

Job Satisfaction - All In the Family

Pat Reising (September 2014)

When I was perhaps ten years old, that inevitable question came up in a school assignment: What do I want to be when I grow up? That was a progressive concept back then. In the mid '50s, women had stopped basking in the glory of giving up their jobs to the men coming home from the war, but hadn't started publicly clamoring for careers of their own. College for coeds was often a social event. But by the time I graduated high school, almost half my class, male and female, went on to some kind of higher education – ostensibly because Sputnik went to space, but mostly because we lived conveniently next to Southern Illinois University. There I met John, a graduate student with a turquoise Mustang, and I got my MRS.

Recently in Illinois visiting my family, I was preparing to write this month's Theme Quiz on Dream Jobs. I asked a few members of my family what their dream jobs were. From my intelligent and imaginative kinfolk, I expected a witty, creative discussion from astronaut to zookeeper. How disappointing!

My mother retired from a long career as secretary to her county's superintendent of schools, a job she began only after we kids were old enough to stay home alone. She organized and kept school records neatly accessible long before computer systems. By helping teachers and administrators, she made a difference in her corner of the education field. And she wouldn't have changed it for the world.

My sister is now driving the kids of the kids she drove in her school bus a generation ago. Everywhere we go someone says, "Hi, Jeanie". She had enough time between bus runs to tend to her own kids and now uses some of those free hours to be with our mother. She has summers off. And she wouldn't have changed it for the world.

My sister's husband owned an appliance repair business. Name on a truck, ads in the newspapers and phone book – everyone knew the Appliance Doctor. Later he hired in with the public schools in maintenance for the necessary end-of-career benefits. All the teachers and staff know Larry. And he wouldn't have changed it for the world.

My husband John signed on with the Air Force early in his career as a human factors psychologist. With a PhD, promotions were forthcoming; but more importantly, he got to do what he wanted to do: research he has since seen implemented that helps pilots to do their jobs safely and efficiently. As a civil servant, pay was never spectacular, but retirement benefits are priceless. And he wouldn't have changed it for the world.

I was fortunate to be a stay at home mother and returned to school only after the kids were old enough to stay home alone. I was a medical technologist in the laboratory at Children's Medical Center for more than twenty years. Oh, and that question back in grade school? I remembered my answer decades later. I was going to be a medical researcher (sic). I would wear a white coat, look down a microscope, and make people well. During my time at Children's, sick kids got well; I like to think I helped — in a lab coat with a microscope. And I wouldn't have changed it for the world.

No astronauts, no zookeepers, just a family of ordinary workers, doing ordinary work, with extraordinary satisfaction. How disappointing. How perfect. And I wouldn't have changed it for the world.