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Janet Ruthe Howell

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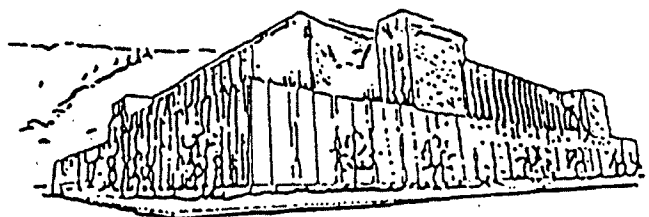
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Date

*October 1, 1997*

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# GENERATION X AT WORK

## Eight Portraits

by

Janet Ruthe Howell

B.A. Western Washington University, 1987

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

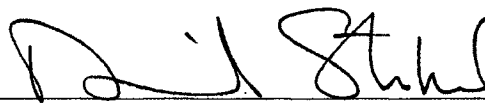
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"You'll never do as well as your parents did."

It's a phrase today's young workers have heard before—from the media and their parents. Their wages are falling. There's a growing income and wealth gap. They'll never see the money they pay into Social Security. There is no such thing as job security. So plays the news as Generation X drives to work. But how closely are they listening?

In Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, the novel that coined the label, lead characters Dag, Claire and Andy talk about the "Mc-Job: A low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service sector." Are Coupland's characters and their Hollywood counterparts in movies like "Reality Bites" and "Singles" representative of Generation X workers?

How does Generation X feel about work? What is their work ethic? What are their goals? Do they feel they can attain them? Are they lost and confused, angst-ridden slackers? Or are they just another generation of young workers, not unlike their post-war grandparents and baby-boomer parents, facing a challenging and changing economy?

In today's economy, few Xers will work 30 years for the same company and retire with a healthy company pension. For them, job security rests with being able to market their skills; retirement comfort with 401Ks and IRAs. In addition, the economy today offers little middle ground. There is good-paying, high-skill, high-education employment and there is poor-paying, low-skill, service employment. Jobs where a person with a high school diploma could make \$15 to \$25 dollars an hour are uncommon. More likely are jobs waiting tables, washing windows and taking deposits at the bank.

And in the jobs that are out there, wages are falling, especially for younger

workers. *American Demographics* magazine reported in its April, 1995 issue that between 1983 and 1992, the median weekly earnings of young men aged 16 to 24 working full time fell 9 percent. Women in the same age group over the same time period saw a decline of 4 percent.

To better their odds of finding a good-paying job, Xers are flocking to two- and four-year colleges. In October, 1992, 54 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds were enrolled in or had finished one or more years of college. That figure was up from 43 percent 10 years earlier. But the kicker is that lots of Xers aren't finishing school. As of 1993, 24 percent of 25-to-29-year-olds had bachelor's degrees, only two percentage points more than earned bachelor's degrees in 1982. (*American Demographics*, April, 1995)

So, with more Xers being able to claim "some college" on their resumes, but about the same number as past generations claiming degrees, they hit the job market—and the many cases, the economy hit back.

In their book, *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail ?*, authors Neil Howe and Bill Strauss reprint a Census Bureau finding that between 1973 and 1990, household income of U.S. families headed by a person under age 30 dropped 16 percent—from \$27,980 to \$23,600 (in 1990 dollars). What's more, Xers were the only group of three to experience a decline. Households headed by people between 30 and 64 saw a 4 percent increase, while households headed by someone 65 years old or older saw a 39 percent gain in income.

Added to this generational gap is a more general income and earnings gap in America today. A 1995 editorial by the *National Catholic Reporter* stated that, based on 1989 Federal Reserve figures, the highest-paid 20 percent of Americans earned 55 percent

of all after-tax income. The lowest-paid 20 percent earned only 5.7 percent of after-tax income, leaving 60 percent of Americans in the middle to share the leftover 40 percent.

And the gap kept growing in the early 1990s. In March 1996, the Los Angeles Times reported study findings that a typical American in the top 20 percent of the economic spectrum earned 10 times more in 1993 than someone in the bottom 20 percent—a ratio that had grown 12.4 percent wider since 1989.

But how seriously are Xers taking the news? Is it affecting their job satisfaction? A 1995 survey of workers by *American Demographics* reported that the "under-30 'Generation X' ... are more upbeat" about work than baby boomers. Xers were less negative about the effects of recent organizational changes on morale, were more likely to believe what management says and were more likely to feel committed to their company.

One reason for the difference in attitudes, wrote author Michael Reinemer, might be that "most Xers came of age in an era of economic, corporate, and workplace turmoil that relieved them of any assumptions about automatic job security and career advancement."

Conversely, a 1994 Roper poll of 18- to 29-year-olds found that only 21 percent rated their future as "very good,"—the lowest since 1975. This poll was refuted by columnist Jane Bryant Quinn who wrote that the future of Xers was brighter than they thought, although she did note that the benefits reaped by the generation would be felt less by the oldest of the generation. What Xers have going for them, she wrote, is 1) record high levels of education, 2) more training in skills, 3) a good work ethic (resulting from economic anxiety), 4) the advantage of youth when companies enter rehiring cycles, 5)

affordable homes due to falling mortgage costs, and 6) higher productivity.

So, working happy or working scared? Which is it? In the following interviews, eight Xers between 25 and 31 years old share their work stories, describe what they do, why they do it and what they hope for the future.

Of the eight, three are single, three are married and two are divorced. Three have children—two have infants under one year old and one has a 2-year-old and a 6-year-old. Half of them own their homes, half belong to unions and half come from homes broken by divorce. Only one is a college graduate, but five others have "some college." They live in western Washington and work in Seattle or Tacoma.

They are: Chris Rimple, a software engineer/project manager, 31 and almost divorced, who quit his job and is considering changing his career; Nalani Linder, an administrative assistant, 26 and married with a new baby; Tony Painter, a waiter, 26 and single, who has his own business promoting concerts; Stephanie Ambauen, a waitress, 27 and nearly engaged, who also has been a mortgage broker (and who has a chronic medical condition requiring comprehensive, affordable health insurance); Boyd Wolfe, a paper mill laborer, 28 and divorced with two children; Becky Little, a park maintenance worker, 31, married and trying to become a mother; Amy Johnson, a special education teacher, 25 and single; and Boyd Miller, a retail camera store manager, 29 and married with a new baby, who used to have his own jewelry repair business. They all work full time and live on their own.

In reading their stories, you'll hear things like, "I want my kids to have it better than I did," which leads you to think they're no different from their parents and



grandparents. But their goals for their kids are different. "Better" for Chris Rimple means a parent (be it mom or dad) and not a key tied to a shoestring necklace, opens the front door after school. And "better" for Boyd Wolfe means his kids learn from his mistakes and don't drink, do drugs and party like he did.

Things are different for these Xers. Some jobs are plentiful—Tony and Stephanie are confident they'll always be able to find a job waiting tables. Some jobs are scarce—Boyd Wolfe knows he's lucky to have a good-paying manufacturing job.

Boyd Miller knows that mortgage rates are lower than in the past. But he and his wife also know that homes are more expensive. In "13th Gen," Howe and Strauss wrote, "In the early '70s, for a typical married couple under age thirty, the after-tax cost of owning a first home consumed just 12 percent of income. Following the feverish real estate market of the '80s, and despite the rush of dual-income young households, the after-tax cost of owning the same home has risen to 29 percent of income."

These eight Xers don't identify with Hollywood's description of their generation, but they do feel they're living in a changed world. Some of the changes are good. Stephanie Ambauen likes the fact that "Society isn't about a bunch of white people puttin' on their black and navy suits and wearing their white shirts and going to work." And Amy Johnson thinks more people in her generation are letting their heart lead them into work, rather than doing what tradition demands.

But they know that whatever they do, more and more of their success in life depends on themselves. They're not counting on the government or a "good" company to provide their security. The rules have changed, but they're still in the game.

## **CHRIS RIMPLE PROFILE**

Chris Rimple, 31, owns his own home in the rural community of Duvall, Washington where he is a volunteer firefighter. He is also an avid skydiver, regularly driving two hours south to his favorite drop zone near Mt. Rainier. Chris was separated from his wife and nearing divorce when we met. With the separation came a dissatisfaction with life which caused his work as a project manager for a software firm to suffer. He quit his job four days before we talked.

Thanks to some stock he owns, Chris can afford to be off work for several years, although he plans to be working again within six months. His plans are to go skydiving in Arizona for a couple months while he thinks about his next career move. Becoming a paramedic, skydiving for a living or going back to the computer industry are all career options, with the last being the one he came back to time and again while we talked.

He had been with the software firm for six years after starting as a contract/temporary employee testing software. His last job with the company was in the games group, redesigning a game for Windows, a dream job for him.

When I came to the games group a year ago, the first thing I said was, 'They're going to pay me to make computer games? What kind of a joke is this?' Since I was 12 years old I wanted to get paid to make computer games. In my wildest dreams as a teenager I could never have imagined that I would end up being paid to do that. And it was very, very fun for the first six months.

I was responsible for the design of the user interface for the product. I figured out the layout of the menus, the windows, the dialogues, what controls were needed. Basically, the look and feel of the product was my responsibility. I was free to change everything that I wanted to. And my years of experience with the company, my background in usability studies and having worked on other applications in a design capacity, just gave me the right skills to do this job. Some people would suspect you need a degree in industrial design or you need a degree in usability or art or things like that to do what I did. But, in fact, familiarity with existing software is one of the most important things because you're looking for standards that you can leverage, things that make it easier for the user. It's all about innovation through conformity, which is a really weird way to say it, but basically that's the idea.

They finished the project about five weeks before Chris left the company. He had been slated to work on another game, a two-year project, but the offer fell through when his performance slipped.

I already knew what my next project would be if I stayed there, another game. And actually I was very excited about it. But some things were happening personally that were

causing me to re-think what I was doing. My wife and I separated April of '96, and after we separated, I found myself really de-focused at work, really de-focused around the house. I wasn't paying bills. I wasn't taking care of things. I wasn't hanging out with the same friends that I had been. I was spending a lot of time just online, on the Web. I was wasting a lot of hours. And it definitely affected my work performance and I recognized that, but I couldn't seem to pull myself out of it. Finally it reached a point where my boss really wasn't too happy with how things were going. We got the product out, but my participation in the last couple of months had not been real strong. I was effectively given the choice, I could go to another group or something, but I couldn't stay there. Which in a way was very disappointing because that two-year project was something I really, really, really wanted to do.

I blame no one but myself. I screwed it up. I had the opportunity to have pretty much the best job in the world, working on that next project, and didn't focus. So I did search for other jobs in the company for about three or four weeks and I didn't find anything real interesting. As it got closer and closer to my projected end date, where I either needed to find another job in the company or I was going to leave, I became more and more comfortable with the idea of leaving and finally decided that that's what I was going to do.

I'm 30 years old. I have no children. I have the financial means to not work for at least three years. And if I were to cut back some, I could probably stretch it to five. But I don't want to go that long without working. For me, the decisions are more, do I stay with the computer industry? Because I started with computers when I was 12 and I went straight out of high school into the work force. I don't have a degree. Am I just tired of that? Do I need to get away from computers for a while? I'm a volunteer firefighter and I've given some consideration over the last year or two to changing careers sometimes in the future to become a paramedic. Now I have the opportunity to do it tomorrow if I feel like it.

Chris is considering becoming a paramedic because he's good at crisis situations, something that didn't come up much in his last job.

If there's one thing that I learned about myself and that my manager also recognized about me, I work better in crisis management situations. He felt it was very appropriate that I'm a volunteer firefighter because when a problem comes up, I wrap myself around it. I rally the troops. I get people together. We solve the problem. I come up with a solution that's gonna fix it for good. I fix it. It's done. And five hours later I'm ready for the next problem. But if I have to maintain my focus on a project that lasts two or three years, it's much more difficult for me to see where I'm headed. I know where I want to get to, but it's hard to keep myself motivated for that period of time.

A paramedic on the other hand, what you do changes hour to hour and the thing I love most about volunteer firefighting is going to car accidents, which sounds gross. It's not the blood. I don't know exactly how to explain this. A police officer friend of mine described it like this once. It's like being at the center of a hurricane and everybody around you is

being blown down and you're the only person standing and you have the ability to reach out and help them. I cannot describe the satisfaction I received the first time I did live CPR to someone and got their heart started again. That's what appeals to me about becoming a paramedic. There's an immediacy of it. There's an instant gratification. You know right away if you've saved somebody's life or not.

In high school, Chris wanted to be a police officer. However, he had to be 21 before he could start testing for the job so his first job out of high school was in private security, with some computer consulting on the side. In 1986, when he was 20, he started taking law enforcement classes at college, but dropped out after two semesters because he missed the money he had been making working full time. By age 22, he still hadn't gotten on with a police department, but he was making close to \$20 an hour doing contract computer work. What had started as a hobby when he was a teenager had become a lucrative career.

In high school, I was a computer nerd. I had long hair. I had a beard and a mustache. I grew up quite poor and really didn't fit into most of the cliques in high school. And I spent all of my time on the computer. I got my modem when I was 16 and that opened up the world to meeting other people who had modems. Well, guess who had modems in 1982? Thirty-five-year-old engineers. So I spent the majority of high school years hanging out with people who were 35 and were predominately liberal and very technical. That's how I got the majority of my computer training, going to their house and using their newest computer. And I relish the fact that that happened to me because it turned into a very valuable career.

It's a very comfortable feeling knowing that my skills are in very high demand, that I can get a job without really trying. It's not like when I was in my early 20s and I had to fight to get positions because I didn't have the necessary work experience to just go and say, 'I'm the right person for this job. You want to give it to me.' Now I can do that. In a way, it's odd being part of Generation X because I am an untraditional story. I have no college related to computers at all.

[And] I have no interest whatsoever in being able to say that I have a bachelor's degree. I have many, many friends that have bachelor's degrees that will never, ever have a job in the specialty in which they trained. My wife is a good example of that. Her degree's in art history. She works for an insurance company and she'll never have a job related to her degree. Now maybe she had fun, but, to me, that was a four year waste of time. That's why I never went to college. I already had the skills. I had better computer skills by the time I was 20 than what they could offer me going to a college and learning on mainframes. So why should I go to college?

Now that's not what I recommend for other people and it's not what I'm going to recommend to my children because having a degree does open certain doors for you that I've had a harder time pushing through. Now I'm in a position where my work experience

outweighs any degree. But in my earlier years, trying to break into contract jobs, a degree would have made a difference. Any degree. It doesn't matter what you have it in, really. Just the proof that you were willing to work for four years to get something is important to some employers. I think it's becoming less important over time. They would much prefer that you could come in and hit the job running, which is what I can do. But it takes time to build up that experience. It takes time to get that on-the-job training, so to speak. And if you're 22, 23, 24 you just don't have it.

To give his future children that edge, Chris is planning to pay their college costs regardless of whether they pick a "cash" degree like engineering or a degree in a field they love, but in which they might not be able to find a job.

If that's what they want to do, then that's what they want to do. If I have to pay for it, I'll pay for it because I didn't have any of that from my parents. In a way, I see a tenet of the whole Generation X concept is that I want better for my children than what I had. That includes things like college funding because I had none. That includes a good example of what home life should be like. That includes a rich, active lifestyle, not coming home as a latch-key kid and turning on the television set. From the time I was six years old onward, I came home alone. I came home to an empty house a lot of times because both of my parents were working.

That doesn't mean that I'm after the almighty dollar, that I'm going to slave away so that my wife could stay home and be with the children or so that they never have to want for material things. That's not the goal. To me, a rich lifestyle for the children means that as a family we do a lot of things together, that I continue to be a very close friend to my children, even into their teenage years when it's pretty rare for teenagers to be friends with their parents. That's what's important to me. I can do without lots and lots of cash, as long as I'm happy and my kids are happy and my wife's happy, whoever that may be.

Chris' parents were separated off and on for two years before they divorced when he was 14. He has two older half brothers from his mother's first marriage and a younger full brother. His family life was marked by economic unsteadiness and the drug use of his parents.

All sorts of drugs. Predominately marijuana because it's cheap—at least it was then—but they tried a wide variety of drugs. They never let us use them, the children. But the running joke around the house was: Is that a pan of kids' brownies or is that a pan of hash brownies? They weren't needle users, but they ingested plenty of things—speed, cocaine, MBA, hash, dime bags. You name it, I was around all this stuff. Grew up in the drug culture, basically. Not the ghetto drug culture. And certainly not the affluent drug culture.

My father had worked for Boeing until '72 when they had the big layoffs and he was one of the 30,000 or 40,000 people that got laid off. He was an engineer. And then he had a variety of jobs with the local high tech companies over the years. My mom was effectively

unskilled, manual labor, she did housecleaning. But Dad never made quite enough for Mom not to work, and so when I went to kindergarten and then on up through elementary school, my younger brother and I were coming home every day alone.

My parents became sort of the local community connection for marijuana. We had a green house in the basement, big six-foot beds and eight-foot pot plants. It was just around. It was pervasive. I don't remember the exact year, but probably when I was about eight, my mother got arrested for possession. The judge suspended her sentence or gave her two years of probation. The end result was she spent a couple of days in jail and then she was out. But he made it very clear that if she ever got caught again, she'd lose her kids. So she stopped selling. She stopped growing. She stopped doing anything except using a little bit.

I have to say this much about my parents, they simply would not let the kids around the stuff. They were very good about that. They wouldn't let us smoke cigarettes. They wouldn't let us drink. They wouldn't let us do any drugs. And when I hit my early teenage years, of course you rebel against what your parents represent, so I was Mr. Clean. And to this day, I don't drink alcohol. I don't smoke. I've used marijuana once in my life, when I was 17 and that was with a friend. I didn't enjoy it and I've never done it since and I've never used any other drugs. And as weird as it sounds, I almost value the fact that my parents were addicted to drugs because it kept me from doing it myself. I looked at them. I looked at the way their life became as the years went by and finances got harder and harder and their relationship deteriorated more and more. They were fighting constantly toward the end. And I just said to myself, 'This is not what I want.'

What Chris wants is to work at a job he enjoys.

When I was younger, work meant money. Work was what you had to do to have the cash that you wanted to be able to do the things you really wanted to do. When I got to [the software firm], work meant fun. And it really was fun. Now I don't know what work means because I'm looking for it to be fun again, but I'm not sure what's going to be fun. I'm not sure that I can find fun. And I may not have a choice but to work for money again because I've come to expect a certain lifestyle. Which is not to say that I live extravagantly. I drive a '71 Chevy Blazer. I don't live extravagantly.

Would I do a job if I really hated it? No. I'd quit and go find something I liked. I think that over time the definition of work has changed from make money to support your family to one of do what you like and find a way to make money doing it.

In his last job, Chris liked the creative aspects of designing the game interface. He also enjoyed being solely responsible for parts of the project, "When somebody says to me, 'Just take care of it. I trust you.' Those are the words that I love to hear more than anything else."

Another thing he likes is solving technical problems, something he got away from

in the game project.

