

# GET A JOB!

BY SUSAN ELWOOD

I always like to read the Letters to the Editor of any newspaper.

This particular day I ran across yet another letter bashing the economic minority. This letter's author was offended that the newspaper had run a focus on a gentleman who was down and out.

She felt that the article tended to make excuses for a man who was lazy. She cited 35 columns of positions listed in the daily paper's Employment Ads — and with great scorn she stated that he should "get a job." This letter irritated me. Obviously, this woman hadn't been out job hunting for a loooooong, long time — if ever.

After returning to work from my vacation in July, I found my place of employment in uproar. My supervisor had given notice, we were facing a buyout from a national competitor and employee morale was in the toilet. I was delicately informed that, while management couldn't say one way or another whether or not my position as graphic artist was going to be eliminated, I should not turn down any immediate offers of employment.

I translated that to mean, "Start looking for work. Your job is gone."

So look I did.

One of the mainstay tools of any job hunt is the Employment Ads. Daily I would comb through the ads searching for appropriate jobs.

Now I am pretty flexible. I have three or four basic job classifications I can fill. I have twelve years experience in my field, and I have management experience.

On the other hand, I am handicapped by the lack of a college degree, and the fact that I am a single mother precludes taking a job out of the area or one that requires extensive travel.

In fact, if you start applying reasonable restrictions, the available job pool begins shrinking rapidly. For instance, being the sole wage earner for my family I need a full time job. And that full time job needs to pay a basic wage just to meet minimal living expenses.

Then there is jobsuitability. I would rather be beat and whipped than to be forced into the drudgery of doing bookkeeping and accounting.

Not that I stand any danger of being hired as an accountant. I'm afraid, as accountants go, I'm just not qualified.



LOUIS LOZOWICK, "THANKSGIVING DINNER" (A BOWERY SOUP KITCHEN, 1938)

Nor am I qualified as a nurse — or an engineer, or a social worker. Why, if you look at what I'm NOT qualified for, the pool of available jobs dwindles to a drop.

I knew that 35 columns of jobs didn't necessarily mean that 35 columns of jobs were available. So I sat down the following Sunday and did some calculations.

The Sunday paper didn't list 35 columns of jobs. It in fact listed 200 columns of jobs. I averaged out a couple of pages for job listings

per column and came up with an average of 13. So 13 jobs, times 200 columns, came to 2600 jobs available in that day's paper. What a selection!

After carefully combing through the ads for jobs I qualified for, I came up with a grand total of: 8.

Of those 8 jobs, 1 was out of the area, 4 required a college degree, 2 asked for computer experience on programs I've never used. 1 job was all that was suitable for me.

During eight weeks of job hunting I sent out 22 resumes. I got called in for 2 interviews, but both positions went to other candidates. I received 2 letters declining my request for an interview. Both cited the tremendous response to their ads; one company received 140 applications, the other 150 applications.

These odds aren't unusual. A friend of mine in the same career field as I was fortunate to receive a job offer, beating out over 200 other applicants.

Another friend searched for seven long months before finding a position. His qualifications were impeccable.

Unfortunately, so are many of the other competitors in the job hunting arena.

It isn't enough anymore to walk in to a place of business and ask for a job. You have to dress nice, hand out a good resume, have experience as well as education and a sense of sophistication for how to play the job hunt game.

The down and out have a hard time meeting some of these requirements. And woe to the person who has additional handicaps such as: lack of a permanent address, problems with addiction or mental health, lack of proof of residency or previous work history and lack of transportation.

I'm extremely fortunate. My job stabilized and if I do change jobs it will be because I choose to do so, not because I am forced to grasp the first thing that comes along.

But others are not so lucky. A sense of compassion to the down and out is a must. If a person has never walked in those tattered shoes, I hope they think long and hard before saying "Get a job," unless they can add, "I'm offering you one."

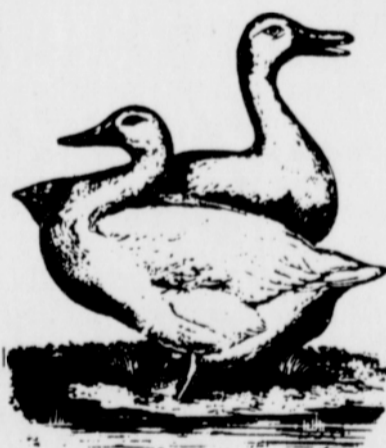
Susan Elwood wrote this article for These Homeless Times ("A Voice for the Homeless Community"), which is published in Portland by the Burnside Community Council.

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