Hard-Hatted Women  
edited by Molly Martin

Week: 1 of 3  
Chapters/Pages: pp. 3-15, 45-54

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 some of these stories together over the next few weeks 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 Pat Cull - Carpenter, pp. 45-50 (to “a woman could do this job”):

* BGL can choose to read this story in two parts or, time dependent, just read the first half.
  - What appealed to Pat about carpentry or the trades more generally? What makes the job fulfilling to her? What makes it challenging?
  - What draws you to the trades? Are there other reasons you can think of that someone might want to work in the trades?
  - How has age affected Pat’s experience on the job? What are some ways she seems to manage these challenges?
  - How do you anticipate your age/perceived age affecting your position and/or treatment at work?
  - What does it take to, as Pat puts it, let them know “that a woman could do this job”? Do you anticipate having to prove yourself in this way on the job? How does that make you feel?

Read Pat Cull – Carpenter, pp 50-54:

- How does Pat describe the difference between how she was treated comparing to her younger female coworkers?
- What strategies can you think of to deal with the sex-based, “she can’t do it” harassment? What about the sexual “come fuck me” harassment? How do you think those two kinds of harassment might affect women differently?
- What does she mean when she says “how the men on the job see me hasn’t changed over the years. What has changed is me” (53)? In what way do you think she seems to have changed over the years?
- How has Pat’s accident affected her work? What options do you think a tradesperson has who is not able-bodied?

* BGL can distribute tradeswomen photos from the book for people to peruse on their own time, or you can devote a few minutes to look through them together.

Recommended Poetry: “The Women Always Wave the Flags” by Donna Allegra
  - What’s your reaction to this poem? What stands out to you about it, if anything?
  - Why do you think the poet chose to write about this woman?
  - What do you make of the title? Where are there women waving flags in the poem? What is this significance of this?
  - What are some different meanings of waving a flag?
  - What do you make of the last line: “[…] she hoisted like a baton/unfurled her colors/and let the flag wave/by itself”?

Recommended Poetry Prompt: “Hard-Hatted Women”
Allegra’s poem and Hard-Hatted Women honor women who were pioneers in doing non-traditional work. Using your own knowledge and what we’ve read, 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:** “I am thankful for my lessons and grateful for my struggles. I have not forgotten what has brought me to where I am today.” —Native American Blessing

**Notes:**