I really enjoy the technical aspects of my job, even the stupidest, simplest things. Like somebody comes to me and says, 'My dang machine won't boot.' There was one woman in particular, a close friend of mine who was just down the hall. She was in marketing. Very smart woman, knew the product line well. Didn't know a lot about configuring her machine. Every time she'd get a new game that she needed to test, she could never get it running right on her machine and I'd be in there fixing it for her. And surprisingly enough, even simple, little technical problems like that, once you do it, there's a great sense of satisfaction that I solved the problem. Being a project manager doesn't have a lot of technology. And so I think perhaps the move into project management pushed me into a less satisfying role because I was away from the technical.

More than anything else, what's going to draw me to a job is do I think it's fun. It's how I feel about the company. How I feel about the people I'll be working with. How I feel about the job, the duties themselves. What is the job? What will I be doing? Those are the key elements right there: the business, the people and what I'd be doing in it.

The right elements can be found in any number of companies and Chris believes it's to his advantage to change companies a couple times during his career.

In the computer industry, it's to your advantage to move around once in a while. A project manager in an average software company will probably change companies once every five years, maybe more, maybe less. But in five years you can work on most of the projects that a given company does. Your average software company probably has less than 300 employees. They don't have that many different projects. A lot of companies are focused in a particular area. They are a game company or a utility program company. There's so many cool things going on in computer technology that frankly it's to my advantage to move around. It's to my advantage to go learn some new stuff. To go get some additional job skills in other areas.

If I was a manual laborer, building cars, I'd want to stay with one company. I'd want to build up my tenure. It's a union shop. I wouldn't want to leave—ever. But there's no union for my business. You make whatever you can justify, what the market will bear. Whatever I convince people I'm worth is how much I'm going to make. And I convince them that I'm worth more by showing that I have a broad variety of experience, that I'm well rounded. That I can come in and take over any kind of project and lead it to success. So it's to my advantage to move around.

Besides the job itself, salary is the next most important thing to Chris. Benefits play a small role because Chris is planning on taking care of himself.

I know that if I work for a company that has no 401K plan, big deal. I can just take my own money and stuff it in the bank. They're not matching it, but I could take my money

and invest it in mutual funds or stocks or other things that my financial analyst is much smarter about than I am. And it will get a return. It will grow over time. So, I just don't think of 401K or retirement plans as a benefit that particularly concerns me right now. If I had to weigh them, medical, dental, vision is much more important to me than retirement plans. And right now, salary is probably more important than either one.

Also, I could work until I was 65 or later because, until my brain goes soft, this is an industry in which I can continue to contribute. The fact that I'm physically slow, that I'm 75 and can't run down the hallway quite as easily anymore doesn't matter. It's not a physical labor job. It's all what I know and how I can apply it. So the likelihood is that if I stay with computers, I'll either work until I have enough money to feel like I want to retire and then I'll just go play the rest of my life. Or I'll just keep working. Why stop?

If I was rich, if I won the lottery tomorrow, I'd retire. If money was no object, I'd stop working. But I'd want to do something to feel like I was accomplishing in my life because I have no religious beliefs whatsoever. I'm a complete atheist. Which means when I die, I'm going nowhere except into the ground. And I'm going to make as much out of this life as I can. I'm going to do as many things as I can before I'm gone because I will not get a second chance. So if I work the rest of my life, it doesn't really feel like work. It feels like fun.

Where Chris is looking for a second chance is in love and marriage. His future plans include, hopefully, a wife and children.

Five years from now, I hope that I have at least met the person that will be my wife. If I don't, I'll survive. But it would be nice to meet that person. Thinking about children in the next year or two after that. Career-wise, probably working with computers, office-type environment. Have my weekends free to be with my family and my friends, skydiving, whatever. Frankly, I think five years from now I'll be in a very similar environment to what I have been. The only difference is I probably won't be working as many 12-hour days. I probably won't be spending quite as much time at the office as I have been.

My assumption is that when I marry again, if I marry again, that it would be to someone who has a career. Possibly not as successful as my own. It's not a big deal to me. But by the age of 35, 36, 37, when it's children time, if she wants to stay home with the kids, I would like to make enough for that to be possible. If she makes more than me, I'll stay home with the kids. Frankly I think that would be totally cool and I don't use those words very often. But I think it would be wonderful to stay home and raise my children and watch them grow up.

Chris bought his house (financing the down payment by selling of some of his stock) because his wife's mother had moved in with them and they needed more room. It's a decision he has some regrets about now.



Somewhere along the way, growing up, I was given the idea that it's better to own than to rent. And long term, I think the house would have been a good investment for me because by moving out here, I got involved in volunteer firefighting which may turn into a career as a paramedic. I got involved in community politics and have just had a lot of rewarding experiences by being out here. Was it financially sound? Yes and no. Looking back, if I had to do it over again, I might not buy because the stock would be worth more to me in the long run than making the down payment. So if I had to do it over again, I probably wouldn't buy. I'd rent.

This is the way I look at it. I've been here three years and I'm now in a position where I may change careers. I may move. I may go away for an extended period of time. Any one of those things could result in my selling this house with only three years of equity in it. That sucks. That's dumb. That's bad. If I hadn't bought the house, if I had saved the stock, I'd have been better off. Or I need to sit on the house. I need to maintain it and keep making those payments until I've got about ten years of equity in it. Then it would be worth selling. But right now, there's just not enough equity. And the value of the house hasn't gone up enough over what I paid for it over three years to make it profitable to sell it. It's not a good investment if I sell it right now.

What to do with his house was just one of Chris' considerations when he decided to quit his job. As the date approached to make his final decision, he was visited by memories of his father's layoff and his early days as an independent contractor.

My father was laid off in '72 from Boeing and that was very tough time for us financially. But keep in mind that in 1972 I was six years old. So the impact to me was macaroni and cheese for dinner or other staples of the modern cheap economy.

I've never really been laid off, per se. I can remember at the ends of contract jobs in my early 20s, moments of fear. Wondering, okay, I'm getting my last paycheck in a few days and then how the hell am I gonna pay the bills after that? When I was considering leaving [the software firm], that fear jumped into my head again. But fortunately it didn't last long because I reminded myself, 'Well, sell a few shares of stock and you can live for a month or two.'

I also know that I could get another job in under four weeks. As soon as the word got out that I was available, I was getting calls from recruiters in other companies. Before I'd left [the software firm], my friends in other companies had already mentioned it to their recruiters and they were asking for my resume. That's a security. That's a sense of knowing that I have a job without having a job. Frankly, I feel sorry for the majority of Americans who are not in my position. I remember what it was like in my early 20s when I didn't have that level of security, when I couldn't just run out and get another job. It's a very scary place to be and I wouldn't want to be there right now. If I didn't have the stock, I'd absolutely be out job hunting today instead of talking to you 'cause I want to know that I have an income stream. I don't care so much where it comes from as I do just to know

that my bills are going to be paid.

Some of the skills that give Chris his sense of security are directly related to his knowledge of computers. But he also values his more basic working strengths.

I have an attitude of soaking up information. I want to learn new stuff. I want to be at the front edge. I like it there. I'm comfortable there. Now, that's key. Ten years from now, that's probably still key. Twenty years it's hard to tell. It's hard to say 20 years down the road when there's a computer in every house and there's fiber optic and all that other stuff, will the technology still be important or will psychologists become real important 'cause we're all freaked out 'cause we're in front of a computer all day long and we have no social skills anymore. It's hard to know 20 years down the road what careers are going to be the best ones. But I absolutely believe that I have the necessary job skills to survive in this marketplace and to change with the marketplace.

I have good leadership skills. I have very good communication skills. I think that is an area where we're seeing a change over time that really bugs the heck out of me. People who don't speak well, don't write well. There's an line, age-wise, you can see it. When I run into people, 23 years old, they talk in an unprofessional manner. They don't present themselves very well. Long term, that's going to hurt them very badly. Communication, especially in this industry, is key. They have to be able to communicate. They have to be able to lead meetings. They have to be able to stand up in front of people and present. They have to be able to write well, be it papers, marketing plans, specifications for a piece of software, piece of code. They need to be able to sit down and interact with people and say your idea sucks, but do it in a nice way.

Besides communication, the difficulty Chris has staying enthusiastic and motivated about long-term projects is another working weakness he relates to his generation.

Short-term focus. Short-term attention span you might call it. You know, the TV generation. I watched a lot of TV when I was a kid and I think that long term that's hurt me. I have difficulty with long-term projects because they don't stay exciting to me. Some people would say that I procrastinate a lot. I think it's less that I put off the things I don't enjoy and more so that I start a lot of things and then over time I don't enjoy them as much, so I move to things that I enjoy more.

Chris says business in general suffers from short-term focus, too. He believes the economy would be healthier if people were put ahead of short-term profits.

It just seems like if we spent more money on our people, if we took a 50-year-old man who doesn't have any technology experience and who is afraid to use computers, and we gave him the necessary retraining, he'd be a viable worker for 15 years. Without that necessary training, what is he? A guy working at McDonalds. He's not generating anything really valuable to the economy. He's not bringing in a lot of taxes so the roads are getting fixed even though he still uses them. So in concept he's not paying for his share of the

roads. He's not paying for his share of environmental protection. And I don't mean to put him down. It's not his fault that the industry he was in disappeared and that he doesn't have the job skills for today's marketplace. If we gave a damn about people, we'd retrain him to fit into today's marketplace.

A high-educated, well-paid work force could turn this country around and we're only going to get that if we invest in the people. And we're not investing in the people. We're sabotaging the people. We're taking money away from education. We're talking about educational reform because we're not happy with the way our children are being educated. Well, guess why we're not happy with it? 'Cause we never cared about it for 30 years and now they're not educated. I didn't learn what I know about computers in school. I learned it on my own. If I hadn't learned it on my own, I'd probably be a waiter or a cop or a fireman or something. But I'd be a blue-collar person because I had essentially no other skills coming out of high school and I didn't go to college because I didn't have the financial means to do it. So I'd be just like anybody else who's in a dying industry. I'd have very little future potential because I relied on the education system in this country to teach me job skills. And we don't do that today. And we need to do that.

Our interview was winding down when Chris was beeped by the fire department. There was a car accident with injuries. Within 60 seconds, we were both out the door and he was off to try out a career option.

## **NALANI LINDER PROFILE**

Nalani Linder, 26, is an administrative assistant for a non-profit, social services agency that offers "all sorts of family-oriented, good, healthy child-rearing-type services" such as in-house care for abused children and parenting and family classes.

She is newly married with a daughter born in early summer, 1996. She went back to work three weeks after the birth, slowly building up to full time by the time Abby was two months old. She now commutes to her office in Seattle, Washington, Monday through Thursday and works at home on Friday.

Nalani's husband Mark, 32, is an accountant for a chain of restaurants. They met when Nalani waitressed for the restaurant chain in the early '90s. They live in an older, upscale area of Tacoma in a house Nalani inherited from her father.

Nalani makes about \$24,000 per year, which is about \$5,000 more than a comparable non-profit job in Tacoma, but still lower than the income of friends who work at for-profit businesses. She took the job even though it meant setting aside her schooling one semester away from a bachelor's degree in sociology. Her goal is to become a social worker and the job she has now is fulfilling her passion for helping others.

I work for a three-year, granted initiative. It is a private/public/tribal initiative trying to reform the foster care system in Washington State. It's a national initiative with ten sites nationally and Washington State's one of them. I'm the administrative assistant for the state-wide initiative. I work directly with the director and try to choreograph all the things going on in this state-wide behemoth.

That means lots of meeting and I do all the phone calling for the meetings. I make sure everyone gets the copies they need and gets the books read that they need to have read. And I answer questions as people come in and say, 'This is a really weird thing and this sounds very complicated, what is it?' I try to explain what it is and route people to different folks. It's starting to get national interest, which is exciting. We just hired on a communications person so I don't have to be the PR person anymore, thank heavens. I write the memos. I type the letters. It's administrative assistant work and all that entails--phones, computer stuff, that kind of thing.

I was going to PLU [Pacific Lutheran University] at the time and I was looking for a brainless, part-time job. I saw an ad in the paper for a receptionist for the [social service agency] in Tacoma. It was part time, late afternoons. I had classes in the morning. I thought, 'Perfect.' I applied. They said, "Sorry," I was overqualified and would I be interested in applying for this job up in Seattle. I really wasn't, but obviously I took it. I heard more about it and realized it would be fascinating, educational and a good step. I'm

one semester away from my B.A. and I was planning to be done with my Master's [in social work] right now. So realizing that I would have to seriously side-step my educational goals, I thought it would have to be a job that profoundly interested me and would be substantially career-related work for me.

I worked for [a national charitable and volunteer organization] prior to this for about a year and a half. I was their Young Leaders coordinator. The Young Leaders are high-school students who do volunteer projects and try to encourage other students in their high school to do volunteer projects. I was one of those high-school students when I was a senior, the first year it started. And so six, seven years later, I thought it would be really cool to coordinate it for a little while. That was part time while I went to PLU. It actually started as a work-study job and came into its own.

Dotted throughout all this is a very long-standing time as a food server. I started in '88, my senior year. For three or four years, I did it full time. Well, food service, 30 [hours per week], but pretty much your life. Although you spend a little more of your life sleeping and cavorting when you're a server. Lots of cash and weird hours sort of lends itself to that kind of lifestyle.

And I have worked for for-profit. I worked for [a shipping company] up in Seattle doing the documentation for getting the seafood from Alaska to Japan. That was a summer job. That paid insane amounts of money. It was my summer between my sophomore and junior year in college and I think I was making \$18 an hour. Doing something I hated. I just hated it. That was so stressful. But it paid a whole lot of money. I saw paychecks huger than anything I'd ever comprehended. I thought, 'People make this much money.' I was just floored.

Nalani was raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools. She credits her interest in social work to her upbringing.

I think it's intertwined with my faith and that started from very, very young. I really dug the nuns at St. Pat's [school] who taught us about going and doing well to your neighbor. For several years, through junior high and all of high school, Mother Teresa was my absolute hero. (Not that she's fallen off that pedestal or anything.)

I remember when I turned 14. You had to be 14 years old to start volunteering at the hospital as a candy striper. That was my first volunteer job. I showed up on my 14th birthday, ready to work. I stayed there for four years and saw that there's actually different jobs out there where you could be paid for doing the kind of stuff that I enjoy doing so much, which is helping other people.

As Nalani found out in a different job, however, not every variety of social work appeals to her.

I worked [trying] to place adults who had various challenges in their life into jobs. Mental, emotional, not really developmental, not really physically disabled folks. There was one fellow who had a very strong phobia about crossing the [Narrow's] bridge. He was an electrician and made \$15, \$16 an hour and his company was based in Purdy. And they moved to Tacoma. So he was out of a job because he would not—would not, could not—cross the bridge. And so I was trying to help him find an electrician job over there. That kind of thing. I thought I would like all kinds of social work. I don't like all kinds. I don't know anyone who does. That wasn't a particularly good fit for me.

As much as I really enjoy the field I'm in, I don't look at any one particular job of any of the colleagues, the people that I'm surrounded with, and say, 'That would be ideal.' I think the closest is my director's. What she is is an administrator, just like any administrator in any field. This one just happens to be social work. So it's business administration with a very touchy-feely aspect to it. Where, when things get really heated, everyone stops and says, 'Remember, we're doing this for the kids.' Rather than the bottom line being money, the bottom line here is kids.

Nalani started college in Salem, Oregon. When her father died in 1991, she came back to Tacoma. She took some time away from school to "get a grip on life"—that's when she was waitressing full time. Then she went back to college, first at community college, then to Pacific Lutheran University. For a while now college has been on hold, but she plans to finish her bachelor's degree and go on for a master's degree in social work.

I think college is extraordinarily useful. I don't think I used it to my full potential. I think that I wasn't ready. Going to Bellermine [Preparatory School], and especially working for the college counselor as a work-study job, there was just no question that you go off to university. If I had to do it over again, I think I would have hung out and grown up a little bit because I think college is useful, not just for academics, but for social growth and maturity, and I think it's really wasted on a lot of 18 year olds. But absolutely essential for intellectual growth, I think. Being able to think critically and all those other things we see in the college guide books.

That would be for me. College in general, I've got a lot more liberal view. I know it's not for everybody, that post-high-school work isn't for everybody. I'm all for anyone who wants to go into other forms of adult life. Take on vocational school or whatever.

Generation X is one of the most college-bound generations ever. However, enrolling doesn't equal graduating, and despite the high enrollment, Xers graduate at about the same rate as other generations.

I'm currently one of those statistics that hasn't done it yet for whatever reason. Now I'm going to start using Gen X slogans, but I think we become a little bit disillusioned at what college means. We're not as focused. And I hate to talk for a generation. I'm not talking

for a generation. I think that for me and a lot of my close friends, we didn't share the same traditional view of, 'One must go to college and graduate just for the sake of doing so.' Even coming from the very traditional background of Bellermine where it's indoctrinated in you that this is what you must do simply because that's what's done. It took until about sophomore year to kind of snap out of it and say, 'Okay. I'm not enjoying this and I don't necessarily have to keep plodding down this road if I don't enjoy it.' I think that's one of the defining marks of what this Generation X mentality's all about. Well maybe that's a defining mark for young people. That you say, "We don't have to do this the way it's been done in the past."

Passion is a big part of Nalani's work. She gets great deal of satisfaction from working toward a goal she believes in.

Work, for me, is part intellectual stimulation, part communication with all sorts of folks. It's an ongoing education in both the tangible and the abstract, and a little bit of mission. I think that just comes from my faith. I think we were put on this Earth to do something and I don't think I've got enough time to work in a high-paying job and go out and volunteer so I figured I'd just meld it all in one.

I need some challenge and increasing challenge as I meet it. And, again, a sense of purpose, a sense of meaning to me. What else do I need from work to be happy? It sounds a little silly, but I also need some pats on the back from people I work with. That's not silly. Some basic appreciation. For people to acknowledge, 'Yes. The whole machine's working better because you're part of it.'

I think some of the most meaningful are the tangible items that I see happening through the whole initiative of which I know that I'm a big part. It's a lot more satisfying to me to hear that we have placed 125 kids, who have been languishing in foster care for five years and longer, in permanent homes in the past 18 months. That's a lot more meaningful than my boss saying, 'Hey. Great memo yesterday.'

But a passionate nature is sometimes a curse because she's just as passionate about Mark and Abby and balancing work and family is difficult. "I think the most frustrating part is juggling because I have these two people who are so integral to my whole being. And yet I have a job that I love so much. It's a really tough juggling act."

Nalani says if she hadn't had a house and family in Tacoma, she would probably have moved within blocks of her job and made it the hub of her life. As it is she says she's lucky to have an "extraordinarily understanding" husband and a job with people focused on caring for children, which makes them very understanding when she needs to bring Abby to work or take time off.

Quitting her job is also an option. Since Nalani and Mark don't have house

payments, they could probably afford for her to stay home with Abby. But Nalani doesn't want to quit, despite what a friend said to her.

I was actually confronted by a friend of mine. She and her husband are about the same ages as Mark and I, but they make a few thousand dollars each more than we do and have no children. And she had made a comment to the effect of, 'Well, if you really loved your baby, you'd be staying home because it's obviously not going to be a hardship.' That and just these life changes have made me sit and think, could we do this? Mark makes a few thousand dollars more than I do, not a whole lot more annually. Could we scrimp and save? Yeah, we could. If I really, really wanted to, we could take out a home equity loan and live very frugally off that. Or, God forbid, we could sell our house and move into a house that most normal 20 and 30 year olds live in.

But I don't want to do that. I don't want to stop working. My friends at work laugh at me because I said one morning, 'If I win the lottery, the first thing I'm going to do is buy [the agency] some really good quality coffee.' And they looked at me and said, 'You know, quitting should be at the top of your list.' And it's not. If I win the lottery, I would hire a driver to drive me to work so I could sleep. But I love my job.

I think [my family is] helping me re-prioritize what it is to work because I can be so passionate. I mean, there's so many different ways to look at work. I have friends who see a job as just a job and live for the weekends. That's not me. And so I'm trying to re-evaluate what it is to have really quality work time and really quality family time. And does that sap every last ounce of energy out of a human soul, if one tries to do all that? They're helping me realize that I do need a balance. And if I need to tip the scales one way, then it better be towards family.

When she found out a grandchild was on the way, Nalani's mother quit her job and now watches Abby on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. On Monday, Mark works at home in the morning and takes Abby with him to work in the afternoon. And on Friday, Nalani works at home. Although Nalani and Mark found "one of those Take-'em-at Six-Weeks places," day care probably won't kick in until Abby gets to be too big a handful for either Mark's co-workers or her grandmother. Or the future might see either Nalani or Mark staying home.

When the grant's over in 2000, I could very well see myself working a little or not at all, just staying home with kid/kids and going to school. And then when I'm done with school, just staying at home and maybe trying to do some sort of work out of the home.

But Mark would have no problem tossing out all the work equipment and just staying home and cooking meals and taking care of the house, taking care of the kids and living like that if he could. I think he sees his work entirely differently. We have a great deal of respect for each other's motivations to work, but they're very, very different. If he won the lottery, he would quit and not look back. His would be a life of leisure and he would



probably go straight to what I envision for us in our retirement-type years.

He has a stronger sense of work ethic: that we must do it to help propel the economy. And he has a job where he doesn't work as intensely as I do. He makes sure that the atmosphere is just a lot more fun and jovial. And we don't have time to be as fun and jovial. Superficially, he's got a much better job, a much better set-up, than I do, but he's not passionate for his job.

In 1991, Nalani's father passed away and left her the house he'd grown up in. Located in a historic North Tacoma neighborhood, the house is more than she and Mark could have purchased.

When Dad was terminally ill and said, 'Hey kid, I want you to have the house that I grew up in,' after being overwhelmed for a couple weeks, I really started to say that this stinks. I didn't want that. The last thing I wanted was to deal with cracked foundations and ants and gardening. I loved apartment life. I was 21, just barely out of the nest, and I didn't know if I wanted to stay in Tacoma. As much as I've got roots now and realize that I love it here, maybe I wanted to go live in Portland or Kalamazoo. Who knew?

I'm very grateful now. I'm grateful for the equity. These are longstanding things. And I certainly got talkings to from my uncle and other folks as I was inheriting this. They said, and correctly so, 'You have no idea what you're getting.' And it's tremendous and it's wonderful. I was able to pay off all my school loans by taking out a home equity loan and that floored me. I wasn't expecting to pay these off 'til I had my third child and had been working for 15 years.

I think we're living beyond [our] means had we truly started out from scratch. Neither Mark nor I make enough money (or have aspirations to make enough money) to live in a way that we nonetheless can because we don't have house payments—because the major financial burden of most home-owning Americans is already taken care of. Neither of us aspire to make enough money to live the way we do. We just want to keep our piddly jobs and keep living good. And we're lucky enough to be able to do that.

Nalani says her ability to deal with people fairly and with humor is one of her strengths as a worker. She's also good at handling several tasks at once and she's a fast typist—a strength that she admits was more important to her boss than her passion for the job. Her passion was "icing on the cake." But, she says, that same passion features in her working weaknesses.

I think that I can tend to take my job a little too seriously and lean toward the workaholic side, which is a working weakness, I think, because that doesn't keep it in good healthy context with the rest of the world. [The foster care initiative] is this wonderful mission to help place kids in permanent homes, but it's part of this greater society, and if I don't acknowledge that people want to take naps and spend time sitting under a tree or

something, then I've lost touch. So I think that becoming too focused is one of my weaknesses.

And another working weakness—like when I was a waitress—I had a really hard time with putting up with bureaucratic crap. [For example, the restaurant owners] would try to empower their middle management and they wouldn't know what to do with this so-called power so they would yell at the most vulnerable, the weakest links in our chain. So what I saw was the owners saying, 'Take charge of your restaurant and go forth and make money.' And then the middle managers would come down and yell at these dishwashers saying, 'Dammit, wash faster.' And I would just become incensed. I wrote letters and I called managers into the office and I talked about fair treatment for all. I was just my own little personal nightmare. I had no life outside of the restaurant for a while so I was making mountains out of molehills occasionally.

What I'm learning is that the skills that I need to build on are some advanced analytical thinking, some advanced political analysis, and some book smarts on how some things are working. But I think that basic perceptions and sensitivity to what's really going on are the kind of skills that are going to be helpful in the kind of work I want to continue in.

It's kind of a weird thing because I'm not really a social worker and I'm not really in social work. I'm an administrative assistant, the flavor of which is social work. And right now, unfortunately, the skills I'm utilizing and mastering the most are typing and memo writing and that kind of thing. So to go into social work would be a bumpy transition without schooling at this point. But I think that what I don't have, I'll get.

Nalani believes Douglas Coupland, the author of "Generation X," went overboard in his description of an angst-ridden, apathetic generation. However, she does think that the generation is a unique product of its upbringing.

There are some definite things that we grew up with that make us different from previous generations: more working moms, the beginning of the MTV age and that whole attention-span problem that seems to be occurring. I think that we're certainly the fast food generation and the instant gratification generation.

I don't think that we've got as strong a work ethic. That was an observation made by my 32-year-old husband, thank you very much. That people younger than himself don't have as strong a work ethic, meaning they don't think of work as important or as necessary. They don't see the big picture as much as, why do I, personally, need to work to help America grow? What's America done for me anyway, dammit?

I've got a girlfriend who, to me, typifies Gen X. She went to high school, went to college, graduated. Got her major in psych because it was the easiest one to get a major out of and then didn't want to go to graduate school. Travelled because she could. Got a waitressing job. Worked for her parent's company for a little while. And is now floundering and is

looking for herself. And at 26 your parents start saying, 'Do you know what you want to do with your life, yet?' And she's honestly saying, 'No,' but she's feeling as if she should.

So she just left the restaurant and went into social work. That was a full eight weeks ago. And she's decided, "No. I've tried this. I've sampled just a taste of it and I don't like it so maybe I'll go and get my teaching certificate." I'm betting that she's not going to like doing that either. And I don't know what she does want to do.

She's an intelligent woman. She's got lots of really wonderful, marketable skills. But I think that she's impatient and there's just an intangible quality that makes me think of Gen X when I think of her. There isn't a lot of direction and focus. I think that's bad. Individually, I love her as a dear friend, but, generally speaking, I think that's not doing our work force or the economy any favors.

An older co-worker of Nalani's pointed out another aspect of the current work place that doesn't always do us favors—technology. Generation X and lots of other workers have bought into the benefits, she says, without knowing the costs.

We, the younger generation and all the other people who buy into technology which is most of our work force, we're speeding up so quickly, we're hurtling ourselves into this black hole of never being able to get all the work done or to catch up with all the work that we're doing because we can fax things so quickly, and e-mail and voice mail things. We get them so quickly we don't have time to sit down and think.

And that's something that's only been brought up to me by people of a generation older than ourselves. Who said, 'Back then I would pick up the phone and dial the number, very slowly and methodically, and they'd say they'd get back to me. That meant they were going to type out a letter and mail it to me and I'd have a couple days to think about that.' It just doesn't work like that anymore with e-mail and voice mail and fax machines. You get stuff instantaneously and people are working faster than they're thinking. And they're so impressed with the huge amount of information, which when you're just talking about data transfer, is, of course, a wonderful boon. But when you're talking about something like system reform, like we're doing, where we really need to sit and think what's going right, what's going wrong? What are some thoughtful, reflective ways of dealing with this? You don't have time for thought and reflection because things are just whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.

## TONY PAINTER PROFILE

Tony Painter, 26, is a waiter for a private club. He also owns his own company, booking bands and organizing concerts.

We met at his apartment in a converted brewery. His place used to be the brewery lab, the beer vats lay outside his door, and he did most of the conversion himself. The place was a mess when we met because there was a fire in the building three weeks before and he still didn't have power or water. Since then, the building has been condemned and Tony was forced to move out.

Tony has lived most of his life in Tacoma, Washington. His mother is a homemaker, his father works in a factory. Tony's first job was delivering the newspaper. He did that from when he was 10 until he was 15. He was a sales clerk in a gift shop for two years during high school and he worked at a golf club before getting his current job.

I do what is commonly called being a waiter. I'm a waiter. But at the Club, particularly at night, sometimes that encompasses a lot more because I might be the senior person there so I end up being responsible for closing out the restaurant six nights a week and supervising any staff that may be there—anywhere from nobody else to up to six people on any given night. I manage the restaurant for all intents and purposes after the boss person leaves.

He makes \$7.50 an hour plus tips. Tips are inclusive on the bill, are pooled among all restaurant staff and are paid out once a month.

As far as it being a pool system where everybody gets a share in it, I think that's actually a good idea if the management can keep all the employees motivated enough to be worth an equal amount relative to the other person. In a cash-tipped restaurant, your scale of pay is definitely dependant on how efficient you are, how fast you work and how good your service is. Sometimes that does tend to lack in a restaurant where it's pool tipped because that immediate gratification of cash in hand the night of working isn't there. But the Club is such that sometimes it's dead as a doornail and other times there'll be parties where you would be making beaucoup amount of tips. It all kind of evens out in the end, I think.

It's a small place. I'm only three or four spots down from the top of the ladder. So there are prospects of advancement there, but not many because of the relative size of it. There's only about 40 or 50 employees total and so there's only so far that you can go.

I have considered staying because I have five and a half years experience and in some respects that's as good as school. Some GMs [general managers] of restaurants are hired that way. They might hire the person who has experience over education. A combination of both is best, of course. But, you know, I spent five and a half years of my life gaining

experience doing something, so more than likely I might stay in that business only because it'll be easier for me to get a job. It doesn't really do any good to go to an accountant's office and try to get a new job as an accountant when my skills are in the restaurant business. And an accountant wouldn't go to a restaurant and try to get a job as a restaurant manager when all their skills are in accounting.

Tony also has experience organizing live music events. Since 1991, he has been organizing parties, providing a place for 200 to 400 people to gather and dance to live music. His first big party was Valentine's Day, 1991. A year later, he started his own business, The Industrial Arte Company.

Valentine's Day of 1991. It was the first [party] I charged for. The first couple parties we did, it really was just myself and other musician friends getting together and having a party. And maybe some people gave us some money to cover the beer we bought or pay the band a few dollars. But it wasn't really organized to be a money-making situation. But the Valentine's Day party, at the very least, was meant to afford itself. We went all out and did a lot of things and it looked really cool. And we had great music and staff and all that kind of stuff. So it needed to at least pay for itself, which it did.

And it was that first couple months in 1992 that I started subletting out the rehearsal spaces. That turned out to be great thing. I rented rehearsal studios on a monthly basis to local bands so they could practice from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. and basically just provided them with the facilities to play really loud music where people weren't going to complain and call the cops on them.

Originally, the parties were held in the basement of the brewery, but Tony didn't have an occupancy permit, so he had to find other places for his concerts. The change really cut into his profits.

The rehearsal spaces, on a profitability level, have always been very successful. The other things I've done, like the concerts I promoted and produced and all that, only half of them have been profitable. I have probably put an average of \$10,000 a year the last two years into the Industrial Arte Company. I guess that would be a business loss.

My expenses have gone up because I wasn't able to do the events in the brewery anymore. And when I was forced to go to places where I could run that type of business, the location wasn't as good, number one, so not as many people wanted to come. And my expenses went straight out the roof because I had to start paying other landlords more money. Each event was costing three times more than what it cost here. And there were fewer people coming because of the change in location.

During the summer of '96, a fire in one of the rehearsal spaces spread and now the building is condemned. Since then, Tony's done some booking for an underage club in Tacoma that he is thinking about buying.

I would prefer to not be working for somebody else. I would rather be working for myself and have other people working for me. That's my main thing. I've thought about restaurant managing, [but] I'm not ready to quit doing stuff in the music industry yet. I still have a lot of hope for what might happen. I may just have to alter it a little bit. Right now, I'm doing a lot of concerts, at least one a weekend, sometimes two a weekend. If my side business doesn't start being more profitable, I may have to cut it back to only the events and scenarios where it is profitable and maybe do 25 percent of what I'm doing now and use the other 75 percent of that time that I would have freed up into working for somebody else and getting a paycheck.

Although work is sometimes defined as what you do to get a paycheck, Tony takes a broader view.

Work means, to me, playing a role in human society. We live in a world where for in order for it to exist with some sort of stability and manageability, people must play their role in that society, which means work. Doctors, lawyers, attorneys, hamburger flippers, street sweepers, garbage collectors, plumbers, they're all just playing a role in society. There's a whole bunch of different things that you can do, but you have to do something because when people don't do something, that's when stuff starts breaking down.

Nobody really sees it that way, but everybody depends on everybody else to do something. We rely on the people who are putting up our roads and providing us with electricity and helping us to travel places and providing us with news and music and everything. We all rely on other people. Even though people won't admit it, the world is a team effort right now and I feel like work is a part of being on the team. So I just feel like I'm playing my role in society and I try to get a role that pays me well enough to make it worth it.

By the time I get older, 50 plus, 60 plus, 70 plus, I would assume that I would have a choice. And if I choose to work, it would be more because I enjoyed it. If by some strange act of God, I've made beaucoup amounts of money and I could just afford to travel around the world and do nothing ... I can't say I'd be doing nothing. I'm more likely to work 'til the day I die rather than not. But I'm sure that as I advance in age, what I define as work is going to be much different than what I define now as work.

Like anybody, there are jobs Tony would prefer over others. However, he says that regardless of what kind of job he had, "a grip of cash" would make it satisfying, because with a lot of money, he could do all the other things that would help him feel at peace.

If somebody could pay me so much that it would make me happy and all I had to do was watch bottles go by, that would be fine because it is still just a job. It's only 40 hours a week and you still have plenty of time to do whatever else you wanted to do that really makes you happy, whether it be painting or playing music or traveling. I think it might be

cool to be a really influential politician, where what you said and thought actually got put into action and you could change the social values of the country and all that. Of course, I'd rather do something like that. But if I could sit at a factory and watch bottles go by 40 hours a week for way more money than I could being that politician person, then I would just have to use that money I made from watching the bottles go by to affect politicians, or still do that, too, on my own time.

It wouldn't be any fun to sit there and watch bottles all day, but it's not any fun being a server either, really. Almost every job that you can possibly have, there's going to be something you don't like about it. Unless you're the Pope. Or Ghandi. Do you think the President of the United States likes his job really when he sits down and thinks about it? I don't think the President is the President because he likes being it, but because he has other needs that are fulfilled by being the most powerful person in the country. Not powerful. Presidents aren't really powerful, but they are the President.

We have distinct societal classes in America. And if you're one of the people that has to have a job to survive, in order to pay your bills and eat and be able to do recreational things, then you're going to have a bitch about any job that you take.

It all comes back to that question, 'What does work mean?' It depends on why you're working. I work at the Club because I need money to pay my bills and eat. I work at the Industrial Arte Company because I like to do that. I like being involved in music and it's some sort of natural skill I have to be able to deal with musicians and their agents and put a production of that size together and get it going and have it be successful. And then I make money also. At the Club, I work to pay my bills, so that's just a job. The Industrial Arte Company is also work, but it's not really a job. I'm doing it because I like to do it and I just happen to make money at it sometimes.

I'd rather have the work that is a passion, of course. That's my goal. I'll work 24 hours a day, and when you own your business, you basically do work 24 hours a day. You think about it in your sleep. Your dreams are about how to make your business better. I would much rather have work that is a passion or a job that is a passion rather than a job that is just a job.

Until my rehearsal spaces burned down, I was getting closer and closer by the day. By the week there was definitely advancement. And then something like that happens. I didn't plan on that burning down. That was totally not my fault. So now what do I do? About the only thing that taught me is that life is not fair. I've always known that. Not only is life not fair. Life is unfair, which I think is pretty un-cool. Can I rise above it? Yeah. I will survive. But I'm sick of just surviving. I want to succeed.

Finding success in a job is not Tony's only option. He has been going to school off and on while working and lacks 30 credits to earn an associate's degree. He likes school and is thinking of going back.

If the outside influences in my life are allowing me to have time for school, I enjoy school when I'm in it. The problem I've been having is that I'll get in school, I'll do really good for a quarter and then the next quarter something bad will happen. Or my business will start picking up and I spend too much time going out and producing concerts and stuff instead of staying home and doing school work. Something always happens that prevents me from doing real good in school.

It kind of gets that way after you get into your 20s. You can't just do school. It's not like just getting out of high school and you don't have anything to do but school. I've got not only a full-time job at the Club, but I also own a business that takes up sometimes upwards of 20 or 30 hours in a week. Plus I have a lot of other stuff that I do and even though I enjoy school and I enjoy learning and school's usually no problem for me, I either need to just say, 'Hey, I'm just going to be in school' and let some other things go or I end up quitting school.

I [attend college] because it would help me get to where I want to be eventually. And it makes you a better person, just learning in general. It makes you a more interesting person. It helps you to understand how the world overall works. College is not just about learning stuff in books. It all translates out into life.

And people have more respect for people who have a college education. It looks better on a resume. One of the primary reasons I would like to get my degree is that it looks better on a bank loan application. I would like to in the future get a big old bank loan to start a business that I think would really work and it would be difficult for somebody with only a high school education to get a \$250,000 bank loan.

Another loan Tony would like to get is a mortgage. He's lived on his own since the summer after high school graduation and has tried more than once to buy a house.

I tried to buy a home before. A couple times. I just haven't been able to get financing for it. I don't think a home is something that really needs to tie you down. I want to buy something that's going to be an investment/home. I wish I owned a home already. I wish I owned three homes already and I could be renting two of them out. And the only thing that's holding me back is being able to get money. I wasn't lucky enough to be raised into a family that had money in the first place and I kind of botched my credit record up when I was young and so I'm having to pull myself out of that now. But it will happen.

Just last summer I tried to buy a house. Almost went through. It was a major fixer-upper [for] \$18,000. It was built in 1905 and it was very dilapidated, no windows in the house. Been sitting totally open for 15 years. But it was a classic Victorian style two-and-a-half-story home and structurally it was all there and it was a great plot of land.

There were a couple of large liens against it and the city was getting ready to demolish it and the current owner really needed to get out of it as much as possible. He was going to



take care of all the liens, but he just wanted to get rid of the house before the city demolished it. Well, my financing didn't come through in time. The timing just wasn't right and the house got torn down before I was able to go to the city and say, 'Please don't tear it down. I've got enough money to fix it.'

