

Careers *by Helen Gowan*

Some people are lucky and know what they want to grow up to be, fireman, nurse, marine, teacher, computer games creator. The rest of us are more governed by chance, and, as my parents opined, "Chance favors the prepared mind." It is because of this belief, they endeavored to expose their children to as many career options as were available in the early twentieth century. Whether we showed an interest or not, we learned the mechanics of daily life, laundry, cooking, house cleaning. I graduated from these tasks, for which we were not paid, to my first paid job, marking English papers for a high school English teacher, for which I got 25 cents for a set of 40 papers, (and an occasional lesson in grammar when I failed to catch an error. I sold imprinted greeting cards (I forget how much I gained from this, but I did not pursue it, as I ran out of family friends to solicit.)

My limited experience in cooking did not lead to my next job. At the age of 12, I took over the feeding of my family. I received the money allotted for feeding the family, shopped at local grocery stores, after school, provided supplies for breakfast and paper bag lunches, and had dinner on the table when my mother got home from work and my little brother came home from school. Sometimes my older brother and sister, who worked and went to college at night, would be home for dinner, too. I did not get paid for this, of course. We were all working to maintain the family unit.

My next real job was as a farmhand during the haying season from 1942-1945. I got paid for that, \$25 a month plus board and room. That netted 0 for the summers, since I had to pay train fare to Delaware County, and buy blue jeans and work boots, but my mother was spared the cost of feeding a growing girl for a couple of months and got a vacation from a teenage rebel.

So then I got into college, went to work as a reader in a clipping bureau, got married, got pregnant, began my first real career choice, raising a family, moved with my husband's job, got pregnant again and again and again, and when the kids all got into school full time, I got a job as a school bus driver, not really a career choice, but it paid better than the more prestigious school clerk, \$2.25 an hour instead of \$1.25, and besides I didn't have to wear office clothes, and was off school holidays and summers. Ideal!

Time passed. I practiced typing, passed the clerk-typist test, skipped the interview with the Motor Vehicle department, took the one with the welfare department, gave that up for the first library that offered me a job and kept that for almost twenty years. When the director offered me a trainee's position if I got into library school, I made my second career choice. I quit work, got myself back into college where I labored mightily to get my degree in four months, and was horrified to see our checking account balance was 3 dollars after I signed 4 tuition checks one day. Nobody broke an ankle so we made it okay. And that was my second career choice. I never regretted either one.