

# *Hard-Hatted Women*

## edited by Molly Martin

Week: 1 of 1

Chapters/Pages: pp. 3-15, 17-25, 63-70

### Themes:

- ♣ Experiences of tradeswomen
- ♣ Sexism/heterosexism in the workplace
- ♣ Ageism in the workplace
- ♣ Working class struggles

**Recommended Opening:** What's one word you would use to describe tradeswomen or how you hope to be as a tradeswoman?

### Before Reading:

- We'll only get to read a few of these stories together but they are all wonderful first-person accounts of pioneering women working in the trades.
- At the end of the group you'll receive a copy of important vocabulary terms that Marilou has highlighted with relevant page numbers. The book is out of print at this point, but you can look up and familiarize yourself with the terminology. If you want to find a copy on your own, there are some used copies available through the "marketplace" option on Amazon (and probably some other used book store hubs, if you wanted to find a different source).

### Recommended Reading Passages and Questions:

Read from Introduction, pp. 3-9 (until "by women in blue collar work."):

- What skills/jobs are considered "women's work"? What was Molly told and taught about it? Why might a woman want to do something different than this? What does it take to overcome the expectation that women should only do certain kinds of work?
- What is some of the history of women in trades and skilled crafts that Molly outlines? What was your reaction to reading this? Did you know any of this history?
- What did it take for women to secure equal access to trades and trade unions?
- How much do you think the circumstances for tradeswomen have changed since this book was published in 1988? What do you think has been accomplished since then? Where do you think there is still progress to be made?
- How do women's wages and earnings compare to men? Have you heard of the term "feminization of poverty"? What do you think it means (BGL can share this definition if useful: *a phenomenon in which women represent disproportionate percentages of the world's poor*). Why do you think this trend is occurring? What possibilities do you see for fixing it?

Read Introduction, pp. 9 (from "When I began talking...") – 15:

- What examples of the contributors' stories stood out to you? Why?
- Why do you think Molly calls the women who contributed "survivors"? What are some of the challenges tradeswomen face?

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- What kinds of harassment do tradeswomen sometimes face? What is the difference between sexual harassment and sex-based or gender-based harassment?
- What different discrimination might tradeswomen face on the job? In what ways might their womanhood/background help them?
- What do you think of Molly's comment that feminism has focused on "promoting women into white-collar and management positions"? Why do you think this is?

Read Beth Szillagyi – Sheet Metal Worker, pp. 17-25 (until "I haven't had to yet, fortunately"):

- What made Beth want to change jobs and become a tradeswoman? What are some other reasons women or people in general may be interested in working in the trades?
- How would you describe the exchange between Beth and "Cigar"? What kinds of things does he tell her to support why he thinks "women shouldn't work here"? How does she respond?
- What do you think you would do and say if you were in her shoes during that conversation? Why?
- How does Beth respond to some of the skepticism and harassment from men on the job? Do you think this is a good strategy? Why/why not?
- How do you foresee responding to situations like this, if you encounter it?
- How do you think you should judge when to speak up and advocate for yourself and when to let something go? Why?
- Beth talks about being prepared with a "bag of tricks" for different situations. What tools do you think you'll bring to work that will allow you to deal with conflicts that might arise in the workplace? What skills or tools do you want to hone or work on to prepare you for your work?

Read Fai Coffin – Drywall Rocker and Taper, pp. 63-70:

- What kinds of challenges does Fai face as a working, single mother? What kinds of things gave her strength to face these challenges?
- How can age be a liability at a trades job? How can age be a benefit? How do you think age or ageism will play a role in your work in the trades? Why?
- Fai talks about starting a program for disadvantaged girls. What ideas do you have for how women in future generations can have more access and opportunities to work in nontraditional jobs?
- How does Fai try to build a community of women? Do you see yourself as being in community with other tradeswomen? Why/why not? Do you think this will change when you start working? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What 'isms' does Fai mention playing a role in her work? How have you seen some of these things affecting a work environment? How do you anticipate your own background/identity being received in a workplace?
- What does Fai say in the last paragraph about class, work, and community? How do you react to this?
- Fai talks about her dream for people, especially women and especially working class people, to have access to good jobs. What are your hopes for the future of women/working class people?

**Recommended Poetry:** "¡Sí, Se Puede! Yes, We Can!" by Luis J. Rodriguez

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- Why do you think Rodriguez may have written this poem? What message do you feel like the poem is sending?
- Were there any lines or even words that stood out to you? Which ones? Why?
- Rodriguez mentions the words “human” and “humanity” several times. What is he trying to point out? Do you feel like he’s doing it successfully? Why/why not?
- What do you think the poet means in the last line: “What we clean, we also make sacred”?
- How do you think people view and/or treat janitors/custodial staff? How do you think people view and /or treat tradespeople? Is it different for different trades? If so, how?
- Rodriguez dedicates this to his father who was a janitor. Were there people in your life who you would want to honor the work they did? What would you want to write about them/their work?

### **Recommended Poetry Prompt:** “Hard-Hatted Women”

Luis J. Rodriguez writes a poem dedicated to his father, a janitor, and in honor of the hard work by people that often go unrecognized. Using your own knowledge and the stories we read in *Hard-Hatted Women*, write your own ode to tradeswomen (or one in particular if you have someone in mind). Think about the value of what they do and the rights and treatment they deserve. Honor the hard-hatted women at work!

**Recommended Closing: Closing:** “To have courage for whatever comes in life—everything lies in that.”—Saint Theresa of Avila

*Notes:*