[Owning a home] is just a matter of not wasting your money. To pay rent, you're giving your money to somebody else. You're losing your money. If you're going to have to pay money out, it might as well be going into something that you can own. So 10 years down the road, instead of saying, 'I've paid \$5,000 in rent per year over the last 10 years.' Instead of saying, 'I wasted \$50,000 and gave it to my landlord.' You can say, 'I have the house paid off.'

The club where Tony works is unionized and although he thinks unions are useful for some industries, they don't have a place in restaurants.

I think it's a really dumb idea for a restaurant that has 25 employees. I think it's stupid. Over all, the union has thousands of members, but that's spread across a whole bunch of different restaurants. Granted, this is all one industry, but every restaurant is different. It's not a steel worker's union where you've got 50,000 steel workers spread out over four or five plants. You're talking about 50,000 restaurant employees spread out over 5,000 different restaurants, each one with its own market, its own concept, its own way of operating. Restaurants are not all the same and I think it's baloney that we're in a union there. I think in something like that an individual should be able to fend for themselves and be able to bargain their worth with their employer. I think they could probably do it better.

And our insurance sucks. Everybody says the big reason we have a union is because they provide us with insurance because they have a pool of people that bought into this thing. Well I think there should be better health insurance pools that people individually can buy into. I think that I could use my \$25 a month and probably find myself a better health insurance program.

Tony's father worked 17 years for a local food manufacturer, driving a fork lift and working in the factory. It was a good, family-wage job, but when the company merged with a national company, Tony's dad was laid off. It took his father 11 months to find another job and it was farther from home and paid \$10,000 less per year.

In spite of his father's difficulty finding another job, Tony's feelings about job security are pretty good.

In a lot of fields right now, there is no job security. But there's really a lot of jobs. People talk about these 5 or 6 percent unemployment rates, but I think half of that's due to people who just don't want to work. I've never been without a job. I've lost my job suddenly and been able to find a job within the next week. And maybe that's just the industry I'm in.

There's a lot of restaurant jobs. There's a lot of entertainment jobs. There's a lot of jobs for somebody who's young and willing to go after them. But just seconds ago I was talking about my 42-year-old father who was trying to find a job in the factory market. There aren't a lot of jobs that way.

I have experience doing something that always has a lot of openings. There's always restaurant jobs. And restaurant jobs, relatively, are decent money. I make more money than my dad does. You're not going to get rich, but you could raise a family being a good waiter if you had to.

Good communication is important, either as a waiter, a restaurant manager or a music producer, and Tony counts that as one of his strengths. Being personable, making a good first impression, making contacts—"It's all communication," says Tony.

An ability to negotiate grows out of that and is another skill Tony has. What he needs to work on, he says, is organization.

I have good people skills. I communicate well with people. I like to get to know people and talk to them and I'm pretty good at making people feel comfortable around me. I can deal with all different kinds of people.

[However,] I'm overly optimistic, which is bad for business because I don't always guess on the low side. I guess on the high side of stuff. [And] I'm a procrastinator. Sometimes I put things off. In some instances, I tend to overload myself with stuff that I can do and I don't realize the limitation of time and how much one person can do. For example, if I have a big concert, I always end up thinking I can do more than I can actually handle. So the last day or two leading up to a concert, I'm really busy. And I end up putting in 24-hour days with no sleep.

I'm getting better at that. I'm delegating more stuff. It's part procrastination, too. I leave too much stuff to the end. So I'm getting much better at trying to do things right away and get them sorted out ahead of time so I'm not rushing around at the last minute.

Tony also believes that good communication and an ability to stay calm under stress are work place skills that almost everyone needs.

They need to be able to handle stress well. They need to be able to be calm under stress, realize that there's only so much that you can do and not break down. If you break down under stress, everything gets worse. Whereas if you can just handle whatever kind of stress it may be, weather it and deal with it, you're going to be better in the end if you dealt with it than if you broke down and gave up and just let it pile down on top of you.

I think everybody needs to be able to communicate well to their co-employees and deal

with them in a friendly and polite manner. It's amazing how many people aren't friendly and polite. Polite's the first thing. You can go a little bit beyond that and be friendly. In order to have a hospitable work environment, everybody needs to be at least polite and more so friendly. And it's amazing how many people aren't. They just don't know how, or they forget or they just don't want to deal with other people in the correct manner and it's easier for them to be jerks or assholes or not talk at all. And that fosters animosity. It creates a bad work environment.

Overall, one thing making the work economy bad, Tony says, it too many low-paying jobs.

I don't think that you should expect people to work for minimum wage because then it puts them in a certain class. You work for minimum wage and you're trying to support a family, it forces you into the poor. But there's so many low-paying jobs that some people are forced into it and they just never get out of it. They never go to school. They never better themselves. Our whole economy creates a poor class.

Better education in the public school system and higher education that is cheaper and more accessible could help solve this problem, Tony says. Also, the pay scale needs to be more fair.

Lower the ratio between our highest-paid executives and our lowest-paid grunt workers. That's a big problem. I don't mean to sound like a socialist, but sometimes I just don't feel that one person has the right to be worth five and a half billion dollars and then have somebody who's working for him for \$7 an hour trying to support a family. Does a human being have a right to be that much better off than another? I don't think that they do. And that's totally socialist. Some people would even think I'm a commie (laughs). But something's wrong when a whole bunch of people have money to burn and other people pray for money.

Despite the challenges, Tony is confident that Generation X will be successful. But things are definitely different now.

I think that we will be relying on the government less to take care of us when we're old. I think we'll be relying on the government less to take care of us when we're young. I think everybody's going to have to be much more able to fend for themselves and not expect somebody else to take care of them. There might not be Social Security when we're older or it may be drastically changed or reduced.

The one big change that I've seen is that, unlike the '40s and '50s and '60s, just putting in a hard day's work is not enough. Because we've changed into a service industry society, you have to have skills and knowledge now. You can't just expect to go and get a factory job and start a family and retire from it and get a pension and Social Security anymore. At least, it's not prevalent like it was 20 or 30 years ago.

People my age, we all have to be on our toes. I think we need to be constantly striving to better ourselves to succeed. I think everybody needs to go out and get an education. And if you're not willing to get anything more than a high school degree, then you either need to be prepared to accept the fact that you're going to have a low-paying job for the rest of your life or you better be really lucky and make some money off an invention or something like that. Or you should have some sort of natural skill that other people don't have, i.e. music, singing, sports, something like that.

I think there's a lot of social stuff that we need to change. And in 10 years our generation is going to be in a real good position to change some of the social issues that bug us right now like personal freedom, government regulation, environmental causes. I hope that Generation X bands together in the near future and starts pushing for some of these big social causes that everybody relates us to.

I don't want Generation X's mark to be symbolized only by a bunch of people whining and crying that there aren't any jobs left and there's no hope for us and our parents have driven up this huge debt that we're never gonna be able to overcome and the Earth is being wasted by all our stupid mistakes. I don't want Generation X to be known as just being a bunch of whiners. I hope that we turn our whining into a process for change as we get older, more mature, get some jobs, as some of us become politicians and that kind of stuff. I hope that we're able to make our mark. I want us to make some sort of change and I just hope that we're able to.

## **STEPHANIE AMBAUEN PROFILE**

Stephanie Ambauen, 27, is a waitress. She lives in her own home, which she bought when she was 22. Her parents are divorced and her mother and sister Julie live close by. Stephanie is a devoted aunt to Julie's two children and, although officially single, she and her boyfriend Darren are talking about marriage and children.

Stephanie describes herself as a "worker bee" type of person. She started working when she was 15, giving horseback riding lessons before moving into food service. The majority of her career has been in restaurants, although she has also worked as a mortgage broker. Now she's waitressing in a restaurant on the waterfront.

A restaurant on Ruston Way, on the water. I think it was first established in '52. That says it all. It looks the same as it did in 1952, I think, and we're still using the same equipment. Most people that come in there on a regular basis are in their 80s and 90s. They all have a lot of money. Drink like fish. They come in every day or once a week. You get a lot of other people, random younger people, but the general people that we get are quite a bit older that know the owners. 'We know Anton. We know this person.' It's like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, shut up. Sit down.'

Stephanie's been waitressing "forever." She started in fast food during high school. After graduation, when she was 17, she moved to California. She lived there for a year waitressing in one restaurant and hostessing in another. When she came back to Tacoma, she moved into the house where her sister and brother-in-law had been living and started job hunting.

At the same time, I got three jobs. I started at Red Lobster. Started at Shenanigan's. At the same time I was working at the Salmon House. So I was training, essentially, at three places within two weeks. Then I quit the Red Lobster because that was horrible. And I ended up quitting the Salmon House because of Shenanigan's. I was working there all the time. I was there for four or maybe five years.

I was working there [when] I started working for this mortgage company [she was 24]. I stayed at Shenanigan's until December. And then I quit there and I just stayed at the mortgage company.

Stephanie made the move to the mortgage company because she needed group medical insurance, a benefit few restaurants offer. She has a pre-existing medical condition and at one time was paying more than \$200 a month for insurance. Since then, the laws have changed, making her premiums more affordable and shortening the waiting period for pre-existing conditions to 90 days.

With no mortgage background, Stephanie applied for and got a job.

It was pretty easy. I just answered ads. I took my resume in and they interviewed me and they hired me. The job is so similar, it's amazing. Selling is all it is. All the rest of it is just learning numbers and formulas and book work and stuff. Your personality is really what they're looking for—if you can sell, if you're personable and how you deal with pressure.

Stephanie had been making about \$2,500 a month working 30 hours a week at the restaurant. When she moved to mortgage brokering, she started out at \$800 a month for the first two months of training. Later she was getting a draw against commission, plus other incentive money.

There were all sorts of ways you could make more. You had overage, you had leadership. I was making probably \$3000 to \$4000 a month in that time. And when I started, I was working all the time. December or January, I won a \$700 prize for top production. One week I think I closed seven loans, which is a lot because you have to go for all the closings. You don't have to, but I did. And you're just really busy trying to keep it together.

But I left there in May because they were just unethical. It was really bad. I took it on myself to write a letter to the owner after I quit because this one customer, who I know personally, they gave him the wrong rate and it was like thousands of dollars they owed him. I wrote a letter to [the owner], cc:-ing it to the trade commission and all these people, which I didn't send it to. Of course, [the owner] threatened me back, but the guy got his money back.

Then I went to another mortgage company, which was really good. They had great marketing. It makes a difference when you get all these marketing tools. They give you pamphlets and booklets and they do up all these really professional looking things for you to use, tools for you to go out there and to sell with. Well that was really great, but they were spending all this money on marketing and they ended up going out of business.

Anyway, I was debating then, 'Do I want to do this anymore or not?' Then I went to another company, which was a really good place. Very, very ethical. We didn't charge dime; we charged less than anything and I made less. I didn't make much money there and that was the main problem. We could get the loans and we could close them. [But] where I was used to making one point or more, I was making half a point. If I did a \$100,000 loan, I'd make \$500 as opposed to \$1,000. It takes a lot of money out of your pocket

I did a lot of good loans with her, as far as a lot of good people. One couple, they came to our seminar, they were wacko. I mean they were really wacko people from California. And this gal used to be a hairdresser and had hair like the wildest bee's nest you've ever seen. But really nice people down in their heart. But they had horrible credit. They had a foreclosure a year before. And the rule usually is foreclosures at least two, three years. Nobody will even touch you during that. And they had bad credit other than that.

Well I made her go through the ropes. I said, 'Now, if you want to get this loan...' because I didn't think it was going to get approved. Neither one of us did. We made her call down to California and get newspaper clippings because they'd lost their jobs because of the economy in California. And this house they bought, they were trying to sell it for what they owed. They were going to take a loss on it and they couldn't even do that. Nobody would buy it for anything.

I made her get newspaper clippings. I made her get letters from her realtor saying that they tried to sell it. All this stuff. I had this big file on her put together. I sent it off to three different places and the first two came back negative. And then I called the third one. It was approval. Of course everyone in the office was like, 'Oh my God! Oh my God!' And the gal totally just dropped to the floor. She was totally excited which was the neatest thing. It was the best thing about my job I loved.

But the lower loan fees and a slump on Stephanie's part led back to restaurant work. Now Stephanie is making between \$2,000 and \$2,500 a month working about 30 hours a week. But she's unhappy there and thinking about changing again.

I'm looking for a job right now, actually. Their management is so poor. I mean, [the restaurant] is a really good place. It's been there for 50 years. It'll be there, I'm sure, until it falls into the sea. But the people. I have worked in small shops where it is a family-owned business and I have had the best experience, where they take you in and you are like family and they treat you so well. This place is horrible. I have never been in a place where they are so unprofessional and so completely horrible.

They harass you. They leave nasty notes. That's a big thing. And they used to say, 'Hey, you bitches.' Now it's not, 'You bitches.' Now it's, 'Ladies' and a nasty note. I don't need to be working in that environment. I don't think anybody does. I think it's ridiculous.

I'd like to get back into the mortgage business, but not on the commission end that I was. I'd like to do the same job, but with a salary because I don't like trying to charge people more money so I can make money. That's the whole premise of it. You charge 'em a 2 percent loan fee, you get a paycheck. I just want to do the loan and not worry about trying to finagle these other fees out of 'em because I think it's bullshit. And there are places that are salaried.

Stephanie has almost two years of college. She attended both a community college in Tacoma and the University of Washington in Seattle, 40 miles away.

I went to Pierce College and the UW, back and forth. Money-wise, I think I used to go a quarter to one and a quarter to another, because I was down here and I was working down here. When I went up there, I had to bomb up there, go to class and bomb back 'cause I would go in the morning and I would work doubles, lunch and dinner. So I'd have

to run back in the morning before lunch shift started. That was hectic. It was fun. I loved it. But it was hectic, trying to do that.

And it was hard. I didn't finish. I'm short two years. I ended up coming back here and I was going to Pierce and I started taking night classes because of work schedules, trying to work it in. Night classes did not work for me. I just didn't have any time to study between trying to work. That was my main thing. I was working all the time. I was working two jobs. I just was into work more than I was school. I really liked school, but I had to have money.

If I ever get back to school, I'd like to do criminal psychology. I think that would be really interesting. Or child psychology. [Adolescents are] who I'd want to work with. I'd want to be out there like a high school counselor or something. Just because I know what it's like to have somebody. Sometimes where you're a kid you really need somebody else just to be able to talk to.

I'd like to do a lot of things, though. If I go back to school, that's what I'd like to do. But I want to have kids. I want to be able to buy another house so I can remodel it and sell it 'cause I love doing that. I could do that all the time. Working with my hands, I really like doing that.

There's just a lot of things I'd like to do 'cause I'm interested in a lot of things. I like learning about a lot of stuff. I know I want to have kids and a family, but I like to work. But my interest varies so much that I don't have any set ideas about going to school. If it should happen that I can ... But if I had kids right away, then I don't want to be going to school. I want to be staying with my kids.

I think college is very important. I think it opens your eyes so much as far as what's out there. So many people have never been and they're so closed minded in a lot of ways as far as what they can do. I feel you can do anything you want to do. Sometimes you're limited by health or age. But I just think [college] is great. It gives you so many more goals. You are able to learn about all this stuff and it gives you so much more self esteem and courage to go out there and do other things. It may not be important in a job. You may not use it for a job, specifically a career. But it's improving yourself. And I think that's so much more important. I'm not interested in a career. I'm not looking for one job as a career. I don't have a career goal. I have life goals, but it has nothing to do with a career. I do not want to have one job for the rest of my life. That is what I don't want.

I want a family. I want kids and I want grandkids and I want to be with my family. Your family's probably number one, the most important thing. And my health is important. I like to ride bikes. I love to ski and water ski. I really like to do athletic stuff and I want to do more. I want to try everything that I haven't tried as far as skydiving and hang-gliding. I just want to try everything.



When she has children, Stephanie wants to make them her focus. While she doesn't expect she'll automatically be able to stay home, that's her preference.

I would [hope] that I won't have to work if I choose not to. That doesn't mean that I can go out and go shopping at Nordstrom everyday. And if that means clipping coupons, fine. I'm very economical anyway. I don't have a problem with that. But if I need to work, then that's fine. I'll do that. I'm not going to have a tizzy fit about it. In marriage it's pretty much open. It's a 50-50 deal. I expect to work. I don't expect to just be able to stay home automatically. But that's something that I know Darren would want and I want definitely to be able to do that, stay home.

If I want to work, then fine. I can work one night a week for four hours in a restaurant or something like that. That's no big deal. But I don't want to have to work at a nine-to-five job and worry about paying the bills because I want to be there to take care of my kids. It's the whole point of having them.

I wouldn't do day care. If I couldn't stay home then I'd work something out. I'd work in a restaurant at night and Darren would work in the day, which isn't that ideal for a relationship. But I wouldn't go to a day care.

My sister's at home. She'd be able to watch 'em. My mom's there. And that's why I'm here with my family. I don't want anybody that I don't know raising my child. I know my sister well enough. I know my mom well enough. There's a lot of people that I wouldn't have take care of my child because I'd be very finicky about that.

Although she doesn't want a career, Stephanie knows what she wants from work.

Work is something that you do that you hopefully will enjoy (or that I have to enjoy to be able to do it), that you get some sort of gratification from. And it can be long-term, as far as two months or three months down the road, but something that I can take away and say, 'Wow.' Like the couple that I helped put into that house. That is something I'll always be able to remember and say, 'That was really great.' Or even working in a restaurant when you meet people and they really, really enjoy their meal. And you know they did. They go out of their way to make sure that you know. Not necessarily tip-wise, but make sure you know that was really great, that they met you.

I like working in the yard. I could did ditches because I love that kind of stuff. 'Cause I say, 'Look at that ditch I just dug. Look at that. It's great. Look. I did that right there.' I like working on anything that I can do myself, doing any kind of work that I can do myself. I don't need anybody else really to say, 'Hey, you did a good job.' I need to be able to look at it and say, 'Okay. I did this. That's great. I feel good.' And that's it. I don't need to make a lot of money. Money's good, but I don't need to make a lot. It's just being able to set out and do something and have it done and say, 'Hey, that's good. I feel good about that.'

As a waitress, customers provide the satisfaction—and the frustration.

Being able to meet these people and—it sounds so totally corny—give them a pleasurable dining experience. [To] be able to touch them, make contact with them personally. They get to know a little bit about you and you get to know a little about them and that's kinda neat.

I can deal with the management. You're always going to run out of stuff, or the regular stuff that goes on in any job. But the people that come in sometimes. I had this one couple who had too much to drink, and I think that was a big problem, but who were very belligerent. They belittle you and yell at you for no reason. Instead of saying, "Please, can I have this?" They will yell at you just because they want something. That is worst part. I just can't handle that.

I'm just rude back to them. If they yell at me they need a knife or whatever, when I take it over there I say, 'Well, you must have given your knife away. And you just need to ask me for a knife and I'll bring one right over to you.' I just say, 'You're welcome,' because they never say thank you. And they don't even get it, but it's like, 'I just want to kill ya'. I want to wring your neck. (laughs)

Stephanie got the "bug to buy a house" when she was 21. Her sister Julie called her up one day out of the blue to tell her about a little house for sale for \$32,000. They checked it out then decided it wasn't a good deal because the neighborhood had nowhere to go but down. But by then she was bitten.

