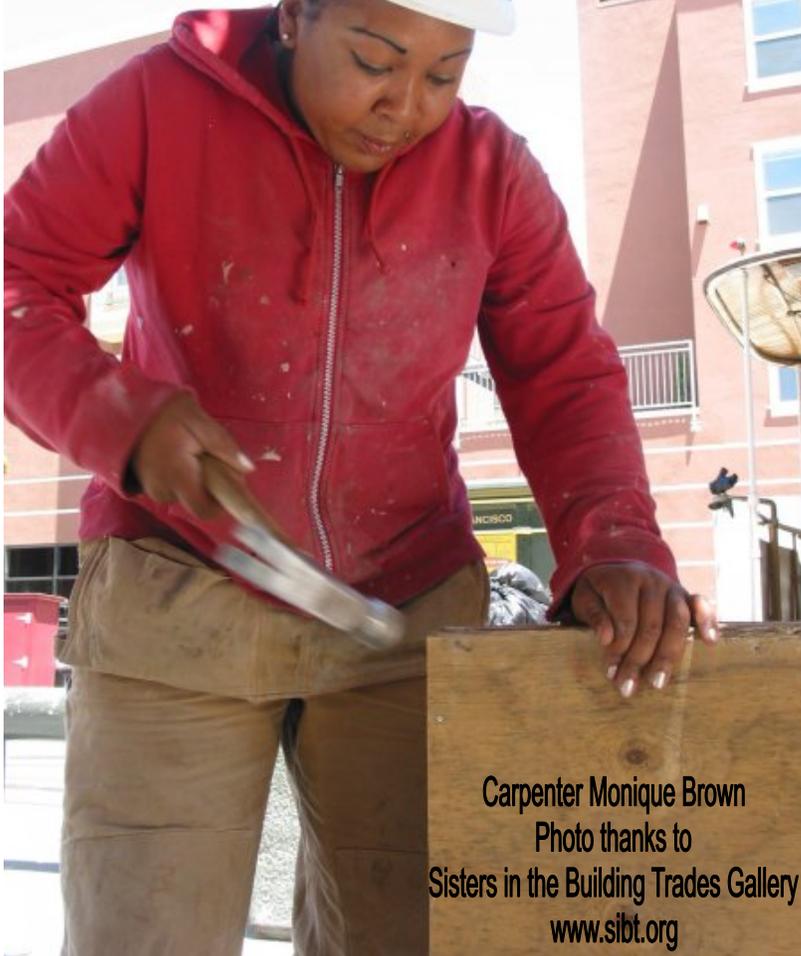


PRIDE AND A PAYCHECK

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS..

A Women's Guide to Blue Collar Jobs



Carpenter Monique Brown
Photo thanks to
Sisters in the Building Trades Gallery
www.sibt.org

...I NEVER THOUGHT
I'D BE A CARPENTER...

© By Melody Church
Journeyman Carpenter
Local 156 Oregon

High School meant nothing. I had no plan. I graduated because they said I couldn't. "C" average because I barely showed up.

So I entered the workforce with a piece of paper that meant nothing. No experience. And no chance to gain any.

I never thought about construction before. It was really only by chance that I showed up on a drywall job and started slinging mud. The boss came in and I had the job.

I loved it. Just me and the radio finishing my dream house...a different one each week. Learned to texture, walk stilts, challenge my fear of heights, lead a crew and move on when the time came.

Join the union I heard...so I called. Health insurance? That's not a very funny joke. "No, I don't want to hang sheetrock. I'm a taper." Talked into being a Carpenter.

Never looked back.

IS THERE ANYONE WHO CAN UNDERSTAND?

