

## The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden back.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

# Blue collar: backbone of America

By Casey McCabe

The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Plant, 4021 N. 56th St. is a vast expanse of factory, operated in three shifts as it churns out radiator hoses and belts for industrial use, 24 hours a day.

Bob, one of 1,700 plant employees at the plant, is about to start his fifth year with the firm. He views himself as a fairly common example of the working class lifestyle.

Married at 19, Bob started work at Goodyear to support an upcoming family.

He remembers being happy to get the job—the pay was good, it was close to home, and he felt secure. Four years later the situation was still the same.

*Only two things get him through the day: the quitting whistle and the knowledge that a paycheck is coming*

As Bob sees it, there are only two things that get him and his co-workers through the day: the quitting whistle and the knowledge that a paycheck is on the way.

"There's certainly nothing very glamorous about the average 40-hour work week as a general laborer," he said. "It's like any other job I've ever had. I like to make money, I need to make money, but in a job like this you make your sacrifice every day, you earn every cent."

For Bob, going to work right after high school was not a choice, but an expected necessity. He had no desire to go to college and feels no pangs of regret about his decision.

But he does acknowledge that the mental and physical stress of spending most of your waking hours in a predictable routine, can create tension elsewhere. Bob says he's really not trapped but still feels the limitations around him.

*Some of the guys seem to enjoy their jobs, most of us just tolerate them*

"Let's say things do get too much for me, let's say a job is starting to drive me crazy," he explains. "What do I do? Come home to the ol' lady and say 'honey, I quit. Let's make ends meet some other way?' I know guys who've done it, but not me. I'll hang in there."

"Some of the guys seem to enjoy their jobs, most of us just tolerate them," he said. "Some guys have been out there in service for 35 years, maybe they don't know anything else. But I think most of us survive by making the best of our hours off, or hoping like hell that something better is just around the corner."

The blue-collar worker like Bob has been called the "backbone of America" or part of "the Silent Majority," for years, though many seem to think the common laborer has been maligned by government interests since the white-collar boom in the 60s.

The need for a strong blue-collar work force has always existed, but as economic times change, that assembly line worker, and others who sweat it out daily in manual labor jobs, have a way of making their presence known.

Eldon Arnold, employment supervisor for Nebraska Job Service, has been interviewing those who seek both professional and general labor jobs for 13 years. In his opinion, the recent value changes by many Americans has brought a reversal of market trends.

"The trend was to push anyone who could cope with it, into college," observed Arnold. "If there's any trend now, it's that people are realizing everyone doesn't have to have a college education today. They're beginning to realize that frequently the garbage collector may be driving one of the biggest cars and owning one of the biggest homes. More than the college professors, unfortunately.

"The economy seems to have been turned upside down in that respect. People are more money motivated."

The decision of which road to take starts somewhere in high school with the influence of peers or the expectations of parents. There is much to be weighed as the student approaches graduation; the choice of an immediate, good steady income at a job that may become tedious, or going to four or more years of costly education, with hopes, but no guarantee, of a better job in the future.

The question of whether some students are cut-out for either college or general labor jobs, is one that high school counselors are understandably hesitant to answer.

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Tom Pappas, a counselor at Lincoln High, says that the student's own view of their potential is the most obvious factor in their decision.

"I think students tend to have the idea they are either cut-out or not cut out for college," says Pappas. "Basically about half of our kids go to college, most of them to the university (UNL), and most of them belong there."

"And there are some that are not academically oriented. They're not interested, or they never learned the skills along the way," he noted. "But I think it's more of a situation where they are molded in high school—and not many break out of the mold."

Not very far from Lincoln High, but economic poles apart in Lincoln Southeast High School, where often the higher standard of living relieves the pressure of initial decisions from a student's shoulders.

Counselor Dennis Tinsley believes academics play a smaller role in career decisions than motivation.

"There is probably a very small minority that are not academically able to make it through college," says Tinsley.

"The majority of the students I deal with come in here with a mind set on whether they're going to college or not. It's something they've decided from what their friends are doing, or what their parents have done. This is much more of an influence than whatever I might tell them."

Southeast sends more students to the university than any other school in Nebraska. At one time over 80 percent of Southeast graduates went right on to college.

"We live in an area where college is a major factor, it's expected," said Tinsley. "I don't think there is any need to have a student sit down and say 'this is what I want to do.'"

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Still, the emphasis in recent years has been to establish better career guidance programs in high school to increase student exposure to the many varied possibilities in the job market. According to Pappas, Lincoln High has excellent examples of such programs, but not enough students take advantage of them. The promise of immediate high pay in so-called unskilled labor jobs serves as an effective lure to some.

"We had an honor roll student leave last year before he graduated, and he got a Pepsi route," says Pappas. "I think he made \$18,000 as starting salary. And that's more than—well, his counselor."

For many, the good pay and secure job doesn't mean the end of career decisions.

Julie DeBoer, a 22-year-old graduate of Lincoln Northeast, has reached another fork in the road after three and a half years of employment at State Farm Insurance. She says she has good job security, a good salary, and a comfortable position. But nevertheless things have grown stagnant.

"I've had the urge to go back to school hundreds of times, but after four years of not studying, the thought also scares me," says DeBoer.

"Every day I see people who started like me, only it's 20 years later. They reached the fork in the road and decided to stay, and many are dissatisfied," she says. "They want to pass their experience to me, they say 'don't get in this rut'. I don't want to be giving the same advice to someone in 20 years."

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