It took me probably about a year after that to find a house. I looked at so many houses. I made offers for quite a few. And then I ended up finding this one. It was a VA repo, \$59,000, cash only. I wanted to [offer] for \$50,000 or \$52,000 and the gal that I had talked to said, 'No, no. They'll never take that.' She wouldn't write it up for me. So I called up this girlfriend of my mom's who was a real estate agent and said, 'Hey, I want to buy this house and nobody wants to write it up for me.' So here's a gal who I've never talked to before. She hadn't shown me anything.

Well, \$59,000 is what they wanted, cash only. But they hadn't gotten anything on this house, no offers. And it was sitting here for a couple of years. So we offered \$53,000, contract and they denied it. And we offered \$53,500, cash and they turned that down. Then we offered \$55,000, cash and they accepted that. And then they give you 60 days to come up with the cash.

Her house needed lots of work and finding a loan took some doing because banks don't like to finance fixer-uppers. She finally got a loan, but had to give the bank cash up front to cover the cost of repairs to the house. Even getting below-market-value bids from friends, she had to come up with almost \$12,000 for the bank, "I was scraping the bottom of the barrel; every single penny I had in the cushions of

the couch."

It looked like everything was ready to go when the bank told her she had to get the roof certified or get a new roof before they'd give her the money.

Well I couldn't afford a new roof because it's like \$10,000. So, my sister—I didn't think she was sneaky—but she said, 'Why don't you just get them to certify a different roof on a different house on your street.' So we picked a house. I think it was [house number] 309 [Stephanie's is 306]. It had a brand new roof. And I had John, my boyfriend at the time, call up this roofer and tell them it's a rental and that these people were druggie people and we were really having problems with them. And we were selling it and we wanted to get 'em out, but we don't want them to know we're doing this because we don't want them to trash the place. We gave them this big story and asked them if they could do the roof cert from the street. And they said, 'Fine.'

Then I took this original paper and I went to the Bon [department store]. Went to the typewriter section and matched the typing on the deal and I inked out the '9' and changed it to a '6.' And I sent it in. They took it and it was like 'Whew!' So we cheated my way through that one. Then we put a new roof on it, of course. But John, my sister's husband, did that for me. It cost me \$800 or \$1,000.

The house had been abandoned when Stephanie moved in and she spent hours doing major and minor repairs. She's thinking now of selling within the year to take advantage of the University of Washington's move into the area. Plus she's already found a bigger fixer-upper in a nicer neighborhood. But she says there is still much to do before selling this one and she's planning to do most of the work herself.

The floors need to be re-finished. A lot of the woodwork on the window sills I need to re-do. I'm going to paint the outside this summer. The kitchen I have to re-do. I have to put in a dishwasher and a new sink and new fixtures and disposal and I'm going to re-tile the sink. Finish re-doing the upper cabinets. The bathroom, I have to put a fan in because I haven't done that. And I'm going to tile in there. Have the tub re-finished. Finish the basement because I've got a full basement, 900 square feet downstairs. I've got to change over to gas, because I've got oil now. And frame the basement and re-do that. Put another bathroom in a laundry room down there and a couple bedrooms. That's the major stuff.

Stephanie's confidence in her ability to fix her house matches her confidence in her job skills. In her experience, the key to getting a job is good salesmanship.

I have great experience in my job field 'cause I've never had a problem getting a job. If I wanted to go out and get a job, I would be able to do that. I think the main part of going out and getting a job is bullshitting your way through it. Be able to present yourself very, very well and bullshit your way through it. I've gotten jobs where I've had no experience. You can come across very well and they'll hire you. They'll be totally excited to hire you.

It just makes such a difference when you go in the interview and you're positive. They want you. And they want to pay you whatever you want to work for 'em. It's just totally amazing because I had no experience. I don't know anything. I'm just a dum-dum who works in a restaurant.

I think there's a lot of different skills and if you want to go out and be an attorney, of course, you have to have certain skills. But I think that it doesn't matter how much experience you have, if you do not have what it takes as far as selling yourself and coming across well, that you can do the job and you're confident in yourself, then it doesn't matter. You can't get a job. I know a lot of people who are very experienced and [have] the degree and everything and they were unemployed.

Work is very different now, incredibly different. [Generation Xers] don't want the nine-to-five jobs. They're going to go work for MicroSoft, wearing their jeans, going to work at ten o'clock at night.

I think the workplace has become a lot more diverse. So much more has opened up. You don't go to the factories. You're not the head of the engineering department. My Dad worked at NCR, wore a suit and tie everyday, fixing computers and machines. And everybody else did the same thing. They went to the banks. They went to ... whatever. I think people want to do more diverse things. And they can. You can go work in a restaurant and make a heck of a lot of money.

I think it's so much different now. Society isn't about a bunch of white people puttin' on their black and navy suits and wearing their white shirts and going to work. It's about all these different people and everybody being able to accept everybody else. And if they want to pray at 10 o'clock, facing east or whatever, fine. They should be able to do that and they should be able to do that in whatever workplace they're at. I think that's great. I think that's really great.

I like work. I love working. I've worked since I was 15 and I'm sure I'll work 'til I'm 90, if I can. I just think it's very ... the pride and work ethic kind of deal. It makes you feel good about yourself and I think everybody needs to do it. I think it's a very important factor. I know, being a big sister [in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters volunteer program], my little sister's family, a lot of the people don't work. And that just creates such a bad atmosphere, I think. It doesn't matter what you're doing, you're bringing home a paycheck. At least you're doing something and it's better than not. It sets the ball rolling.

## BOYD WOLFE PROFILE

Boyd Wolfe, 28, is divorced and has two daughters who live with their mother. He graduated from high school in 1986 and went to two vocational-technical schools because his father said "either do something or get out" and he wasn't ready yet to leave, "It's too hard out there."

Boyd's father was in the Air Force for 30 years and Boyd was prepared to follow in his footsteps, but the timing was bad. Recruitment had slowed, the military was offering early retirement and Boyd left the recruiting office still a civilian.

Except for a brief stint delivering pizzas, Boyd's work history is in manufacturing. He worked for a company that made concrete roof tiles and also as a packager for a frozen foods manufacturer. Now he works at a paper and pulp mill. His title is "extra board laborer," he fills in for people who are on vacation or away at school. He's hoping to get a regular position and meanwhile he's gaining seniority. He's been there since late 1994.

I'm an extra board. That's pretty much what it is. You're an extra body. Primarily I work in the paper mill and most of the time I do the sixth hand's job. They got five different guys runnin' the paper machine. I'm the sixth guy on the bottom. I'm the guy that receives the paper that has been cut in specific size roles and I put stencils on 'em. They go from me to shipping.

I've worked in chip handling a little bit where the chips go on the conveyor systems into the mill. And I've worked down in paper shipping a little bit. I want to stay [at the mill] for a while because the money is good. At the job I'm doin' now, I'm making \$16.10 [an hour].

Boyd works day shift for seven days, gets "a couple days off," then switches to swing shift for seven days, then graveyard, then back to days. When he works swing and graveyard, his paycheck gets a boost through a shift differential. The shifting schedule isn't easy, but the pay and potential for advancement are good. Boyd had tried to get on with the mill in '91, but they weren't hiring. He tried again in '94.

I was gettin' fed up with my job [at the roofing company] because things were really, really slow for most of the year and people were getting kind of nervous about what was happening. And I thought well, shoot, I'll give it a try. So I took a day off and went down to [the mill] and they were accepting resumes at that time. I sent my mom all the information. She made up a bunch of resumes and sent one in. They called me back about a month later.

I had to take a strength and endurance test. Plus I had to take a paper test—basic math,

some reading, see if you can follow simple directions because we got a lot of different rollers and stuff the paper goes through, see if you knew which way they were turning. Just basic stuff that, I guess, somebody would know with a basic education.

Boyd's goal at the mill is to get a permanent job as a spare hand on the paper machine. The process is pretty much a waiting game because open positions are filled on the basis on seniority.

There's so much seniority goin' on. There's jobs that come open at times. People move up or go away or leave the job. That'll leave a slot open and then everybody will move up. I'll be waitin' on a spare hand job at the paper mill. Spare hand, that's just a permanent job title. You're a permanent spare hand on a certain shift.

Spare hand's less money than what I'm doin' now. See, spare hand is the low man on. You got your machine tender, then you got your back tender, your third hand, your fourth hand, fifth hand and sixth hand, and then your spare hand.

As the son of a military man, Boyd lived in many places. He was born in Oklahoma and lived there and in South Dakota until moving to Arkansas. In the middle of the 8th grade, Boyd's family moved to Okinawa, Japan. They returned to the United States in 1985 and Boyd finished high school in Spanaway, Washington. He took small engine repair and typing electives, but was not a good student.

The teachers always said I graduated by the skin of my teeth. I wasn't motivated at all. I liked to put off my studies. I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to mess around. Didn't want to do it unless I had to. [But] when it came down to, you either got to pass this class or you don't graduate, it's like OK. And so I passed. It come through in the end.

Faced with his father's "do something or get out" ultimatum, Boyd got a job delivering pizzas. That lasted only a couple months before he was fired. From there, he tried two different vocational schools in an attempt to please his father.

We were goin' through bad times. I was still young and I wanted to mess around and so I went to school to make my dad happy. And didn't learn nothin'. I went to Bates. I went to Clover Park. I learned how to be a checker in a grocery store and learned about stocking food and all that stuff. That was a joke. But I still finished it, passed it. I went to Clover Park before that. I took manufactured housing. Learned how to build the new type of manufactured houses.

[Going to school again] has crossed my mind, but the way I'm workin' now, I don't really got the energy to do much else. The rotating shifts, it gets to me. It wears you down. So I gotta force myself to do stuff sometimes. And on my days off, it's pretty much taken up because I need to see the kids when I got time.

Boyd married in 1990 and he and his wife were still together when he got the job at the mill. Now his ex-wife, 23, and their two daughters, 2 and 6, live on public assistance. He spends as much time with his daughters as possible. For him, their well-being is "the main thing that I really, really care about more than anything." It's helps get his day started—that and a few company policies.

It's an incentive. But let's face it, if I don't feel like going to work, I'm not gonna go to work. But there's penalties to pay for that, like a short paycheck. Or you get on the attendance program at work if you miss too many days above and beyond what you're allowed. But, yeah, I think about [the girls] because they're my beneficiaries. If I get a good check and I can go see 'em on the weekend, we can go do things if I have extra money. But if I'm broke, then we can't. We can just visit. I like to go take 'em out and have a good time.

I try to see 'em at least on my days off. At least. But I'll see 'em on day shift sometimes. And even when I'm workin' graveyard. But I don't see 'em on swing shift. Swing shift is the worst shift for me. I don't do anything except work and sleep on swing shift. Very little else.

Boyd hopes to teach his girls not to drink or take drugs, not to make the same mistakes he made. He also hopes they finish school, something their mother didn't do, and perhaps go to college.

Finish school. Go to college. Because the way things are going, things are gonna get a lot worse. And with all the technology and everything that's comin' about, you're gonna have to get some kind of training, good schooling, to be able to make the kind of money that they're going to need to make. That's the way I see it. They're gonna have to get prepared. I just want 'em to have a better life.

Besides providing the means to take his girls on outings, Boyd's work gives him a sense of worth.

I feel like I'm a productive part of society. I guess I get a feeling of worthiness, you know, that I deserve things. I'm doin' my part, so I'm good. I'm not just a nothing. I'm doin' something. I'm trying to make a life for myself.

When I do a good job at work, when I feel like I'm putting my care into my work and doing it the way that it should be done, I get a satisfactory feeling about it. It's like a team. We're a team. And when everything's goin' good and we come together and get that paper goin' again after a break, smooth things out, everybody's like, 'Good job. We're doin' good. Pullin' together.'

[Teamwork is] the utmost importance in any job, I guess. Any job that I've ever been in.

I've basically been in manufacturing, production.

Boyd finds satisfaction in working as part of a team and doing a good job, but it's hard sometimes, especially when the going gets rough on the paper machine.

When things are real active, when there's a paper break, you need time. You need to get the paper running. You gotta clean it out so it can start up again. The goal is to keep it running, to keep making paper. Money, money, money. And it's just all the excitement and people's attitudes are racing and blood pressure and just everybody yelling. People get mad at each other and bad attitudes and don't want to listen and that's when things just don't work out. Sometimes I get so frustrated that I just throw my stuff down and walk off.

It probably doesn't look too good, but sometimes you get to the point where you just gotta' walk away and take a breath. Go get some water and just kind of step back and think. Calm down and look at the situation before I do something stupid and damage something in the machine because I don't know what I'm doing. Or get frustrated or get hurt or cause somebody else to get hurt or whatever. You just gotta know when to be careful and regroup. We're really safety conscious. That is a big priority because things can happen just like that. No matter who it is because that machine doesn't care.

I've gone through a whole seven-day shift without a break on our shift. That's pretty smooth. And then there's been times, take for example, graveyard. We were doin' natural paper, real thin stuff, and for some reason that doesn't seem to run as good as the heavy-weight paper that we make. And we were just having problems after problems with that thing. It was breaking in the machine and then we'd get the reel over in the winders, start winding it up. And that'll blow up and the paper just shreds and flies everywhere. And I'm up there on the deck and I got seven rolls to stencil at a time. And my deck's full and I'm just going crazy and the winder keeps blowin' up and I gotta drop everything and go down there and we gotta splice paper and cut it off and everything. It gets frustrating at times.

If Boyd had his way, they'd never make thin paper on small roles that "come out like popcorn—boom, boom, boom" so that he never gets a break. He prefers a day with a chance to take a break and maybe learn something new.

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When the machine's runnin' smooth, like it did today, you get a little time to relax and maybe even get a snack, get something to eat. And then you can concentrate on things. Or just learning, getting some OJT [on-the-job training] on something else that you don't know too much about. Like me workin' the sixth hand, I'll do some of the fifth hand for him when he's off doin' something else. So everybody covers everybody's back pretty much. That's all part of that teamwork type of deal. It's gotta be done anyway. The fifth hand gets called away, the sixth hand's got some time, he'll load the core on the shaft.

Boyd is a member of the United Papermakers Union and pays \$27 a month in



dues. It's his first time working in a union shop.

Every job that I've ever had has not been union so I didn't know what I was missing. Now I think it's cool because it's a contract. They go by this contract for so long and that's the way it's gonna be. Annual raises and all this and nothing's gonna change until the contract's up. So it's like no worries until that time period comes along. Nothing to worry about.

Not like when he worked for the roofing company. He was laid off from there twice.

The first time I got laid off it was five and a half months. I was workin' part time with a guy who cut down trees and getting paid cash under the table every time we worked. We really had to struggle then. It was tough. I applied for some food stamps. The folks would help out if I needed it. I didn't ask 'em, but they would offer anyway and help out because [my wife] would tell them the situation. I wouldn't say much about it.

I was havin' a hard time finding a job. I was down at the unemployment office all the time, getting ideas from them and going out and searching for jobs. Finally [my company] took me back. I was glad to go back to work.

What would you do if you found out your job at the mill was ending in a month?

I've actually thought about that since all this new technology's coming about. I've thought about, if that happens, maybe I don't want to be a laborer again. I was thinking about just going to school, learning something different. Just getting into something that's going to support me the way [the mill] does because I don't know of any kind of a job out there that you can walk off the street and start making what I'm making now without some kind of education. And the way things are, I can't afford to do anything less.

Boyd says a working weakness of his is that when he gets angry, he doesn't want to work. "People can be jerks. If I'm not in the mood for it and they want to mess around, that kind of gives you a bad attitude. Most times I just walk away and say, 'leave me alone.'"

However, he considers himself to be a pretty good team player and he tries to be dependable.

I try to be a person that's gonna be there, that's gonna show up for work, that people can count on. When I first started [at the mill], I got down on the attendance program quite a ways. I was just a couple steps away from bein' out the door. And so I really just buckled down and got off that program right away. I'm trying to stay that way.

Boyd's parents are retired and live in a rural, Southwestern Washington town. "They got five acres down there, live in a double-wide trailer. They got their life.

They got what they wanted. All their life they've been talkin' about doin' that and that's what they got."

Boyd's also working toward a good life in retirement. The mill offers a 401K plan and Boyd puts in the maximum of 9 percent of his pay with the company matching up to 4 percent.

I'm doing it because everybody says it's a good idea and I see that it's a good idea. There's gonna come a time when I'm gonna have to depend on that. I'm gonna need that money to be there.

He had money in a 401K plan at the roofing company. But when he was laid off, the company sent him a check for his retirement plan and not knowing better, Boyd spent it.

I spent it all. And I paid for it. [The IRS] caught me a couple years later. They sent me a thing that said, 'Oh, guess what? You didn't tell us about your 401K so now you owe us \$700.' I had to pay all that money.

It was the first time I got laid off. I got almost \$2,500. They automatically sent it to me. I didn't know anything about it. I knew it was a savings plan, but I didn't know all this [tax] stuff. I didn't know. And when tax time came around, I wasn't even thinking about it. My Dad helped me do my taxes and I guess he forgot about it, too, so it just didn't get put in there. Then back in '93, I got a letter. Oh man, I was upset. I was really upset. I'm not gonna make that mistake again.

Boyd describes his goals as "real basic." Although he makes more than \$30,000 a year, he's not looking to buy a house anytime soon. Instead, he lives in a \$295 per month apartment in the flight pattern for McChord Air Force Base. "We get planes that are real loud. Shake the building. You can't even hear yourself." He chooses to stay there because of the cheap rent.

I'm faced with all these new bills, the child support and everything. Plus I'm tryin' to pay off some debts that I've got. That's the main reason why I chose this. I was paying \$460 in Puyallup on South Hill. We had a two bedroom when we were still together, big nice apartment, ground level. It was a four-plex. That was pretty cool. I had my own driveway that I shared with my neighbor. There was a lot of kids there and a lot of big open yards that they could play in. That was no problem affording that up there.

But since everything came down and now a lot of my money's goin' elsewhere, I figured I'll get into this place and see if I can't take care of some things. Got a big VISA payment. Huge. I cut it up and told them, 'Just cancel my account. Just send the bill and I'll pay it.' And so I'm trying to pay that. And I got some others. I ran up Fred Meyers and Sears. They're all not used at the moment.

When do you think you'll have your bills paid?

In the future. Let's just put it that way. I try not to future trip at all—think about the future. I gotta do things one day at a time at the moment. That's just the kind of person I am today. And the way I'm trying to live.

Boyd is concerned about jobs being shifted outside the United States when we have people out of work here. But he also thinks some people choose not to work because it's "just too easy to get free money in America."

We got people just taking advantage of the system because it's too easy for them. That's the way I see it. So it kind of encourages people to be lazy and not work 'cause they're so eager to give out their public assistance. It seems like it's easy.

What about your ex-wife and daughters? They're on public assistance.

There again, that's a tough, tough thing. I mean the kids gotta be supported and if that's the way she's gotta do it, then I think it's OK then.