© By Katy Haugland, IBEW Local 11, Los Angeles

Everyone can understand

The value of a hard day's work
Earning a decent living
Learning a useful skill
Pride in your work, your ability, yourself
Pride in each other and a job well done
The struggle of trying to find your place
Keep your place
Learn, grow, even maintain
The desire to strive, rise and lift
No matter how different the individual battle

We can all understand

The fight for our best selves

Both work pieces on this page were written at the 2013
Blue Jean Pocket Writers workshop,
Women Building CA and the Nation Conference

WOMEN AND OUR ALLIES IN TRADES...Kate Braid, Vancouver British Columbia Canada

Editor note: Kate Braid is a Canadian carpenter, author, activist and educator. She has also worked as a contractor in her own small construction business. The following is a portion of a speech she gave at the 2013 "Trade Up" Conference in Kelowna BC. Also check out three of her great books: "Journeywoman: Swinging a Hammer in a Man's World"; "Covering Rough Ground"; and "Turning Left to the Ladies".

I never planned to be a carpenter. I was raised in the 1950s and in those days they said, "If you aren't going to get married and have babies – which was what Nice Girls are supposed to do – then you can be a nurse, a teacher, a waitress or a secretary." There were not many other choices.

And if you read the results of the latest Canada census, not a lot has changed. The vast majority of women still work in low-paying clerical, sales and service jobs.

Back then I picked secretary but I was awful at it. And it was quite by accident that years later – after trying many of the traditional "women's jobs" like receptionist and child care worker – that I stumbled into construction.

It happened in 1977 when I was living on the Gulf Islands and told some men friends I was going to have to leave the island to find work. One of them said he'd just quit as a carpenter on the new school – a huge project for a small island – so why didn't I apply for his job? In 1977 none of us had ever heard of a woman doing this work. When I said, "I've never built anything," he gave me the best advice I ever got in construction: "Lie."

They also say in construction, "Fake it 'til you make it." So I did. And that foreman hired me as a labourer, only because the guys had been slowing down and he thought the presence of a woman on the job – even a useless one – might make them show off, speed them up. That was the beginning of 15 years of an amazing and life-changing career as a labourer, apprentice, journeywoman and

teacher of other apprentices. I worked union and residential, building high rises and bridges and Skytrain stations, as well as, as a contractor in my

own small company, doing renovations and housing.

I loved the work. I loved what most of you who've had a taste, probably also love: being outdoors, using my body, being fit and active and mechanically competent and confident (well, the confidence mostly came later), and on the good days, I loved working with a crew of men.

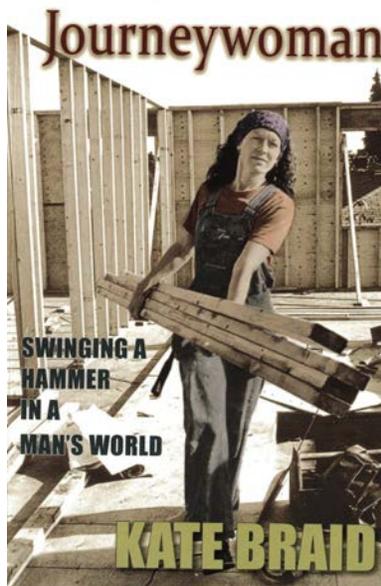
It isn't as if I never thought of dropping out. The first time happened on the island, after almost two years as a labourer, when I got into a conversation in the pub with the men I was working with, about ceiling tiles on the gym. Then I joined the women in a conversation about relationships and decorating. And then I panicked. It felt as if the earth was cracking open beneath me. I thought: who am I? Am I male or female? How is it possible to be so at home, to love both these very different worlds? So before

starting my pre-apprentice course at BCIT, I did my MA thesis on women in trades in BC and found that, in 1977, we were 2-3% of the trades.

Soon after, we started a Vancouver Women in Trades group and we worked to change that number. We lobbied government and industry, worked as role models. Helped change laws; we now have Human Rights laws and the Charter of Rights that say you can't discriminate. We sat on government boards. Large employers like BC Hydro and what was then called the Workmen's Compensation Board, now

WorkSafe BC, developed programs aimed at hiring "minorities" which included women at the time. The BC Fed. of Labour put on the first conference on sexual harassment – a word we'd never heard before. We put on assertiveness training and other courses for women, held local and national conferences. **Then in 2007, when I did that research again, 30 years later, the number of women in trades in BC was 2-3%.** Still. Nothing had changed or at least – the numbers certainly did not reflect change.

