



Your Professor ain't Studs Terkel, but he'd like to reflect for a spell on the world of work these days. I'm struck by how seamlessly young college graduates slip into slots in the electronics industries. Fresh from colleges and universities, they seem possessed of some incipient foreknowledge of the freeways to financial success. I see them drive by in gaggles, polished clean in fresh BMWs, charmed and apparently blissfully content.

Your Professor may have a twinge of jealousy. His work path winds over more ground than a junk yard dog. As a teenager he foraged for blackberries, picked cascara bark, cut and split firewood (\$35 a cord, stacked), set chokers (2 days at a gypo logging show—a ghastly business), and stocked grocery store shelves.

Following my first college session, I snaked out of the draft for a few years by "inculcating Western Values" to sophomores in high school. Richard Nixon and Robert McNamara sent me their regards in 1969. The U.S. Army taught me how to kill people in the Republic of Vietnam, let me burn human excrement in 55 gallon drums, and trained me to call in artillery rounds. In the process, I had a chance to hump coal and fold laundry at beautiful Fort Lewis.

After graduate school and a fit of joblessness, I butchered meat for the Del Monte/Sweetheart Meat Company. The Old Boys in the back room never guessed I had a background in Romantic Poetry. They called me "Tiger" and showed me how to lift front and hind quarters of beef with a pair of meat hooks. One morning, with an elaborate ceremony tantamount to being "knighted," the whole meat plant celebrated my receiving of knives. I was a By-God card-carrying Union butcher. Old Al imparted sage advice: "Tiger, you only need to know two things. Keep a sharp knife and know your bones!"

In succeeding years, I've gill-netted for herring in Tomales Bay, purse seined in Yaquina Bay, trolled for salmon, sawed and pounded boards, slushed out concrete with Ab "The Slab" Childress and Rod Kerslake, painted trim, shingled houses, roofed, insulated, and just plain dug dirt. I've scabbled around in an alphabet of other tasks too, but, oh well.

Some days I'm not sure what to make of it all, really. I cherish the fine stories I've accumulated. What could be of more value?

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## Butterflied Steak

By Alison Clement

I got a job waiting tables at a seafood restaurant that nobody but tourists and strangers went to. It was owned by a woman named Trudy Fargo and she hated us all. She hated the people who worked for her and she hated the people who lived in town and drove back and forth on the highway in front of her restaurant and she hated the tourists, most of all. "Why don't they go back to California, where they belong?" she'd shout from the kitchen. Sometimes she'd throw down her spatula and charge through the swinging doors that separated the kitchen from the dining area and shout it right into their startled faces while they slunk down in their orange booths, and averted their eyes, like a dog, don't look, maybe she'll move on to the next table, the guy in Bermuda shorts eating fish and chips. She had a dirty mouth. "Why don't you get the fuck back to California, where you belong?" Her first husband was from California. She knew what they were up to.

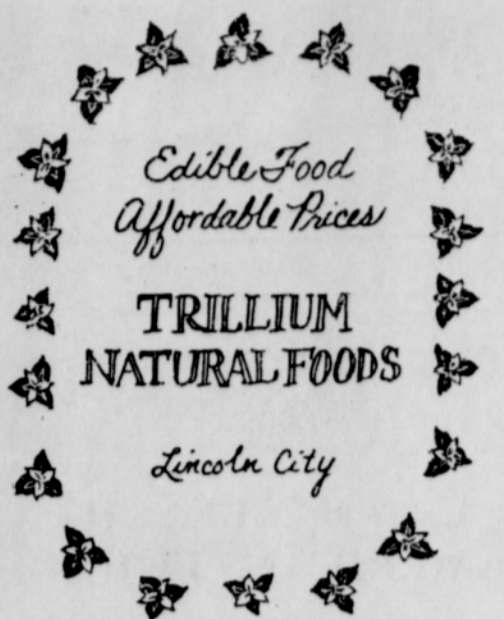
It was a seafood restaurant: The Pyramid Seafood Cafe, the sign said, but people wanted to order steak, sometimes, or they wanted pork. If they were from the Midwest it was steak. What's good enough at home is good enough when they travel is what they think.