I wish there was more work here in America instead of them sendin' it overseas. I wish they'd keep it all here because we have so much unemployment and everything. I wish everybody could be workin' and have things and not have to worry.

Boyd doesn't buy Hollywood's depiction of Generation X, but says work is different for his generation and feels lucky to be where he is.

The portrayal of Generation X on TV shows 'em to be a bunch of bums. And I think that's a bunch of B.S. They portray them as a bunch of people that just wanna do nothing, just have fun all the time. And I don't see that.

I think it's a little bit tougher to get a job nowadays and they require a bit more experience and stuff like that then they did back when my Dad was startin' out workin'. I consider myself lucky to have the job that I have. I'm glad [the mill] was there to hire me and I'm glad that they got the wages that they got because this is the most I've ever made in my life.

As far as that goes, I feel pretty fortunate to be able to do things that I want to do and have money a lot of the times. There's still a lot of times when it's paycheck to paycheck because I just got major bills to take care of. And there's sometimes I just blow my money and I don't watch what I'm doing. Old habits die hard. I just gotta learn to budget my money and stuff. 'Cause there's people out there that would really, really want to be in my situation with the kind of money I make.

## BECKY LITTLE PROFILE

Becky Little, 31, is a grounds and facility maintenance worker for a large county park on a lake that includes two swimming areas, a boat launch and children's toys. She is married and her husband Mike is a manager for a store that rents to own furniture and appliances. They live in their own home on an acre and a half and have been trying to have a child for several years.

Becky's father was also in grounds and building maintenance and is retired now. Her mother worked mostly at home as a bookkeeper and legal typist. Becky was a "rebellious" teenager who dropped out of high school and moved out of her parents' house for a couple of months. She later returned and graduated in 1984, but did not go on to college.

Becky has been working full time at the park since 1991. Before that she worked as an extra hire for three summers.

I do all kinds of irrigation work, mowing grass, repairing what I know how to repair—broken doors, some plumbing work, some small engine repair, electrical stuff and some carpentry. And, hopefully, as the guys go along they show me new things. Most of them are 10 years older than me so I've actually learned quite a bit of stuff from those guys. It's been quite an experience for me. I really enjoy it.

Little by little, I've picked up a lot of stuff, but there's still so much stuff I could learn. I'm trying hard. I always try to get them to show me, if it's not a rush project, as much as they can. [It's frustrating] when I don't know something and I wish I did. It's not frustrating to me to ask for help, but I can see that everybody else knows it but me. That's frustrating to me.

During the time Becky was an extra hire, she worked about five months out of the year, from late spring to early fall. One winter she collected unemployment. Another winter she got a job with a company that manufactures plastic bottles.

After [the park] laid me off the second fall, I went to work down at the tide flats. [It was] assembly line work, just standing at a big machine. It was injection molding and we made spice bottles, hydrogen peroxide bottles, army canteens—all different kinds of plastic bottles. The machine would just pump these things out. You'd throw out the bad ones and then pack 'em in boxes.

There was a lot of turnover down there. They treat you like dogs. It was a straight eight hours. I worked swing shift, 4 p.m. to midnight. They paid for your lunch and Washington State law says they only have to give you 20 minutes for lunch when they pay for your lunch like that. So we'd be in this long warehouse and your lunch started when you left your machine. Even though there might be 10 people at the same time taking lunch and

trying to use the microwave and going to the bathroom and eat, all in that 20 minutes, you had to be back at your machine in 20 minutes. That kind of sucked. And it was hot, stinky. It smells like burning plastic. But you get used to it after a while. I actually worked there a year and a half, so one summer I skipped for the park.

And then I quit that job and I went back to work for the park. I worked one summer and then they hired me full time. They laid me off in October and then they hired me full time in February of the following year, which was 1991.

Becky makes \$16.94 per hour. Her benefits include medical and dental insurance, as well as other insurance like disability. She gets 12 paid holidays, 15 days of vacation and 12 days of sick leave per year.

I love my job. It's great. I'm outside everyday and I don't have my boss hanging over my back. And I was born and raised in Washington so the rain, that kind of stuff, doesn't bother me at all.

I really can't see myself digging ditches and stuff like that when I'm 50, but then, you never know. I might move up in the department. If I won the Lotto, of course, everything would change. But there's nothing that I can say right now that I want to go back to school for. I don't have any other ideas. I'm constantly looking, but nothing I could say right now.

Becky's first job was taking inventory at supermarkets with her uncle when she was 15. When she turned 16, she started working in fast food and stayed until she was 20.

It was a great learning experience. It was very hard work, but it really taught me. You had to get along with all kinds of people, even people you really didn't like. But while you're at work, you're forced to get along with those people. People say, 'Oh, I would never make my kid work fast food.' But it taught me a lot of great work ethics. When I left I was an assistant manager. But I had a boss who was really a jerk and I was 20 years old and I just said, 'Well, I don't have to put up with that.' So I quit.

Becky earned her high school diploma, but didn't go on to any other schooling. Becky's father has a high school diploma, but didn't go to college either. Her mother attended three and a half years of college and is about a semester shy of a bachelor's degree.

I always got good grades when I went to school, [but] for a while, I didn't go. I dropped out for a couple months. For a while, I didn't live at home. I was a pretty rebellious person. I've partied. I've done drugs and stuff. But after a while it was boring and it wasn't for me and so I quit.

I don't so far have any regrets except for maybe I wish I hadn't done quite so much

partying. I'm not sorry I didn't go to college because I don't know at that point in my life how much of it I would have even taken in. I think that now when I make up my mind what I want to do—if I do decide I want to change something—that I will be doing it for me more than if my parents had forced me to go.

I think that maybe, within the next five years, I might take some night courses because I want to learn more. I want to learn more about what I'm doing, but I'd also like to learn more about other stuff. And I think that may also interest me in some other career I might like that I'm not thinking about now.

Work, to Becky, is "a great way to get money to do things after work." It's also good for buying cars, houses and dog food.

Work is something I always picture myself doing. We don't have any children right now, but even if we did, I couldn't picture myself just being a housewife and staying home all day.

I need to feel like I'm wanted, like I'm doing something worthwhile when I go to work. Am I completing something? Is it something that's important? I like to be a part of the team. That's important to me. A really good day at work is when we're all working together and everyone's laughing and having a good time while we're doing it.

Some people have bad work ethics. They don't care if they're on time to work. Or they don't care if they call in sick. Or don't care what kind of job they do. I try always to do a good job, to the best of my ability. If I did something wrong, I want to know what it is so I won't do it again.

Becky's says a dream job would be "something like, say, a basketball player. He makes millions doing something that's just fun and he loves and that he's very good at." For herself, she doesn't know what that might be, but she would like something more from her current job.

[I wish] I was using my brain a little bit more. Some of the stuff I do is very monotonous work and I don't think I'm using my full potential, as far as my brain goes. That's why I think, within the next five years, I probably will take some classes, just to stimulate you in a different way. Everybody gets bored of the same thing all the time.

Barring winning the Lotto, Becky predicts she'll be in the same job in five years. The supervisory positions are "very few and far between and I don't think in five years I'd be anywhere ready for that anyway." More than five years out, she says she doesn't know what she might be doing, "I don't think that far ahead."

She chose the parks department because she really likes what she does and, for now, staying with them is her best option.

I really like being outside, especially in the summertime. You can't beat it. It's beautiful around here. I love all the green and everything. Some people would hate it. Some people, if it's raining or cold out, you can just tell they're absolutely miserable when they get out of the car. That doesn't bother me.

Right now, I would say it's important [to stay with the park]. I have great benefits there. It's important. You don't have to change around, fooling around with all your benefits and waiting periods and retirement plans that might be different or whatever. [Also] I certainly wouldn't want to stand in front of that machine and smell stinky, hot plastic or flip burgers again.

But then again, if I lost my job, would I go back to work [in fast food]? Sure I would, because I think I could probably get another assistant manager's position, at least, like I did before. I'm certainly smarter and could keep my mouth shut longer now than I could at 20 when I thought I didn't have to worry about anything. I don't think I could get another job for \$16.94 an hour, but I could get another job. I would do almost anything if it meant keeping our home or not claiming bankruptcy. I'm not too good to do anything.

One month after she was hired full time, Becky married Mike. For the past five years she's been trying to get pregnant and is seeing a fertility specialist. It's a "spendy process" in terms of money, hopes and time away from work.

We have to do in vitro fertilization. My ovaries work fine and my uterus is fine, but my tubes are closed. I take fertility drugs to make lots of eggs, which has caused me hideous sickness. I was off work three weeks one time and two weeks another time. Ovaries are the size of walnuts and [mine] swelled up like the size of cantaloupes. Really painful.

Anyway, all the eggs have got fertilized every time we've done it. But when they put them back, they just don't stick. And there's no reason why. It's just because it's not natural. But [the doctor] encouraged us to keep trying. I usually do it in the winter time or very early spring, because that's our slowest time of the year [at work].

Becky's mother was often home when Becky was growing up. However, Becky says she would continue to work full time after they have children. She feels the extra income is important to have the things they want, like a home and the ability to pay for college.

I'd keep my job. We could easily live on what Mike makes, but we would be constantly budgeting. We both like to spend money. I feel like these days if you really want the things you want, you both need to work. Unless, of course, one of you is making \$200,000 a year.

Together, Becky and Mike make just over \$80,000 a year.

And we still don't have enough. We probably could be more frugal than we are and maybe have a little bit more. But we've been to Hawaii, Mexico, Las Vegas, Phoenix. These are all trips that Mike's won. The plane fare and the motel is the cheapest part of the trip. It's spending money.

And we do eat out. Mike works late. He doesn't get home until 7:30 p.m., usually on weeknights, and he works six days a week. So we try to do relaxing things. I don't have the perfect garden. My lawn doesn't look like a park. But that's not important to me. I like when we spend time together for it to be fun and relaxing. And since he works so many hours a week, I'm not going to jump up at 6 o'clock on Sunday morning, his only day off, and say, 'Now, come on. These are the home projects I want done.' We have 30 more years to pay on our house, so we have plenty of time to do any projects we want to.

They bought their house the same year they were married. With a gift of \$2,500 from her parents instead of a big wedding and \$2,500 they had saved, Becky and Mike put \$5,000 down and got a mortgage to cover the other \$80,000.

Our house, it's old. There's a lot of things we need to do. We have an acre and a half and three big dogs so they have plenty of yard to run around. It's fine for us right now. We don't have any kids. We would like to add on at some point to give us a master bedroom and a master bathroom, but it's fine for now. I'm not a very materialistic person that way. I don't have to live in a big mansion that's flawless or anything.

Becky is a member of the Teamsters union and believes her \$27 in monthly dues is money well spent. "If we didn't have the union, [management] would push more, more, more production on less and less money. Or more and more stuff being done with less and less manpower."

[The] administrative people are budget oriented. Very little of them are actually thinking about the safety of the worker and what it takes to get something done. That's no fault of theirs or anything. That's just what they're more attuned to—money, budget matters. And of course the more done with less people or less money spent is better for them.

I think [labor unions are] important. I'm not down at the union hall every night waving a flag and picketing and striking. I don't want to do any of that. But I think unions are a good thing. I realize we can't have everything perfect, that both sides have to make concessions on things. But I think there's a lot of companies out there that'd try to get away with anything they could if they didn't have the union behind 'em.

[At the plastics manufacturer, which was not unionized] they would tell us at five minutes before it was time to get off, 'You have to stay four more hours or you're gonna be fired if you don't.' They made us come to work and then they might say, 'Only five machines are running.' So then they would go down the list seniority-wise and ask the person who'd been there the longest, 'Do you want to work tonight or do you want to go home?' And



then when you got down to the bottom of the seniority list, of course, there were other people that had to work—bills, kids or whatever—they'd just send you home after you'd driven all the way down there.

Becky says her strengths are that she's outgoing, friendly, even-tempered and likes being a team player. Maintaining that, she says, is important in getting a job. "I think I got this job for the fact that they knew that I was willing to learn anything and that I'm a friendly person."

Her weaknesses are part lack of schooling and part personality.

My weaknesses are sometimes I open my mouth when I shouldn't. Sometimes I should just be quiet, but I feel I have to voice my opinion right now. And I guess everybody could be more mature than they are about some things. I don't think I always choose the more mature way to handle some things. I try to, but sometimes my emotions get the better of me when I feel very passionate about something, people being wronged or something that's unfair. When I see somebody at work getting away with murder and the boss just says, 'Let's not get that guy upset, so don't say anything.' That's aggravating.

Becky believes the economy overall suffers from the "do more with less" management philosophy. She's also concerned with the money gap between executive management and workers.

I think there's too much downsizing. I think they're asking people to do more and more and more with less and less and less manpower and money. I think, especially in private business, there's something wrong anytime the executive is earning \$23 million a year and they're laying somebody off who's five years from retirement under the guise of, 'We're downsizing.' I think there's something wrong there.

I don't have an answer for it, but it is frightening to see people just getting richer and richer and richer. Even [Mike and I], we make good money and we're not rich by any means at all. I can't imagine what's the family of four that's earning \$30,000 a year ... how do they make it? What are they eating?

And how is someone supposed to get out of the hole? How is a welfare mother supposed to get off of welfare? I'm all for reforming it and everything because I do think there's a lot of people that abuse it, [but] I'm willing for my tax money to help anybody who wants to work. But even if she does want to go get a job, how's she gonna pay for a phone? If she's got a kid, she's got to have a phone. How's she gonna pay for a car to get her back and forth to work and day care and all that stuff on minimum wage?

As far as being part of Generation X, Becky's not sure how the term applies to her, "I just go to work every day, come home, and get my paycheck every two weeks." But she does feel she's part of a group where both husbands and wives will have to

work to make ends meet.

I think it's obviously gonna take us a lot more work and more of it to get what [our parents are] able to get. I mean, Social Security won't be there when I retire, realistically. There are more and more of us living longer and longer, which means it's going to be a lot more money for Medicare and stuff like that. That's all gonna cost money. And with downsizing and stuff and more and more people earning less and less, how's that all gonna work out? I don't know. That's frightening.

## AMY JOHNSON PROFILE

Amy Johnson, 25, has been a teacher for one year. Her first job after earning her teaching degree was at a mental hospital. She was hired to work with a 10-year-old girl who had been physically and sexually abused since infancy. Amy watched her after school and into the evening, playing games and teaching her basic skills like using the toilet, dressing herself and table manners.

Amy was born in California, but has lived most of her life in Tacoma, Washington with her mother, father and younger sister. She describes her father as a "man of many trades." He has a Master's Degree in business administration and has worked in aerospace, owned a tavern and is now a longshoreman. Amy's mother is in charge of inmate accounts at the county jail.

Amy grew up with learning disabilities and used to cry when she had to go to school. She says teachers terrified her and, although she's always liked children, she didn't consider becoming a teacher until high school. Now she's one of two special education teachers teaching the most behaviorally challenged kids from the elementary schools in her district.

I'm the special ed teacher. The official title is Adaptive Behaviors Teacher. Basically, I have what they call SBD room--Severe Behavior Disorder. If you go to any other district, they usually have another name. Sometimes they call them TLC rooms, which is Therapeutic Learning Center.

I have my kids all day. Last year I had five kids and they were with me all day long except for my kindergartner who came just in the afternoon. I have two full-time assistants and we cover all their regular classroom subjects they'd have in any other class, but we also do some social skills. I guess you could say my class is just a little bit more laid back. Sometimes, if [the students are] having a bad day, they start getting out of hand. They have been known to become kind of physical and violent and have temper tantrums to the point where we do have to remove them from the room. We have to physically restrain them until they're calm again. And that's why I have the two assistants. These kids are labeled the worst of the worst. Nobody else in the district wants them in the classroom. And they can't function in a classroom with 20-some kids. They need real small class size and lots of one-on-one. So some days we have to throw math out the window and I end up sitting on the floor talking to a kid for an hour about what's bothering him, what's going on at home, why he's having trouble dealing with his day. It's a potpourri of things.

The children in Amy's classroom have problems relating to both their home life and medical conditions and their actions range from strange to violent.

Some of them we label environmental; their problems stem from home life. One of my students last year was a third grader and she was in the regular ed classroom at the

beginning of the year and I went and observed her. She wasn't doing any work in the classroom. She'd just roam and wander and do whatever she wanted and she stole everything. None of the kids liked her. They started to shun her and so I took her into my room.

And her family life is one where we suspect she's physically, sexually abused, but can't document it. She had an older sister who was removed from the home when this child was three. For some reason they left this one in the home and I'm not quite sure why. I think if one is being abused, the other probably is, too. And if not, when the other was taken away, this one began getting that.

So she does a lot of acting out. She'll be really involved for a while, but it's almost like she can't handle the positive attention. She'll do so well and she's getting all these positives from us and then, all of a sudden, she can't handle that. She doesn't know how to react to all the positives so she acts out and just does something really blatant. Just steals something right from under us or will just grab onto her desk and not let go. Just weird little things that get her to the point where we have to take her out of the room. She needs to be restrained. And she screams and yells and kicks and screams. She bit me last year and it actually went through the skin so I had to go to the hospital for that.

Others have actual biological, chemical needs. They're on medication. Most of my kids are ADD or ADHD—Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder—so they'll take medications for that a lot of times.

They're very distractable. Some of them are real impulsive. If they're ADHD, you'll see a lot of hyperactivity. You'll see they're just fidgeting all the time, moving constantly. They go from one project to another, just bounce around the room. This is when they're not on their medication. Usually if they're on their medication they can concentrate and attend to a task for a longer period of time.

The kids in my room are pretty bright kids. They've got a lot of street smarts. Last year I had a fourth grader who read at almost a college level. She's amazing that way. But she's more like a second grader because she just didn't have those social skills. She's really impulsive and would do some strange things sometimes. She was standing in the middle of her classroom and had a thing of lotion in her hand. All of a sudden, she just pulled her shirt up and started massaging lotion on her breasts. She's just not aware of what's going on around her, what's appropriate, and doesn't think before she does something.

A lot of my kids don't handle change very well at all. Any time we have a break coming up, it's pretty chaotic in my room. They just cannot handle that. They want their routine. They want their schedule. They want to do everything the same way every day because it's safe and it's secure.

Amy earned her associate's degree at a community college before transferring to

Pacific Lutheran University (PLU) because it was cheaper that way. She also worked all four years of school at a design firm to help pay her expenses. Amy knew going into college that she wanted to major in teaching and, in May, '94, she graduated.

My degree is elementary education, but my academic major is anthropology. Really bizarre, but it was of interest to me and seeing that I had to take all the classes, I thought I'd pick something that I was interested in. My minor is special ed and when I applied for jobs in districts, I applied for both regular ed and special ed. I wasn't quite sure which way I wanted to go.

When I first started with my minor in special ed, I did it more for job assurance because I knew it's a growing field. They have trouble hiring people in those areas. But I really did enjoy this last year. I don't want to be in this room forever because it's easy to burn out in this area, with these kids. They suck all your energy. You're physically and emotionally drained at the end of the day because they take so much. I'd like to do it another year for sure and possibly another year after that and then probably go into regular ed. I originally wanted to do kindergarten, but I've enjoyed the older kids just as much as the younger ones. So now, even if I go to regular ed, I'll still have a hard time deciding what grade level I want.

