fill out forms and get through manuals. Neither his flesh nor his spirit was weak, however, and he continued to show up on time, give us an honest day's work, and generally comport himself productively. Twenty years later he is still with us. We helped him improve his communication skills (he now reads at the 9th grade level, though not often), and he has progressed to assistant foreman. Unfortunately, the next step up requires math and writing skills never taught to Bill, though once normal for 6th graders in this country. So he is stuck at a job that is decent, but much less than he could have achieved with a successful education.

The saddest part of this story is that 20 years after my little experiment, Seattle's inner-city schools are far worse even than they were. Many of the students they "graduate" aren't even remotely at Bill's level. And I'm not the do-gooder I once was. Ours is a relatively small family business, and we can't afford to provide our employees with what schools are supposed to. I know our local giants Boeing and Microsoft don't hire these functional illiterates. Whether anyone else does I can't say.

And the answer isn't more money. Our school system receives heavy taxpayer support, yet the more we've spent, the worse the results. Instead, the starting place must be a return to rigor and discipline in the schools. Get back to basics in the curriculum. Flunk a few folks. Fire a few bad teachers and principals. Bonus the good ones. Perhaps the solution must come from outside the entrenched public school system.

But as long as the teachers' unions and permissive liberals rule education, the decline will continue. And American industry will bear a large part of the pain.

Doug Glant is a Seattle-area businessman.

WHY I SERVE

by David V. Broome

Saturday, 0700 hours, Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland. The sun is just rising and beginning to take the cutting edge off the cold morning air. I think of how much I'd rather be in bed as the flight sergeant calls open ranks for guardmount inspection at the 459th Security Police Squadron. After inspection, a few announcements for this month's Unit Training Assembly are made and the day's schedule is given. Today's duties will include reviewing search-and-seizure procedures, listening to a lecture on the use of deadly force, and learning new handcuffing protocols.

Before I joined the Air Force, and even while I served my four years on active duty, this sort of "weekend warrior" reserve training seemed mundane, perhaps even a charade of real military work. But now that I don't wear my country's uniform every day, I better appreciate the value of all service in our armed forces.

In most republics, the call to military service was believed to reach, in principle if not always in practice, to every able-bodied man. America's Founders very much admired the citizen-soldier and the simple patriotism he represented, with Jefferson insisting that "every citizen should be a soldier." But these days, fewer and fewer Americans serve in the military—or gain the respect and understanding for its work that come with that experience.

Few of us in the 459th are likely to be a Patton or David Hackworth, nor have many of us faced death in combat as they did. But a large number of my colleagues do face danger during the week as civilian police officers. And most of us have seen friends go off to combat; we don't want to be on the sidelines during a future conflict, when other servicemen go into battle.

If you asked us why we're in the reserves, we'd probably have trouble answering. Few of us are here for the token money. Part of the motivation may be the camaraderie, which includes opportunities for foreign travel and, if you're not careful, shaving cream in your boots and other practical jokes. And of course, some of us actually enjoy sleeping in the woods.

But the primary motivation for our service is very simple. Most of us are reservists because we want to serve our country. Asking us why we serve is like asking somebody why he loves his mother. You're not likely to receive an eloquent reply, but the corny truth is powerful—we want to prove ourselves in the service of something much larger than ourselves.

One weekend a month, plus two additional weeks a year, I train in police procedures and in infantry tactics designed to defend an air base from ground assault. If I am ever called up in some future confrontation, I'll apply those skills against forces intending harm to American interests.

Compared to the time I put into a regular weekday job, my Air Force duty is a fairly modest undertaking. But humble as it is, my reserve work connects me to a great cause, and to good men. Facing the nation's bloodiest war, Lincoln spoke of the "mystic chords of memory" that stretch "from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land." Those mystic chords especially bind servicemen—from the humblest supply sergeant to the greatest warrior, up and down the ranks, and across time as well.

Staff Sgt. David V. Broome, U.S. Air Force Reserve, is a security policeman with the 459th Security Police Squadron at Andrews Air Force Base.