Continued next page...



.....Kate Braid.....

All the statistics say apprentices do not cost employers, that apprentices give back more than is invested, yet the rate of completion of trades training (at least outside the unions) is abysmal... *overall* – 37%. We all know BC – Canada – suffers a serious shortage of skilled tradespeople. Employers are looking overseas – to the Far East and west – for already trained people, but the fact that you're all here, suggests you understand the simple good sense it makes to look locally, starting with the other half of the population, to women, for recruitment. Not to mention people of colour and the *First Nations.

In 1989 I was working on the Patterson addition to the Vancouver General Hospital, and I had a labourer who hated me. "Nothing personal," as one guy once told me, "just that you're a woman." Labourers may not have a lot of status on a construction job, but they have a lot of power. If they aren't bringing you materials promptly, the foreman doesn't say "What's the matter with your labourer", he says, "What's the matter with you? You're not producing." And soon you're off the job. So one day we were coming out of the lunch shack when my labourer made another of his stupid, put down comments to me, and before I could answer, the carpenter behind me – a foreman – said, "Lay off." That foreman knew me from a previous job where we'd worked together on the Skytrain crossheads. When he said, "Lay off," casually, to my labourer, it was as if the sky had opened. From that day, my labourer couldn't do enough for me. It was the only time in 15 years that a man spoke up for me when another man was giving me a hard time, and the effect was dramatic.

Years later I was giving a talk at a local high school where the shop teacher was concerned because he had very few young women in his classes and after, I got up the nerve to say to him, "Every time someone – anyone – is being hassled on a crew, everyone knows it, it makes them uncomfortable, but no one says a word. (Except my one foreman, that one time.)" The teacher nodded, yes, that's right. So I asked him, why don't the men speak up, and he looked at me in amazement.

"Because that would be implying you couldn't look after yourself on the job!"

My turn to be amazed, but it made perfect sense – man sense. When women walk onto a

construction site, we're walking into a man's world. It's like walking into a different culture, a male culture. I've written and spoken a lot about this in the past. But though we women can – and must – learn to get along in that culture ("becoming bilingual" I call it), the men don't learn ours. Why should they? There's only one of us. And in an all male culture, "looking after yourself" is equivalent to looking after your male pride, your manhood. So of course, someone else "interfering" would be seen as demeaning.

But in a woman's culture, in most women's way of thinking, someone speaking up for us is seen as a kindness, as caring. On top of that, we usually take it personally if a guy harasses us, if others don't speak up for us. We think it's because they hate us. "I'm useless. I shouldn't be here." It took me years to learn that wasn't the case. They don't speak up because in man-thought, they actually think they're being kind!

If you want to know more about this, read Deborah Tanen's book, *You Just Don't Understand*. That book changed my life, my entire outlook on my work.

When I did research on the building of the Vancouver Island Highway, I asked a front-line foreman, a decent guy, what the effect had been of compulsory hiring of women and First Nations on that job. And he said, "The first reaction of 80% of the guys when a woman or First Nation person walks on my job is pure hatred." I'm hoping – I know – that was a little high, a little unusual. However, clearly that guy and presumably most foremen can – not always, but very often – have a problem on their hands, when a woman or other "minority" walks on the job. A management problem.

Here's the point I'm trying to make, and I especially want to address the trainers and employers and government folk. Women can do this work. In the last 40 years we've proved that, over and over. In fact, often the ones who stick it out are particularly good at what they do (because they love it) and have an excellent attitude. But in the past 40 years of asking Why Aren't There More Women in Trades? we've concentrated on the women: study after study comes up with the same data, the same suggestions. They all agree: the problem isn't recruitment. If you make it clear that women are welcome on your job, they

Continued next page...

.....Kate Braid.....

will come. \$20 - \$30 an hour? Are you kidding?
The problem isn't recruitment, it's retention.

So the reports say: train the women, but I'm suggesting another, or at least, an additional and just as vital an approach. Based on the stories I just told, train the managers, especially your front-line managers, your foremen. We forget that the foremen (and women) are as much pioneers as the women who work for them. How do you handle the fact that 80% of your crew hate the new guy – in this case, the new gal? You're out in the bush. You're behind schedule. Of course, it's easiest to get rid of her. I understand this. It's why tradeswomen – no matter how skilled, how experienced – are chronically underemployed.

So the first thing I want to say is: train management, train your front-line people. That foreman out in the bush had a telephone, a computer, and an iPad. What if he'd taken a course on handling staff? Even better, what if there was someone he could call the minute something didn't look good or he could see or even worry about, trouble coming? The second thing I want to say is addressed especially to the tradeswomen and students: what you're doing is hard. After almost 40 years of women in trades work, you are still pioneers. You are still being closely watched on the job. They say the magic number that will turn us from tokens into minorities on the job – an important step forward – is 15%. But we're still only 2%.

So honour your own work ethic. When I started in construction, the first time someone asked me to

bring him a crescent wrench; I had to get him to draw me a picture on a scrap of 2 x 4 so I could find it in his tool box. The only reason they kept me on that job was my attitude. I may have been the dumbest labourer they ever had, but boy, was I keen! In spite of often feeling lost, I loved what I was doing and I wanted to learn more. In the trades people see attitude a mile away, and they respond. It was some of the best carpenters – I later realized – who took me under their wing and taught me everything I know, who made me a carpenter too, because they liked my attitude.

This work isn't easy and there is no one who understands exactly what you're experiencing except other women in trades. So talk to each other! Find other tradeswomen. Get together with each other on a regular basis. We didn't used to say "sisterhood" for nothing. I would never have lasted 15 years without other tradeswomen to talk to, to cry with, laugh with. Sometimes someone just rolling her eyes at the right moment was exactly what I needed to keep going. If you love this work, if you want to keep doing it, you must find allies. Look to each other, to your sisters in trades. Trades work is extraordinarily important, and profoundly satisfying. With the help of good foremen – and forewomen – and site managers and owners, with each other's help, we will one day see a lot more women, and First Nations and people of colour, share in these deeply rewarding careers.
(© 2013 Kate Braid)

**First Nations: n. Canadian. An organized aboriginal group or community, especially any of the bands officially recognized by the Canadian government.*

自豪與收入

Orgullo y Paga

Pride and a Paycheck

And sometimes when things aren't going really good, it helps to take a minute to "write it out". This poem is from Pat Burnham, President of WATT (Women Electricians Houston Texas) Just reading it makes us all feel less alone. We've all walked in Pat's foot prints at one time or another, and then snapped out of it to keep on going!

Thanks Pat!

**retirement just seems
more and more
an unobtainable dream
like the old comedies
bending over to pick up a hat
and your own foot keeps
kicking it further away**

© 2013 Pat Burnham, Houston TX



From time to time, Pride and a Paycheck's Facebook page gets great insights into the work day of brand new tradeswomen. The following piece is from Santa Cruz CA [Carpenter Apprentice Leslie Gill](#). We thank her for letting us into her first day's apprenticeship experience and celebrate her creative writing energy! We invite you to join Pride and a Paycheck's page and share your own first day or another day of work stories! You can also email them to Sue Doro at tradesis@aol.com

Yay Us...Bruises and All!

Here's me on my first day as an Carpenter Apprentice (And the bruises I came home with from the extra-long hammer my field rep thought I'd need- I've switched it out for a shorter one:)) I'm working on dorm renovations up at UC Santa Cruz, helping put plates up on the roof. I got to do tons of ripping, moving lumber, layout, drilling and using the rattle gun. I'm teamed with the nicest journeyman ever, who is constantly taking me aside to show me something new, lets me try it and then has me go at it. He is also so kind about my mistakes. The lead carpenter and managing carpenter also are really solicitous of me, that I'm being treated well. I do get some stares like "what the f are you doing here?" but a lot of the guys have introduced themselves and are really, really friendly, talk to me at lunch. A woman journeyman started yesterday, and there's a woman laborer as well. We have a locked johnnie that smells SO GOOD! There's both a sink and apple scented hand sanitizer. I feel so so lucky to be doing this. I can't believe that this is my life.

*I did have one morning where I got overwhelmed- I have to get up at 3 to get there on time, the commute is so long, and I was exhausted. I'd made a bunch of stupid mistakes, was asked by the lead carpenter if I'd been drinking that morning as my drilling was off, and asked if I'd been hitting the pipe at lunch by my journeyman after getting my drill guns tangled. But I thought of all you ladies, the doubts and triumphs you shared, shook it off and rocked it the rest of the week . Yay us!!! **Leslie Gill, Apprentice Carpenter***

Steel Mill Woman © 2013 Donna De Graaf-Smith, Gary IN

From her unpublished manuscript "*We Can Still Do It...Where No Woman Has Walked Before*"). Donna De Graaf-Smith began her Indiana steel mill work life in 1977. She was 22 years old. It was called Inland Steel. Now it's ArcelorMittal, a multi-international company in 37 countries. Her work herstory at the mill reads like a list of steel mill jobs...Labor/Utility worker, foundry ladle person, Oiler in Mechanical, Pipefitter Helper, and Millwright helper in Blast Furnaces, Power and Fuels Department, Assistant Operator in Pump Houses, then Operator, Water Treater in 4 AC power station, Assistant in Recycle Water treatment. At 80" Hot Strip Mill, worked as Labor, then bander/marker in Rolling sequence. Donna's still there, currently, in the Computer Room as a Console Operator. Her job is to oversee 15 monitors that screen mill production and interface with everyone, mostly Hardware and Software people on a regular basis. Pride and a Paycheck is privileged to be allowed to publish pieces of her work in progress from time to time. This is from Chapter Two... "**Glitter Girl –The Ladle Man –or the Ladle Woman –The Pay in the Same**"

"...I finally got out of labor and went to our in-house foundry where it was like going back in history. They did things the same way they had been done in the beginning of foundry work days....1893...We made furnace gates, the things the furnace cast house people could use for their troughs when they poured an iron cast...Time does not change for some jobs. When I was the ladle girl in our small foundry I raked the slag off the top of the hot liquid iron and would be covered in glitter from the slag. When you're sweating and in a silver heat protection coat, you ARE sweating, the glitter sticks to the sweat. I was an early glitter girl. I had a face shield attached to my helmet and huge asbestos gloves to protect my hands from the heat. I raked the slag off the top of the iron until it was gone, then we did our iron pour into the molds they made in the sand and in the boxes which made up the patterns they used to make various things.....I have heard complaints from some men that the "men did all the women's hard work for them in the mill"...and I (always) wondered where these men were... I never ran across them..."

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CALIFORNIA
AND THE NATION**

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www.prideandapaycheck.com The Editor is a retired Railroad Machinist and member of the National Writers Union, Local 1981 (UAW Affiliate) as well as the United Association of Labor Education, Local 189 (Affiliate of CWA), & Working Class Studies Assoc., and www.railroadworkersunited.org and NAWIC (National Assoc. of Women in Construction), the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), retired member of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and Intern. Association of Machinists (IAM). ***Pride and a Paycheck*** is produced by the Editor who is responsible for content.

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Sue Doro, Pride and a Paycheck's Editor is the author of "Heart Home and Hard Hats"; "Of Birds and Factories"; "Blue Collar Goodbyes" and "Sugar String". Her work is included in numerous anthologies, magazines and newspapers in the US, Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and the Netherlands, as well as high school and elementary school English Literature textbooks and College English and Law textbooks. Her writing is used in Labor History classes, writing courses in prisons, adult literacy classes, creative writing, and plant closure organizing support groups. Some of the learning institutions that use her work as a teaching tool are Rutgers, New York City College, University of Chicago, Laney Community College (Oakland), San Francisco Community College, De Anza College, and Harvard. The University of Nebraska utilizes Doro's work in their Division of Continued Studies electronic course classes. She facilitates worker-writing workshops at union halls, conferences and schools. If you would like to arrange a workshop or reading to benefit Pride and a Paycheck, contact Sue Doro at tradesis@aol.com.