I think [college is] a huge growing experience. I knew what I wanted to do so it was pretty cut and dried for me, but that's how I am. That's my personality. I always have things totally planned out and on schedule. But there's so many other people and friends I have who kind of drifted through college and did a little of this and a little of that. I think it serves its purpose for a lot of different people. I think it just has so much to offer that it's a totally different experience for everybody.

That's where I did a lot of my growing up. I was always really shy, quiet, kind of introverted. I started breaking out of my shell a little bit more in college, trying some new things, going some different directions. Even five years ago I would have been scared to death to do special ed and deal with the kind of kids I deal with. I'm more willing to try different things now, and I think that's because of the experience I got in college.

A big part of work, for Amy, is being part of a group, whether it's fellow teachers or her students.

I don't know if this is just for teachers, but there's a sense of belonging, like a teachers' club. You know all your teachers. You've got your school. Teachers stick together and support each other. I felt a lot of that this year, especially in my school district. They give you a mentor your first year and that person really shows you the ropes and really makes you feel comfortable in the school you're in.

I get a lot of satisfaction out of the kids that I teach and it seems odd because you take

real small steps with these kids. It's the little things that they learn and the little things they say and do that makes me think, 'Ah, it's worth it today.' Some days I'm like, 'Why am I doing this. These kids are driving me crazy.' And then they'll do something and I'm just like, 'Wow. They actually remember that.'

One thing our school did last year was a new program to teach the kids some cooperative learning and social skills. One of the big things was to give affirmations. To say, 'I like the way you said 'Hi' to me.' Or, 'I really appreciate how you clean up that mess when you're done.' Using 'I' statements to give somebody some kind of compliment. I really worked with my kids on that a lot. We'd practice it all the time.

And I was being evaluated by the principal. I was really nervous. And one of the kids raised his hand and gave me an affirmation, right in the middle of the lesson. The principal's mouth just dropped open. None of the other kids in the school was really catching on to this thing and here the adaptive behaviors kids, who everybody puts off in the corner, were using it in their everyday life. And to use it to the teacher was just amazing.

Despite the fact that her students' improvement comes in "small steps," most of Amy's frustrations don't come from the kids, but from her lack of ability to help them the way she'd like. For example, she's frustrated by how little she can do for the third grader she suspects is being sexually abused.

The way the system's set up, from what I'm told, is DSHS [Department of Social and Health Services] doesn't take behavior into account. The child has to come out and tell you they're being abused or you have to see some physical manifestation of it—a bruise, a scrape or something like that. At this point they don't take behavior into account, which is really frustrating in my situation because what I see is the behavior. I saw it a lot when I worked at the mental hospital. Kids out there, you could tell the ones who were sexually abused. They acted out sexually all the time. But [DSHS] won't take that into account. That's not hard proof.

So we just document anything, any story that this child tells me about something her dad did. Sometimes she'll tell you little bits and pieces, but she never comes out enough to where they could take her out of home. I just keep documenting it and calling CPS [Child Protective Services] and they've got a file on her and hopefully some day they'll do something. But at this point nothing.

How much can I do for 'em here at school? That's another thing that's really frustrating with this job. Working was frustrating at the end of last year because here we'd gone so far with them throughout the school year. But then they have a whole summer at home. A whole summer at home with parents who are possibly abusive, going through divorces. Unstable home life where they don't have a real set routine.

Two of my boys, one was fifth grade and one was sixth grade, they're going on to middle school next year. I worry about what's in store for them in middle school because they don't have adaptive behavior after elementary school. These kids just get thrown into the mix of the resource room kids, who aren't necessarily in special ed for behavior. But they all get lumped together. And middle school and high school's chaotic anyway. And so I worry. How are these guys going to handle it? And at that point I have to let go. I can't do anymore because they're not in elementary school anymore. I just hope I've given them enough to do the best they can.

Amy decided to become a teacher during her senior year of high school. With her background of learning disabilities and fear of school, it was a hard decision for her to make.

I've always been drawn to children and I think they've always been drawn to me. And everyone's always said, 'Oh, you're just so good with kids, you really should be a teacher. You should do something with children.' Why would I want to do that? They don't make any money. There's no glory in it. You don't get recognized for it as much as you should.

I really fought it [until] I took a community service class in high school and volunteered in a kindergarten classroom and instantly fell in love with the whole classroom atmosphere and these little kids who were so eager to learn. Then I knew that's what I wanted to do. And I really can't see myself doing anything else. I'll also think about other things, you know, like anthropology for a brief minute. Maybe I should go on a dig somewhere and do something. But it's so fleeting. Teaching's what I'm meant to do.

I'm good with kids. I feel I'm at my best, I'm at my most comfortable when I'm around kids and helping them. So finally it came down to, you should do what you're good at. Everybody has talents in life and you should use those instead of letting them waste away.

Having found teaching, Amy plans to stick with it. The idea of changing careers like her father did scares her. She likes her life to be "totally planned out and on schedule."

But when it came to love and marriage, she found out that planning isn't always enough. Amy was engaged to a man she started dating in high school. They had bought a house with the help of his parents and were planning a wedding, but they broke up in early '96.

I figured I would be married by now. I'd always thought I'd be starting my family within the next couple years. But now that's totally out the window. I do want to be married and I do want to have kids. But now I wonder how long that's going to be. I always had my agenda: finish high school, go to college, start the career, get married and have a family. Now I've done all those other things and marriage and a family isn't happening yet. So I just hang out there until I find that person, I guess.

If she does have children, Amy would like to spend some time off work with them. She says teaching is a nice career for that because it's something you can get back into when you want to. And if she can't afford to quit while her children are pre-schoolers, she'll still have summers and holidays. Also, she's figured out that if she does have children, it would be best to have them in the spring.

The best time to get pregnant would be so that you could have your baby in the springtime so then you'd get your two or three months maternity and then you have the summer, too. So by the time you even have to think about whether or not you wanted to return to school or stay at home, you'd already have six months with your baby.

And I know I'm not the only one who's thought about that. My girlfriend from school called me just yesterday to tell me she's pregnant. She told me that she and her husband were going to try this summer and if they didn't get pregnant, they were going to wait until next summer because she wanted to make sure that she had her baby in the spring. A lot of them do that.

But, for Amy, marriage and babies are still a waiting game.

I look at it and I'm getting to the point where I know I'm young, but I start to feel old. I think, 'Oh, 25. Only five more years to 30.' And, you know, it takes time to meet somebody. And it takes time to date and get to know them. And I wonder how old I'll be. And that's something that's really strange to me because I thought by now I'd be married and, in another year or two, have kids. So it's going to be a little longer than I thought.

Job security is not something Amy worries about. But she remembers when her father was out of work, first when he sold his tavern and another time when his job was eliminated while the family was away on vacation.

My dad had enough business smarts to have a back-up plan and to have some money in reserve. We were able to get by. But I remember it being more of an emotional thing. It was really put on my sister's and my shoulders, 'Your dad doesn't have a job right now and you can't have that.' Or, 'You've really got to be careful with what you spend because your dad doesn't have a job.' I remember a lot of that kind of feeling. This big, ominous thing there. And I remember when he was applying for jobs. I remember the anxiety, 'Your dad's waiting to hear about a job.' And my dad telling me, 'Stay off the phone tonight. I'm waiting for a call about a job.' Even being young, that first time, you could feel it.

Amy says her strengths as a worker are that she's a good listener and support person who doesn't always want to take the lead. She's also a perfectionist, which she says makes her very thorough in her work. But being a perfectionist is also a working weakness for Amy.

Because I'm such a perfectionist, I have trouble taking risks sometimes, just jumping out



there and trying something. Because I always want it to go well and I always want to do it right, I don't always take as many risks as I should. And I know that's how we learn, from our mistakes, but I hate to make the mistakes. That's something I've gotten real conscious about just in the last two years. In college I had a couple professors pull me aside and say, 'You are too much of a perfectionist. You need to just relax and take more risks.' Now it's something that I'm aware of and so I push myself a little bit harder. It's hard still though. It doesn't come naturally.

A skill Amy believes will help her in her career is dependability, something she attributes to her father who says, "Do your best and be on time." She also thinks flexibility and an ability to work well with others are skills/attitudes successful people have.

I think that I try to be flexible. I'm always willing to listen to a new idea or a new way. I'll think about it and then I'll give it a try. I'm not one who is just going to sit stagnant and say, 'This is how I teach and this is how I'm always going to teach.' I'm always trying to find other ways to improve what I'm doing. They're always coming up with new things, interesting new philosophies and new teaching strategies.

I think that will help me out in the long run, to be able to adapt. Like I said, I had wanted to be a kindergarten teacher and this year I tried something different. I did adaptive behaviors and I ended up teaching kindergarten through sixth grade and found out that I even like the older kids. Now I'd be more willing to try an older class when I go into regular ed.

I also see an openness to work with others [as an important skill]. People who work well with other people, who have some social skills, I think are the people who are going to go farther. Because we learn from other people all the time, if you keep to yourself, you're going to miss out on a lot. There are other people in your workplace; if you know how to get along with them, it can help you out with learning new things.

Amy's confused about the label "Generation X," but she does see differences in her generation versus others, both in approach to life and work.

I feel like they're more socially conscious, more into environmental issues and social issues. I don't know if that's just the people I know in my social group or if it's across the board. You know, happy people—not hippy—but trying to do something, trying to give back to the world and make it a better place. That sounds like a commercial or something, but that's what I think of when I think about my age group as opposed to any other group.

[Although] I am in a traditional career, I don't think a lot of people my age are necessarily going for the traditional job. I think they're going with whatever moves them. I think of art majors. They're doing what they love more than, 'Okay. I have to become an accountant because my father was an accountant and his father was an accountant.'

They're going more with their heart and what they want to do, what they're going to be happy doing, whether that means they're going to make a lot of money or not. They tend to do what it is they know they're going to be happy doing, whether that's being a doctor or a garbage collector, a chiropractor or an accountant. Anything.

## BOYD MILLER PROFILE

Boyd Miller, 29, lives in Olympia, Washington with his wife Jeri Lynn and daughter Eleni Marie, born November 9, 1996, just weeks before he took a new job. He had been a self-employed bench jeweler working in a jewelry store when he decided to put in some extra hours selling cameras for the store across the mall during Christmas. That part-time job became a full-time sales position.

Boyd had sold cameras before and had experience as a supervisor. He took the full-time job with the understanding that a management position would be in his future. About a month later, two days after Thanksgiving, he was promoted to manager for one of the camera chain's biggest stores.

Like a lot of jobs, it was a cascade of different things happening. I was working across the way from [the camera store] and photography's always been an interest of mine. I got to know those guys really well 'cause I was printing all my film in there. They needed somebody for Christmas hire and we were about ready to have a baby so I decided that I could work over there and make a little extra cash. About the same time, the place that had most of my [jewelry repair] contracts pissed me off. So I went over there and they had a full-time position. So I said 'Screw it.' I'm just gonna forget this and go do this for a while and regroup and decide what I'm gonna do.

I went over there. They got a new district manager about the same time. He sat down and talked with me and asked me if I was interested [in managing] 'cause he knew what my background was. I said, 'Yeah. I'd be interested to be a manager for you.' I started working for him full time. Then in November, all of a sudden, I'm a manager. Just kind of happens that way.

I've always wanted this job. I worked for Best Products [a discount retailer that has since gone out of business] for a number of years. It was the first retail job I ever had. I did it while I was going to college. It started as a part-time thing, and then college slowly slipped away and I was working full time for them. I always enjoyed the job. I just could never make any money. At Best there was no commission. It was a base pay, hourly wage, and it was very low. But I enjoyed what I did.

From there I kind of moved into the jewelry industry where I could make a little more money. I've always loved jewelry, but not as much as I like cameras. So the opportunity now is right where I would really like to be. The company's a little topsy turvy, but as long as I can do a good job, keep everybody out of my hair, maybe I could stay there for a while.

Boyd's salary is complicated. He gets a base salary, plus 1 percent of store profits, bonuses for reaching personal sales goals and the occasional cash incentive to sell a particular item. If he stays in the busy South Seattle store, his base will be about

\$2,000 a month, with the big money coming at Christmas time. In December and January, he took home almost \$4,500 a month and his base then was only \$1,500.

One of the biggest drawbacks to the job is his commute. It takes an hour to drive from his apartment to the store when traffic is light. But his wife's job—and their good insurance benefits—are in Olympia. They're still trying to figure the best solution.

At this point, this is a touchy issue. I get paid well, but the insurance sucks. My wife works for the state. There she's got a good pay with great benefits. They're taking benefits away slowly but surely and making us pay more and more for 'em, but they're still a hell of a lot better than you can get pretty much anywhere else. So she's got a choice to make. She could transfer to work in the Renton area, but the job they do in the Renton area is not the job she wants to do. She's probably gonna want to work here.

So we're looking at moving somewhere in between because most of our family's here in Olympia. We're also teetering with the thought of staying right where we're at because we pay only \$500 a month in rent instead of going up there where we're gonna pay at least \$150 more and probably want a bigger apartment if we're gonna make the move. We'll be paying like \$750. So we're thinking about just staying put and I'll do the drive for a while 'til I just can't take it anymore. Then, hopefully, we'll have enough money saved up so we can get ourselves a place instead of renting.

Boyd moved to Washington when he was in the seventh grade. During his sophomore year in high school, his parents split up and he ended up moving back to Redding, California with his mother. It was there he graduated from high school. After graduation, he spent a year in Sweden on foreign exchange.

He worked in a pizza parlor in the 11th grade and his senior year he took a class on bank tellering and worked in a bank, first for credit and then for pay. When he returned from Sweden, he got a part-time job selling nuts and bolts while he attended college. Then he went away again, this time to work as a maid in Snomass, Colorado, a resort town near Aspen. He lived rent free and made \$7.50 an hour, plus tips and left-over convention freebies. When he returned to his mother's place in California, he had a wad of cash to finance school. But the situation at home had changed.

My mom had moved in with a guy who she's actually married to now. And I came home. I was getting ready to go back to school. I had a slug of money saved up. And they said, 'No. You're gonna have to do it on your own.' So I had to go out and find myself an apartment. Of course, then I had to find a job because I couldn't ride on the money I had and go to school. So I got a job as a temporary with the phone company. I worked that job for eight months.

Boyd just missed getting a permanent job with the phone company. When that fell through, he moved back to Washington to attend The Evergreen State College. He arrived at his grandparents' home, where he had lived with his parents before their divorce, with his stuff and little else.

I had \$20 in my pocket. So I moved in with my grandparents. My dad was a travelling nurse at the time. He happened to be up here in between jobs. For the last few years, he'd been using my grandparents' place as a central area for his mail. And when he was not working, that's where he'd come and stay. The whole family kind of hung out and played cards and farted around.

I'd go out during the day and try to find a job. Couldn't find a job. Couldn't find a job. Couldn't find a job. Finally I cut my hair and I walked into Best one day 'cause they had an ad in the paper. I walked in, grabbed an application and filled it out. I said I'd like to talk to a manager. They called over [the woman] who was running the department at the time. Unbeknownst to me, she knew absolutely nothing about photography or cameras. She just happened to have that position because it was a department store. They brought her from somewhere else to manage that area.

She asked me a loaded question, 'I see you don't have any retail experience. What makes you think you can sell cameras?' I was hungry and determined so I turned around and told her everything I knew about cameras and didn't even realize I was talking completely over her head at the time. She walked away in a daze, completely impressed, and hired me the next day. So that's how I started retail. Seven years I worked for that company in one form or another. I started part time in the camera department. Eventually I was full time in the camera department and I was also a supervisor.

The company was going through bankruptcy and wages were frozen, so Boyd transferred to the jewelry department in order to earn commissions.

I started working in the jewelry department. I started making more money. And I started learning a few things. I got to know the central repair shop in Tacoma. We'd have to call there all the time to find jobs. So I got to know the manager there real well, on the phone. We'd never actually met face to face. One day a bunch of people quit on her and she had no help. So I told her, 'Well, I don't know anything about what your job is, but I think it would be really cool to do and would you consider hiring me?' I faxed her an application and I wound up getting that job. This is as a bench jeweler. I was actually an apprentice at first. I started polishing jewelry.

I really had no prior experience. I just had sold jewelry. I'd been taking classes to find out more about stones and gold and that kind thing. I did have an interest in what she did and I always asked her questions on the phone about stuff. But I'd never actually even seen anybody do it. I just knew the idea of what you did. I worked my way from a polisher to a journeyman jeweler.

It was a [pay] decrease in a weird sort of way. My hourly wage went up, but I lost my commission, and in that loss of commission, I went down about 50 cents an hour. But I did it because I was burned out selling on the floor. I just got tired of dealing with customers. And I wanted to do something else. I wanted to learn a skill. And I had the potential to go up to \$12, \$13 an hour.

Boyd met his wife at Best. It was through a job she held after leaving Best that he met Gerald, who later helped him become self employed as a jeweler.

Another one of these coincidence things like jobs always seem to be. My wife also worked in the jewelry industry. And one of the guys she'd worked with, his name's Gerald, Gerald and I had always kind of stayed in touch. Well, Gerald was then working for [a jewelry store] and they needed a jeweler. We'd just actually been out one night shooting darts, one of my pastimes, and he was talking about the problems they were having with their jeweler and how they were looking for another one, but never even thinking that I'd be interested in taking the position. So I called his boss and talked about what the job entailed. And found out that it wasn't actually employment. It was independent contractor basis. You rented the shop and they guaranteed to give you X amount of work. Actually they gave me two stores to start with. Then I could get more of their stores later. And I could also do anybody else's stores. So then I had to go get a small business license and go buy a bunch of equipment and put myself out on the line. And I started my own business—Sapphire Cat Jewelers.

I will probably at some point in time be doing jewelry work again. But I'm gonna do it different than I did it this time. One of the things that I found was I became a used car repairman. I was fixing people's broken jewelry and that's all I was doing. I got into it as more of a creative, artistic endeavor and I wound up being this kind of a mechanic. So that part of the job wasn't real satisfying, but that is where your bread and butter is. That's where you're going to put money on the table.

What I'd like to do the next time is not be located inside a store. I'd like to set up a bench inside my own home, in a garage or a shop, and be able to do custom work and do less of the maintenance, repair and sizing stuff. Do probably fewer jobs overall, but be able to come home and on the weekend, cast a couple items for somebody who's gotten my name word of mouth and go from there.

Boyd's current job allows him to indulge his passion for photography, a passion he developed in elementary school.

It starts in fourth grade. I had an activity class for three months where the teacher was a rather avid amateur photographer. She'd gotten the OK from the school to start a photography class for anybody that might be interested. Right when we were coming into this class, they had nothing. They'd just bought equipment. Instead of a darkroom, they built a dark box. So, black and white photography, you could do your developing and

stuff inside the box without exposing the paper. And they set the enlarger and everything in there.

They bought a couple cameras. We also built a pinhole camera out of a shoebox and played around with that a little bit. And my dad saw my interest in it and they went down—I was about nine years old—and bought me a single lens reflex camera with interchangeable lenses and gave me that for my birthday. That's what I started with. It was all manual so I had to learn everything that I was doing, what was right and what was wrong. And I just continued to fiddle with it on my own time, taking classes whenever I got a chance. I've been shooting ever since on an amateur level.