"We've got Dungeness Crab from right out in this ocean here," I'd say, nodding so they'd look out the big picture glass window at the wild blue ocean outside. "We serve halibut and perch and we've got cod and clam chowder." But they didn't like seafood. It tasted fishy. They'd been thinking about steak all day. Didn't somebody tell them we had steak? Didn't the lady at the motel say that?

At The Pyramid Seafood Cafe things hardly ever went like you planned. It was an old building, for one thing. Some nights the septic backed up and we had to send customers to the biker bar next door, to use the bathroom. Some nights the pipes burst and the floor of the restaurant filled up with water and we served our fancy grilled salmon with raspberry sauce or halibut with a hazelnut crust dinners while the dishwashers crawled on the floor with a shop vac, sucking the water up.

The first big problem I had was the day a man came in with his date, sat down at unlucky Table 14, and ordered a butterflied steak. I had never heard of butterflied steak but I wrote it down in my little notebook. It had a nice, cheerful sound to it. I knew right away there would be trouble because when I slid the order to Trudy, I heard her growl in the back of her throat, which is what she does when there's danger coming. She asked me did I ever eat my steak that way. She asked Raymond the waiter with bad teeth. She asked us all, casual, like she was taking a little poll, that's all. "I think it has something to do with cutting the steak up so it looks like a butterfly," said Ricki the Lesbian waitress. "Or a butterfly bandage maybe," she said, and they were standing over the steak looking at it like maybe a clue would present itself.

"I know how to butterfly a goddamn steak," said



Skepticism, like chastity, should not be relinquished too readily.  
George Santayana

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Trudy, grabbing hold of a cleaver.

Whether I knew what a butterflied steak was or not, when she gave it to me to serve I could tell it didn't look right. I sneaked it onto the table and tried to slip away but he was too fast for me.

"Hey! What do you call this? You expect me to eat this?" He was a yellow faced, hang dog kind of man but he had his date with him and he wanted to show off a little.

"Is there a problem?" I hurried back to his table with my most concerned face. I stood over them, cocking my head. "What seems to be the trouble?" Like I was blind.

The customer on unlucky 14 smirked. He looked at his girlfriend who was pink now with excitement, and rolled his eyes, without even bothering to wait until I wasn't looking. He tapped his fingers on the orange tabletop showing me he had had it up to here. He wasn't the kind of man who usually got to push people around and he was discovering that it was kind of fun. He gave his plate a shove. He snorted. The girl was on the edge of her seat. She licked her lips.

"How long have you been a waitress?" he said, giving me the choice of being either inept due to inexperience, which was temporary at least, or the kind of woman who would always be a waitress, a lifelong waitress, a woman whose main concern in life would always be that people enjoyed their dining experience, a woman who would spend her entire life, not reading books or making love or dancing all night but bent over someone's table, someone like him, asking: blue cheese, thousand island or ranch?

But now the girl spoke up. Her voice was high and she was laughing like it was a private joke they had together and she squealed, "I don't think very long!" And they both burst out with the kind of laugh you have when you've been holding your breath and can't anymore.

Would you kindly lower your voice a few octaves, I could have said but didn't.

After they had quieted down, I leaned forward a little, like a nurse, concerned, with my brow knitted and my pencil ready, in case I needed to take notes. "Can I bring you something else?"

Even after all that, when he demanded to see Trudy, I didn't feel any satisfaction. I'm not the type to hold a grudge and anyway all he wanted was to get laid, poor fellow. From the looks of him, maybe the chance would never come again. You got to root for somebody in a situation like that.

"We serve Dungeness Crab from right out in this ocean," I said, in my perkier voice, and I nodded toward the window. It was dark outside and he didn't bother to look.

I was trying to wiggle my way out of it, he thought, making a face at the girl while she licked her lips, thinking how sexy he was. Oh, what a dominator!

"You got a manager?" He said, lowering his voice and smirking. The girl was flapping her legs back and forth under the table.

By now my other customers were restless. He had taken more than his share of my time and their sense of justice was aroused. They began to wave at me from across the room and call out the names of condiments. Mustard, ketchup, tartar sauce.

## From The Lower Left Corner

Victoria Stoppello

### A manufactured problem

The other night our friend Tom arrived from Portland and teased us, saying he thought we'd already gone to bed because there were no Christmas lights and so few lights on in the house. I laughed and said, "We're saving a few kilowatts to send down to those poor souls in California." Tom snapped back, "Oh, giving some to those guys, who will never send them back when we need them." This is the way the "energy crisis" has niggled its way into the consciousness of people who follow energy politics.

Some of the "crisis" is due to unusually cold weather across the country, but a lot of it is because of manipulation of the energy market. A complex scheme called utility deregulation, first implemented in California, has changed the way utility companies operate. In the past, utilities typically had three segments—power plants of various types, transmission lines, and local distribution systems. All the power produced was used by the utility itself. Under deregulation, companies had the option of selling their power plants. Many investor owned utilities wanted this option because they were saddled with power plants that were no longer profitable.

Consumer electricity rates are regulated by each state's utility commission, but under deregulation, the wholesale rate floats, and that's where the "crisis" has occurred. Under deregulation, power producers can sell energy to whomever they choose, and for whatever the market will bear. Power producers also have the freedom to cut deals with big purchasers of electricity, like aluminum plants and other industrial users—and make up for those low prices by charging a multitude of small buyers more. Early observers predicted that home-owners and small businesses wouldn't get any benefit from deregulation and would end up paying much higher rates than in the past.

That's exactly what's happened in California, where the Utilities Commission held public hearings last week to help determine consumer rate increases, which could range from eight to 20 percent. In other words, if you were paying five cents a kilowatt hour, it could go up to six cents, but in California people often pay nine cents, which would go up to close to a dime. Given that a typical new house uses 11,000 kwh

per year, that could add up to a \$110 increase in a year, above the \$990 at current rates.

Whenever a commodity has the aura of "gotta have it", the seller can jack up the price, and profiteering can result. In one outrageous instance, Alcoa has decided that, in this super-heated electricity market, they can make more money selling the cheap electricity they've contracted to buy rather than making aluminum with it, so they've shut down their plants. Remember, this is the same industry that insists we keep all the dams on the Columbia system so they can have cheap power. We know that dams have a negative impact on the survival of salmon runs. Alcoa is adding insult to injury—and laughing all the way to the bank.

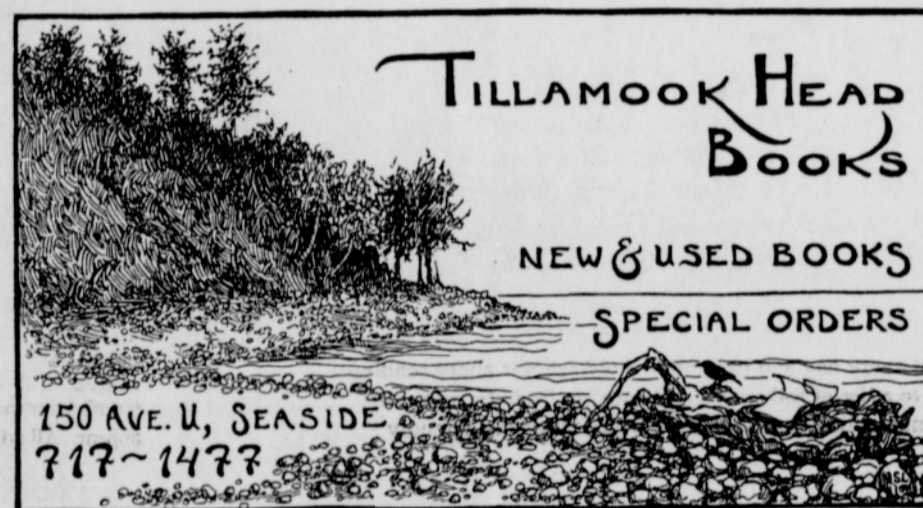
News articles about California's energy problems always quote someone who says we need more power plants—but it takes years to site and build new plants, often with negative environmental consequences as well. Conservation is, by contrast, the cheapest and fastest source of new energy, but conservation programs were phased out by big energy moguls like the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) back in 1993, when energy was plentiful and the attitude was that we didn't have to think about saving any.

