

## A Reflection on Work

### Thoughts by Juley Harper

I was talking with our 88 year old neighbor, Mr. Lynn, on one of those typical humid summer days. Even the mosquitoes were slow and lethargic in the heat. These days... the smells, the heat, the laziness...bring back fond memories of my summers as a child. I am always amazed at Mr. Lynn's stamina. He spent his whole life as a waterman, fishing and crabbing in the extreme heat of the summer. He unloaded boats and packed crabs and has only recently slowed his pace. Even now he was working in his yard cutting grass, weeding the garden, and unloading his fishing boat in the hot Delmarva summer sun. I was daydreaming about my summers as a child and a teacher in the classroom and watching Daisy splash in the sprinkler when he asked what my plans were for the next day. I scrunched up my nose and wrinkled my forehead (as I often do when I have an aversion to something) and said, "Ugh, I have to work."

Mr. Lynn stopped what he was doing and gave me a stern look from under the shade of his straw hat. "Why do you make that face? Do you have any idea how many people would give anything to have a job right now? You should be proud of the work you do. I thought you liked your job!" I was so taken aback by his comment that I faltered and stuttered, confirming that I DO love my job but that the uncertainty of each day and the low morale was making it hard to be positive. He continued to shake his head regarding my downbeat comment about working.

Then, this past week I was chatting with my Dad. A gifted craftsman, he celebrated his 63rd birthday yesterday. He has always been a hard worker running a construction company and spending long hard hours in the extreme heat and cold building homes for our community. We watched, with great sadness, recently as his tools and business were auctioned off-a decision he made as a result of the tough economy. Still, he has not slowed his pace and continues to rise at dawn creating crafts for his successful EBay store. On this day he was excited about a new design he created and was preparing materials in his shop for mass production of the lighted salt box houses he painted that day. I grew up playing in his shop and shadowing him on jobs-picking up debris and painting walls. Over the years, I overheard many conversations about the slowing economy and tough times for those in construction and I know this is a hard time for my Dad. I vividly recall the long hot days as well as the physical and emotional demands. But even now, Dad didn't let on that the hard work ahead may not produce any fruit; instead he seemed genuinely excited and enthusiastic.

These conversations have continued to roll around in my head. How often has the spirit of negativity snuck into our minds and our conversations these last couple of months? Our work influences the future of Delaware children; it is very important....and collegial relationships are rewarding....but sometimes we may let depressing workgroup meetings, daily paperwork and communication and never-ending changes in mandates sideline us. No matter what job we do, there will be aspects that aren't our favorite.

I am determined to remember my conversations with my dad and Mr. Lynn during this uncertain time in education. I know they too have parts of their job that are less than pleasing, yet they choose pride in their work and in a job well done. They both know that what we do to contribute to society is important. Thanks Dad and Mr. Lynn. I heard your words and I am applying your ethic. Lesson learned.