Although Boyd moved to Washington to go to college and started at a community college, working full time pushed school aside. Now he's just short of an associate's degree. He's been thinking of going back to study art photography, although he has no interest in pursuing a career as a photographer. He does some photography on the side and believes he always will, but he's happy with his job now. Finishing his degree has more to do with goals passed down from his family and the unique opportunities college offers.

I don't want to call it status. But for myself, nobody in my family has gotten higher than an A.A. degree. They're very smart, very well-educated people overall. My grandmother went through high school, but then she basically educated herself. She's an avid reader. Her whole dream was that I would go to college because her son never completely finished school. There was a lot of emphasis put on me as a youngster that college was important.

And for myself, with photography, you can go learn that anywhere else and applying it is the only way you're going to learn it well. But to be in a classroom, to be in a think tank with other people that have a similar interest, and to have a direct outlet to see what other people are doing and how they're doing it, I think that those kind of things are an environment that you can't get anywhere else. So I don't know if I want to go so much for the degree as it is just to get the gears rolling again when you start to feel stagnant about stuff.

Despite the fact that Boyd is not planning to use college to further his career, he believes college is beneficial in general.

I think [college is] more useful for some than others. I think it's more useful for some positions than others. I think that somebody who's motivated and really wants to learn can learn a lot. I don't know if it teaches them enough about the real world, about how to apply what they learn. I think that's something that's kind of limited in a lot of colleges. But from my own experience, I think college has a purpose.

And I think that as you get older—I'm 29, almost 30 now—I look back and say, 'Damn.' It would have been a hell of a lot easier just to stick out school for a couple more years and actually have a degree than to sit at home with a family and say, 'Now how are we going to shuffle all this? How are we going to shuffle off these bills? And how are going to shuffle off this time?' And be able to do something that's suddenly become way more important than it was when I was 18.

I think that's another thing about it. It's hard to keep yourself focused on something you know is important when you're that young because there's all kinds of other things you want to do. And you can't do 'em all at the same time. So you wind up getting side tracked and you don't realize how long and how far you get sidetracked. I still can't believe I'm gonna be 30. Not that I have a trip about it, but it seems like the 20s came and went a hell of a lot faster than my teens did. Even though you're only a teenager from 13 to 19, my 20s seem to have gone by even faster, without me even noticing.

Approaching 30, Boyd says he can't explain what "work" means, but he says he had a realization recently that his current job is more than just a job.

It's not just work. I can't even really consider it a career. I don't really know what the 'career' word means, either. But it is a profession. With cameras in particular, you can go anyplace pretty much and find a camera department. And there's very few people behind the counter that really know anything about the product they're selling. That's where it's a profession.

Cameras are one thing in my life I've always had and always loved. And one thing that I like more than anything else is to be able to have someone come across the counter and say, 'I need to buy a camera,' and then be able to identify what their needs are and show them what's going to be best for them. And I think [companies sometimes lose sight of that kind of selling], even the company I work with now. In one breath they'll say that. But in the next breath they're also saying, 'Sell 'em more. Sell 'em up. Sell 'em this. Sell 'em that. Sell. Sell. Sell.'

To me it's more of a profession. I'm not trying to sell somebody something they don't need. I want to sell them exactly what they need. And I feel that more people are going to come back because of that. And more friends of theirs and family members of theirs are going to come back because of that. So I guess work is a profession. And sometimes it's just a grindstone. It's being able to put money on the table doing what you need to do. But if you just go to work every day ... I mean work has kind of a bad connotation to it. I don't want my job just to be work.

Sometimes the best jobs you've ever had are the jobs that don't make you enough money to survive. It is a fact that you need to make enough money to be able to pay your bills and balance your books. But I think more importantly out of a job, you need to get a sense of achievement. A job has to make you feel good. You have to enjoy doing it. And there



has to be something beneficial that you get out of the job besides your pay. There's lots of people that make lots of money and they're just miserable. And then there's lots of people that don't make any money and have a real good time doing it. Somewhere in between there lies the job that's going to pay you well enough for your life style and going to give you all the personal incentives that you need to keep coming to work every day.

Boyd's personal incentives include being around his favorite toys. He used to keep up on all the newest products and advances in cameras for his own information. Now it's his job to know what's new and train his staff so they are better salespeople.

What he's not enjoying right now is that he's had almost no training in management procedures.

They dumped me into a position in a store at a very poor time. I have very little history with the company. I have very little understanding of the managerial paperwork involved and I have to wing everything. Everyday I come in and look over my problems and assess what I need to address first. And then I have to learn how to solve that problem. It's really disappointing that I haven't gotten anybody who comes in and sits down with me for a week and runs me through how things are supposed to be done with this company.

Also, the company is very topsy turvy. They've fired a number of managers. That's part of the reason I got the job I got, because the guy before me got the axe. They've got a new district manager and he's recommending all the people that he wants. I'm one of those people, but he's been stirring up the pot a whole lot. And some of his decisions seem snap decisions. Someday I could come in and not have a job. Or if there's a new district manager, I may be out the door before I have a chance to explain why I can do the job. Those are things that make you questionable about the job at times.

I've worked a few other places. I've been on my own and done my own thing. No job is gonna give you 100 percent of what you want. If they do, you better look out because it's gonna change. Every company I've ever come into, when I've been real happy with things, it's changed. A good thing won't last forever. That's just the way life goes. And you just have to kind of roll with the changes and you have to step up and say what you don't like sometimes. But you can't just be a complainer all the time or you're not going to get anywhere.

Boyd says he can't foresee his future and didn't want to jinx himself by trying. "I'll just take it the way I've taken everything else in my life. Stumble along and something good will happen out of it."

Like a lot of things in my life, it will be a lot of networking. People you meet, people you get to know and build from there, especially in the things that I'm interested in. Technology moves so fast it's hard to predict what will be available in a few years. Had a

guy come in the other day who gave me his business card. He works in Alaska setting up video equipment for school television stations. Came in and asked me about digital equipment and was amazed with my amount of information. So he gives me a business card and says, 'I might be expanding in the Seattle area and I'll give you a call.' And he took my business card. Things like that. Somewhere along the line, something's going to bumble into something else and I'll be doing something completely different than what I'm doing.

I don't believe in changing jobs real frequently. I owned my own business for two years and I worked for Best for seven years so I don't move around a whole lot. I feel faithful to the company I work for. The whole time I worked [at Best], I felt like we sold things at the best price and we gave the best service. I think you have to feel that way. [The camera store] doesn't sell things at the cheapest price necessarily, but I feel like we give some of the best service and we have some of the best photo finishing available in the industry. Those are pride of work. But if something better comes along that sounds good and you weigh all the pros and cons and you go that way, you gotta go that way. I don't think that you can pass something up just because of the loyalty to work in the same place for the rest of your life. They don't seem too concerned about whether you stay or whether you go. I haven't had a company that just bends over and pleads with you to stay.

In 1995, Boyd married his wife Jeri Lynn. They had a private ceremony with two friends in February and a bigger wedding with their families in August. Just over a year later, Eleni Marie was born.

Being married, my approach to work didn't really change. We'd been together for so long nothing was really that much different. But having a child adds a sense of responsibility. It is a bigger weight on your shoulders. We're in this adjustment phase, trying to get used to the whole new environment of being a family.

We've both been working up until this point. Now Jeri Lynn's not working. I think sometimes she has a problem because she's not bringing any money home. She worries about what my attitude is because I have to work and I'm the one that's making all the money. I really don't have a problem. But I feel guilty because I'm working all the time at this new job because it's paying me well and because I enjoy doing it. But I also feel like I should be home with the family more often and be able to do more things. I've only taken today [January 13] and one other day off since I started. I was supposed to have yesterday off and then somebody quit on me so I wound right up back at work.

I feel a bigger responsibility to the job in some ways. And I feel less of it in others because a family's much more important than the job. But at this point, I just don't have any other way to make this kind of money. Until my wife starts working again, this is what we're going to have to live with. And hopefully, once she starts working and things calm down at work and I get things organized, then we'll be able to spend a little more time as a family. Right now it's like one man for himself. I mean, the kid cries at night, I gotta get

sleep 'cause I gotta get back up in the morning. So I wind up on a couch or she winds up on a couch. It's like you're both living two separate lives inside the same home.

Jeri Lynn goes back to work in two months. As of now there's no decision on whether it will be full or part time. In her office, it's possible she could work full time the first two weeks of the month and take the second two weeks off completely.

I think she's looking at working part time, most of the time. But that's that whole teeter-totter thing. It depends on what happens with my job. It depends on if we decide to buy a house and how much money we have available at that time. When the kid gets a little older, she probably will go back to full time. My wife's really into home right now and she's really into baby. But I think eventually she'll be into job again.

But the way it is, even financially, if we could handle keeping her out of work for year, she wouldn't have a job when she went back to work and we would lose our insurance. So she's almost forced to go back to work. I think financially we could handle just me working right now. But when you throw in insurance, especially with a new baby, there's no way. She has to go back to work part time just to maintain her insurance.

Buying a home is something that kept coming up as Boyd and I talked.

Isn't that the American dream? Something that's slipping away from everyone. It's definitely high on our list for major purchase. We've tried to position ourselves a number of times, but things like weddings and babies come into play and they wind up costing us some money and delaying a few things one way or the other. And prices just keep getting higher and higher and wages keep staying about the same. So I don't know. I think that we can definitely get into a home. I think part of the problem is that a lot of the things we can afford, we don't want. It's a champagne taste on a beer budget kind of thing. But you don't want to buy a home that's in bad shape because then you're just gonna spend a whole lot more money on the upkeep and getting the house back up to par. That's something you do when you've got a lot more time on your hands.

Boyd has never been laid off or fired. He's got a few concerns currently, but they're related to being new with a company more than anything else. In general, he says, "I never worried about anybody firing me because I do what I need to do and then I go home. If they fire you for that, then you just go find another job."

I hope that I can present myself well enough to a prospective employer that I can get a job when I need a job. But I don't know if that job will pay me what I want to get paid, or what I need to get paid. That's the big concern. There's lots of jobs, but making \$4.90 an hour is not my idea of good employment. And there's more and more of those \$4.90 jobs. I actually hire people today at \$4.90 or commission, whichever's higher. At the particular store I'm at everybody makes somewhere between \$6 and \$10 an hour. But if you didn't

do well at the job or when you're first learning, it can be very difficult. Somebody who's brand new to retail, doesn't have a pitch, doesn't have everything down, is still learning about products and everything, it can be a very difficult job to learn. And you could starve while you're learning.

It's a matter of somebody giving me a chance. You're just one more face in the crowd until you can get a chance to prove to somebody that you're not. But I feel like I'm pretty well educated. I don't have a degree behind me. It's one thing that can be a knock. It's a nice thing to have. It looks good on a resume. But I feel like I'm a pretty creative thinker and a good problem solver. Work independently. And from my childhood and the way my parents raised me, I don't have to be told something twice. You can tell me once and I'll remember. That was because when I was told not to do something, I was told once, maybe a second time, and never told a third time. And I took my chance on the second time.

I think those things are real important. I think there's a lot of people who just continue to do things the way they want to do them and not the way somebody else wants to do them. I really don't have a problem with that unless they want me to do something I don't feel comfortable with. But I don't feel like I have a lot of personal hangups. I feel like I'm an easy person to work with and work for.

Boyd thinks that successful people are "good, common sense thinkers" who are trustworthy and loyal. They aren't, however, always the most qualified for a position.

I don't necessarily think in every job experience is 100 percent necessary. I think you see more and more with a lot of positions that they ask for experience. But I think that if you actually go and apply for those jobs, you'll find that those people wind up hiring somebody that has very minimal experience. Somebody who comes in and says, 'Hey, I don't have direct experience with this, but I have done this and this before. And I can do this.' And they convince the person that they can do it.

You have 30 minutes of somebody's time to get a job and it's an acting job. You have to sit down with somebody and they have to ask you a bunch of weird questions in an awkward environment. And you have to be able to come off smooth and comfortable and convince them that you can do the job and why you can do it. Otherwise, somebody else is going to. I think lots of people can perform just about any job, given the right education, given the right training. But sometimes people pick it up faster than others. And I think that's what a lot of people are looking for, the lowest maintenance person for this position.

But low maintenance can equal low pay, something Boyd believes is a problem for today's young workers.

I know more and more people that are working more than one job, especially younger

people. Most of those people are making near minimum wage or minimum wage. And every year, at least for me, you need to make a little more money in order to be able to stay at the same level because the cost of automobiles and cost of gas and cost of food, everything goes up. But people's wages just keep kind of going down. When I started at Best, I started at minimum wage at the time. But I wasn't at minimum wage for very long. In six months, I was making almost a dollar more than that. And a year from then, I was making a dollar more. But a lot of positions today start at minimum wage and the people are still making minimum wage six, eight months later. So there's lots of jobs. There's just nowhere to make any money.

I think that some people are offsetting that by getting the education they need to get a good job. Other people are doing kind of what I'm doing, just trying to work hard and hope you land that good job. And then there's other people that are just floating around, working two, three jobs to make ends meet and hoping that things will change. Or just not even thinking that far in advance. I don't think many of 'em think that far in advance because the future never looked that good.

At first glance these eight Xers seem little different from other generations. The tools they work with are different. The economy is different. But they all work hard. They all want something better for their children. How does that make them different than the Cleavers and Bradys of '50s and '60s television?

What seems added to this generation is a fatalistic sense that life happens to them. Life is a dance, but these Xers are not in the lead. They take what life offers and make the best of it, a trait that seems out of place in people between 25 and 30 years of age.

One way this shows itself is in the belief of these eight Xers that luck plays an equal role to success as does hard work.

Tony Painter is by far the most entrepreneurial of the eight. Although Boyd Miller had his own business and supported himself and his wife, he has little ambition to be a business owner again because he believes owning a business takes the fun out of doing what you love. And Stephanie Ambauen talks about buying and remodeling homes as a way of making money, but her goals are clearly home and family, making remodeling more of a way to work at home than to earn a living.

But Tony has grand aspirations for a future business and to get to where he wants to be, he sometimes works two jobs while going to school. He wants to own a home because paying rent is "wasting" money. He wishes he owned more than one house so he could rent the others. And a big reason for getting a college degree is so he can get a big loan to open a business. For a job he is passionate about, Tony is willing to work 24 hours a day.

Where Tony is cynical about luck is not so much about benefitting from "some

strange act of God," as much as being held back by it. A firm believer that life is not fair, he says, referring to the fire that caused him to lose his rehearsal spaces and apartment, it's even "unfair."

Plus, he adds, "we have distinct societal classes in America," and he's one of the people that has to have a job to survive. He has to work that much harder to become successful than someone who was born into money—someone who was luckier in birth.

Boyd Miller, who manages the camera shop, also believes that circumstance plays a major—albeit it more beneficial—role in his life. "Somewhere along the line," he says, "something's going to bumble into something else and I'll be doing something completely different than what I'm doing."

Instead of setting defined career goals, Boyd remains open to new opportunities and takes advantage of them if they suit his needs. He's happy selling cameras, content with the money he's making, but a little apprehensive about the "topsy turvy" style upper management. So when a customer who works in Alaska setting up video equipment in schools gave Boyd his card, Boyd made sure he kept it, just in case it might come in handy when the time comes to "bumble" into another job.

To a degree, all eight Xers mentioned luck. Boyd Wolfe is "lucky" to have a good manufacturing job. Nalani Linder was lucky to inherit a house and a nicer lifestyle than she and Mark could otherwise afford or would even have the ambition to aspire to.

Overall, there is a feeling of these people plugging away at their jobs, for the most part content with the cards dealt them. But at the same time they fantasize about how their lives would change if they won the lottery.

Perhaps it is this fatalistic view that robs them of the ambition to set and work toward definable career goals.

Amy Johnson, the teacher, is probably the most goal oriented. She likes her life "totally planned out and on schedule." She decided to become a teacher, took special ed classes to make herself extra marketable and got a job teaching. Yet Amy's career goals are bound by a very traditional job. The goals she makes now have, for the most part, been set by teachers who have gone before her.

Tony, on the other hand, has goals that are so far reaching and so susceptible to the "outside influences" of his life that they seem more like dreams.

Chris Rimple, who used to work for a software company, is experimenting with life to see what goals to set. But even he admits that he will most likely fall back into computers because it's easy—he knows it and the money is good.

Many of these Xers are living day to day. Becky Little, the park maintenance worker, supposes she won't be able to dig ditches when she's 50, but has no other ideas about what kind of work she might be doing then and therefore nothing to work toward.

Another aspect of not having set work goals may come from the fact that there is a diminished sense of loyalty between worker and company. Boyd Miller doesn't believe in changing jobs frequently and thinks it is important to have a sense of pride in the company you work for. But if something better comes along, he doesn't believe loyalty to a company should hinder taking the new job because companies "don't seem too concerned about whether you stay or whether you go."

Chris Rimple believes that loyalty to one company could hurt someone in his



industry because it limits what he can learn and lessens his marketability if he does find himself in the position of looking for another job. Also, in many smaller software firms, he says, there is only so much to learn before you exhaust their product line and only so far you can go before you exhaust the possibilities for promotion. So moving from company to company is also a way to advance up the ladder in the computer industry. Chris doesn't expect a company to provide a career track, relying instead on moving around and providing his own continuing education.

This sense of not expecting any help seems prevalent in this group. Tony Painter believes you are responsible for yourself. You can't expect, he says, to find a job from which you will retire after 30 years with a pension and Social Security. "People my age," he says, "have to be on our toes," relying neither on big business nor the government.

But because they have a bleak outlook on jobs and careers, don't think these Xers are without any goals. Home and family life seems especially important to many of them.

Although Becky Little's career goals are indistinct—almost non-existent—she is not without goals. She has been trying hard for the past few years to become a mother. To this end she and her husband have given time, effort and a great deal of money. Indeed, these Xers seem to have put a lot of thought into their home and family life—even those without families.

Although single, family is Stephanie Ambauen's number one priority and she is active in her niece and nephew's lives. And although she describes herself as a "worker bee," it's clear that her family will always come before a job.

What's more, the emphasis on a good family life seems more pronounced in the

Xers from broken families themselves. Chris Rimple is adamant that if they can manage it, one parent (and he says he would be thrilled if it could be him) will remain home with the children. Stephanie says she would work an opposite schedule from her husband before she would put her kids in daycare. Tony Painter also would avoid putting children in daycare if he could, relying on his mother to care for a child if he or his wife couldn't stay home.

Both the men and women of this group seem willing to put children ahead of careers, although the only woman in the group who has a child admits that if she didn't have a husband and child and a home in Tacoma, she'd move within blocks of her work in Seattle and make it the hub of her life. For Nalani Linder, her family helps keep her from becoming obsessed with her job.

And so we have eight Generation Xers. They don't expect a lot from anyone. They don't expect a company to provide a life-long satisfying career. And they don't expect the government to care for them in their old age.

They do want to provide a good life for themselves and their families. And they are willing to work for it. But if they get lucky and win the lottery, hey, that would be great, too.