You can blunt the sting of higher energy prices that are inevitably coming our way by employing energy conservation measures yourself. Space heating uses 50% of the energy budget for most buildings. Our PUD has rebates and zero interest loan programs that will help you buy insulation, new double pane windows, a heat pump, and even a solar water heater. It's possible that you could make the payments on the improvements from the energy cost savings—plus you'd have a more comfortable home.

The federal government ordered the BPA to sell power to California to help with their problem. That means we in the Northwest got shot in both feet. On the one foot, we have less power available, and on the other, we have less water in the reservoirs to help fish.

No, we didn't have a lot of lights on in the house the other night, partly because we've been gone a lot and I didn't make the effort to decorate—but mostly because energy conservation has become a way of life.

Victoria Stoppello writes from Ilwaco, at the lower left corner of Washington state.



I looked up at table 7 across the room, six yuppies with empty drinks who might actually know how to tip and I held up a finger I'll be right there, to show him I had other people to think about.

"Are you going to get the manager, or am I?" he said. He didn't leave me a choice.

"I think it's his honeymoon," I lied to Trudy in the kitchen, as she ripped off her apron. I followed her through the swinging doors, "They just got married," I whispered, running after her.

The man swung his face towards us. It had a happy look on it and its mouth was already open, ready to tell. He was a man who would never stop while he was ahead.

"Somebody got a problem?"

And he laughed. Here was a woman who meant business. "We sure do," he said.

"You, you're the one, aren't you?" said Trudy, and his mouth continued to smile but his eyes darted from her to me, to the girl, and back to Trudy. Everyone else was quiet. They forgot about their checks and their drinks, their tartar sauce; they all turned and watched. They always watched, like how people will watch a car accident. You can't blame them.

"What are you looking for, a free meal? Is that it?"

That reminded him of the steak and he moved his eyes to the plate hopefully, but she didn't wait for him to collect his thoughts. "I've seen it before." And thinking of those other times, her voice got louder. "You come in here and order a steak? Is that right?"

He nodded. There it was on the table, no denying it.

And now Trudy turned to the rest of the floor, to all the people watching, and cried, "He comes to a seafood restaurant, and what does he order?"

They didn't like him anyway, not after he hogged all the service.

"Steak!" she shouted. "Can you believe it?"

He wasn't getting sex that night, I'll tell you. She'd never want to fuck him after this. After this every time she thought of him, she'd think of this minute. The most he could ever hope for after tonight was her pity and women do not have sex out of pity.

"You come here, to the Oregon coast, and do you order crab or oysters?" Her voice was loud. "Do you order salmon or halibut?" She turned back to the crowd and some of them were eating steaks and some were eating pork tenderloin or hamburgers but that didn't faze them, they curled their lips. "Do you go to Paris and go bowling?"

He slunk down in his seat and his mouth quivered.

"What kind of idiot goes to a seafood restaurant and orders steak?" she shouted.

"Trudy, it is on the menu," I said, but she waved her arm at me.

"Would you go into a department store and order a chainsaw?"

She hated a weakling.

This is an excerpt from a novel-in-progress, and though she was given a grant to complete it, no, it wasn't enough. You can check out Alison's work at [www.leftedgesuzy.com](http://www.leftedgesuzy.com) or you could just send her money.