

Hard-Hatted Women

edited by Molly Martin

Week: 3 of 3

Chapters/Pages: pp. 63-70, 202-211

Themes:

- ♣ Experiences of tradeswomen
- ♣ Sexism in the workplace
- ♣ Ageism in the workplace
- ♣ Racism/classism in the workplace
- ♣ Rising up/overcoming obstacles

Recommended Opening: “if i know anything at all/it’s that a wall is just a wall/and nothing more at all/ it can be broken down.” – assata shakur

- What meaning does this quote have for you?
- What walls have you faced in your own life? How do you respond when you meet challenges or obstacles that feel insurmountable?
- What walls or obstacles do you think might stand in your way on your journey to be a tradeswoman?
- What needs to happen for the walls in your life to come down?
- What tools do you people have to knock down the walls in their lives or in society in general?

Before Reading:

- We’ll only get to read some of these stories together but they are all wonderful first-person accounts of pioneering women working in the trades.
- 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 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?

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- 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?

Read Laura Deane Mason – Rural Contractor, pp. 202-207 (until “And building.”):

- How does Laura describe the “rigid hierarchy in the apprenticeship program”? What do you think of this? How do you think apprentices should be treated by journeymen/women?
- Laura says: “That’s the thing about construction, they will say it right to your face!” (205). How do you think this work style will mesh with yours?
- What was Laura’s experience about guys offering to help? What do you think you will do if you need help on the job?
- How does Laura seem to think and feel about some of the dangers of the job? What are your own feelings on these dangers?

Read Laura Deane Mason – Rural Contractor, pp. 207-211:

- What are some strategies Laura has used to deal with sex-based harassment at work? Which of these, if any, do you think might be useful to you?
- What is your reaction to Laura’s comment: “Women need to be able to come through and get the skills, and not stay in if they don’t want to in order just to prove a point” (209)?
- Why did Laura form *Women Empowering Women*? What are your thoughts on organizations like this?
- Laura says she wants to “help build the bridge for all those who will follow” (211). What do you think you can do to be a bridge to, or help, others who will follow you?

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

- 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: “Yes We Can”

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Rodriguez's poem describes workers standing up for themselves. Likewise, the pioneering tradeswomen in *Hard-Hatted Women* speak about rising above the challenges and paving a better path for those that will follow them.

What is the world you envision – for tradeswomen in particular or for workers in general? What do you believe we can accomplish working together?

You may repeat the phrase, *Yes We Can* _____, if you want.

Recommended Closing: Closing: “I am in the world to change the world.” – Muriel Rukeyser

Notes: