

Thinking About Working



I've been thinking again lately about our relationship with work, and particularly how blue-collar work is perceived in our society (see *Editor's Letter*, January/February 2008; free at deckmagazine.com). It makes me angry that people who work with their hands aren't afforded the same status as office types. (Yeah, I work in an office now, but trust me — my blue-collar pedigree is as strong as they come.)

Several events triggered this thinking. I've been building a garage (a two-car woodshop, really) at my house. My friend Kevin has been helping me out. While we work, we often talk about writers and books. His favorite writer is Wendell Berry, who's as blue-collar an author as I've ever read. Kevin e-mailed me "Amish Economy," one of Berry's poems. I thought the final verse, and particularly the final three lines, were especially poignant.

But now, in summer dusk, a man
Whose hair and beard curl like spring ferns
Sits under the yard trees, at rest
His smallest daughter on his lap.
This is because he rose at dawn,
Cared for his own, helped his neighbors
Worked much, spent little, kept his peace.

Maybe our economy isn't great. But let's keep our eyes on the brass ring. If we've earned a moment

in the dusk like the man in the poem, well, we've done alright. And if we rise tomorrow at dawn and do it all over again, that in time will make for a life well spent.

About the same time Kevin and I were discussing poetry, contributing editor Mark Clement sent me a link to a YouTube video of a 20-minute talk by Mike Rowe (youtube.com/watch?v=r-udsIV4Hmc). Rowe is the producer and star of the TV show "America's Dirtiest Jobs." That talk left me stunned. I don't often hear celebrities articulating the thoughts that bounce around in my head.

Watch that video. If you don't use a computer, get yourself down to a library and ask the librarian to set you up. Be warned, it starts off with a graphic description of lamb castration. It then diverges into a brief academic lesson on Greek tragedy, and then an impassioned defense of working with one's hands. If Mike Rowe had been one of my professors, I might have finished college.

That video in turn led me to Rowe's Web site, mikeroweworks.com, which is a celebration of blue-collar work. Thank you, Mike. It's about time that someone with even a smidgeon of star power gave the people who build and keep this country running their due.

Andy Engel
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Unlike most of the people you know, we want your two cents.

While it's nice to hear about what we're doing right, it's more interesting to hear about what we're doing wrong. If you saw something you loved or hated, or if you've got a tip that could help out other readers, we want to know.

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