

counselor. I have good-looking hands when I polish my nails. I've been told I have a pleasant voice. And, as it is, it always turns out that my bosses are men, so really what would have been the difference, being a secretary, except for all those expensive skirts telling me that I was part of a real profession, telling me it wouldn't be so easy to quit and move on. I'm glad that no one I knew back then even knew any poets who could tell me how bad writers could wind up having it How easily I could have eased into that swivel chair, reading Danielle Steele through my breaks, never forgetting to unplug the coffee pot at five. At least now when I cry I usually have some idea why.

— Denise Duhamel

Williamsport PA

1969

I remember the morning me and Dave woke up out in the desert north of Barstow California a month after we got home from Vietnam. We had gone camping and had taken mescaline and were drinking Thunderbird wine. The joshua tree we camped by was burned to the ground and smoldering and the bottoms of our shoes were melted from walking on the embers and we had shot holes all through my truck and beat the crap out of each other and were all bloodied up and laughing our asses off, but it wasn't the same as the war, and nothing since then has been either.

FACTORY LIFE

I'd been up most of the previous night drinking to forget the job and when I came in the next morning I had a ferocious hangover that included the runs and after making three trips to the john the foreman said one more and it was a white slip for wasting time so I just shit my pants and stood there over my machine in it for the rest of the day but the foreman stayed away from me, and this made the remainder of the shift tolerable if not downright pleasant.

MAKING THUMBS

Yesterday I watched a guy catch his right index finger between a part he was pulling on the broach machine and the steel backing plate on the machine and he didn't even wince as 800 pounds of hydraulic pressure crushed the

finger and made it look like a thumb, only larger. He just walked over and made a crack about how the foreman could see him flipping him off better, then he passed out in front of me.

WORKING CLASS

Complaining to the subscriber service for the second time this week about my newspaper being thrown into the front yard sprinklers, I feel a power over someone's job that I don't like. Right after graduating from college the only job I could find was working as a janitor. The owner of a beauty salon that I cleaned used to hide pennies around the place and if I didn't find them all he would complain to my boss that I wasn't cleaning the place good enough. I've never forgotten that and I've tried to for years.

MY BITCH

German shepherd Nikki laps water out of my toilet, munches the marrow out of cow bones while lying in the dirt, licks her private parts clean in public places with a flourish, will kill instantly any rodent she can catch by snapping its neck, then leaving it, uneaten, on my back doorstep, and is more loyal and trusting of me than almost any human I've known who only eat off of plates, would be very uncomfortable about being naked in public, take showers at regular intervals, and attend church every Sunday.

— Gary Goude

Riverside CA

THE GRID

A friend of mine who owns three gas stations grunts his own tanker to the Buffalo terminal three maybe four times a week where he's ID'd at a checkpoint, then tails a cop chaperone to the end of the pipe where they all nurse at the same nipple — Chevron, Shell, Atlanta, Exxon — & there can't be gaps

when the stuff flows, so you'll see a sponge, say a blue sponge the size of a basketball, which means that now the flow is Citgo's, say, & maybe a dozen trucks will fill, & then a red ball