

SWINGLINE #20, by Joyce Katz, 59 Livingston St., #6-B, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201. Well, I think this is #20, for Apa's 26th mailing...but the truth is, I've lost count. That's what comes of missing several mailings in a row. All I know for sure is that this is the April, 1974, mailing...a little knowledge is better than none at all.

SINCE I WROTE YOU LAST I've had a number of interesting experiences; it's unfortunate that they kept me from participating in two or three of the most interesting mailings we've ever had. Even though I'm rushed, and know for sure that I won't come even close to having as much in this mlg as I want, I'll do a few pages to let you know what's been happening in my life (and to get back in the habit so hopefully next mlg I'll do better. Isn't that what we always say?)

The most dramatic thing that's happened to me is that I've changed jobs. The way it happened was unique in my work-experience, and fairly traumatic. On Friday, March 29th, the assistant manager of the agency called me into his office, closed the door and handed me a sealed envelope while explaining that my boss, Mr. Nouri, had instructed him not to give it to me until Friday afternoon after he (Nouri) had already left town on a trip to Bermuda.

The note was a hand-written letter from Nouri in which he told me that because of the agency losing one of its salesmen (who had quit the week before) it was necessary to economize, and necessary to cut staff. He went on to say that he was going to double up on some of the other jobs and eliminate my position altogether. He said my work had always been completely satisfactory, thanked me for all the things I had done for him, wished me good luck in the future, and enclosed two weeks severance. Period.

To put the matter in perspective: approximately three weeks before I had gone to Nouri and asked if he wanted me to seek employment elsewhere, and offered him my resignation. As recently as that he had assured me of the security of my job and his desire to keep me. I had known for some time that the agency was in financial distress; I can understand the decision to save a salary. Though I disagree with the wisdom of the decision to save money by cutting agency services, it was after all up to him. But the thing that threw me the curve was his cowardly behavior that led him to advise me of this, not in person as would be responsible, but by note. I had always had a fairly high regard for the man; this totally destroyed every last shred of respect I had.

Being plugged in to the puritan work ethos, I find being unemployed very unnerving. I not only was broken-hearted over the way it happened..I had never been fired before for any reason..but the fact that it occurred two weeks before income taxes made the financial jeopardy seem doubly threatening. And, I guess the worst part of it was the tremendous feeling of rejection; Nouri and I had always had a very pleasant, albeit Edwardian-cool, relationship. I was astounded by the lack of empathy on his part that caused him to end the relationship by leaving me a note.

Sunday I made up a resume, and Monday morning I had it printed up, then went to Fanning to start job hunting. (Unpaid ad: Fanning is very good, and have done well by me a couple of times. They only have fee-paid listings, and that's very important since the fee for my new job was \$962 and has to be paid by the employer, not by me. Tra La.)

Fanning sent me on four interviews on Monday, then on an additional two on Tuesday. By that time I was darned tired of going on interviews, so made my decision of which one I wanted and had Fanning wind it up for me. (I actually got five offers out of the six interviews; and, after the blow Nouri had given me, I really needed that kind of egoboo.

It made me feel much==better to know that there were people who wanted to hire me.)

Anyhow, now I work in this very nice agency on Madison Avenue. I got a \$10 per week raise over what I was making before..but, most important (and the reason I chose this one over any of the others) they tell me that there'll be no problem at all in getting increases in the future. They're very proud of themselves in this agency, and eager to make me understand that they are on the move upward. Considering that my last two jobs were in declining agencies, that sure is a nice change. I've been here three weeks now; it's a little too soon to tell what it will really be like, but so far it looks good. I like the man I work with; he's around my age (though of course ultra-straight) and seems pleasant. The work is fairly demanding..but I wouldn't like it if it weren't, and they certainly wouldn't need me if the work wasn't hard. It's absolutely the most beautiful office I've worked in, and I have a lovely desk, IBM Selectric, and telephone with touch-tone buttons. (I'm learning to play Honky Tonk Woman on it.) And my co-worker is a doll, a hippie chick named Felicia whom I'm certain you're going to hear a lot more about.

Mr. Nouri returned from Bermuda the Wednesday after I was hired on Tuesday so, without telling him I had found a job, I called him up and asked him if I could get a letter of recommendation. (I've found that it makes job-hunting go much easier if I have letters actually with me from past employers. I have letters from every job I've ever had; this saves the long delay while they check my references. Also, in most cases, I was told to write the letters myself. This helps too.) Nouri was very evasive; he was obviously embarrassed and trying to avoid seeing me; tried to get me to let him mail the letter to me. I insisted that I needed it immediately and would stop by to pick it up. When I went in he had left it with the switchboard operator, but I walked on into his office. I asked him if I could have my vacation pay; he said "that's for Sarah (the cashier) to decide." I said, "she tells me you have to make the decision". It went on that way for a few minutes and ended by him insisting that I take it up with Sarah. He didn't even have the courage to answer that question himself. -- Naturally Sarah told me that she and he had discussed it previously and that Nouri had said he didn't want to pay it.

Oh..the letter of recommendation. Well, I had predicted to Arnie that Nouri would find it too embarrassing to admit that he was in financial trouble (since he has such pretensions) and that he would screw me on the recommendation. He did. It was a two-sentence letter stating that I had worked for him for a year and a half; that my work was satisfactory, but that he found it necessary to realign personnel. Sincerely. If I were counting on his recommendation to get me my next job, I'd be hooking on Lexington Avenue. The Bastard. (Fortunately I have a charming letter from the assistant manager of the agency. Plus Nouri's much more revelatory hand-written note that he probably thinks I'd be too nice to use.)

AT THE TIME OF THE LAST MAILING I had one helluva case of flu that kept me in bed for six days with high fever. I had forgotten what a hallucinogen fever actually is. For days I just lay in bed drifting through clouds of subconscious meanderings. Mostly it was pretty pleasant; I spent a lot of time having Disney-like dreams of cotton-candy trees, fairy-land castles, and talking teddy bears. Regressed into childish fantasy as I was, I also had the interesting experience of remembering things about childhood I had forgotten long ago..things that happened when I was only two or three years old at the most. My parents lived on a farm during that period, and the rural south at the end of the depression was pretty grim. It was strange to remember how it was; it was similar to some acid experiences I've had in which I saw things in more than one light at the same time. On the one hand, I was remembering them through the eyes of a two-year old..and what does a child know about depression..and at the same time I was re-examining the memories from my present viewpoint, and understanding

just how bad things were back then. Some of my memories were very confusing to me; I couldn't understand, for example, how I could have any memory of a house with a dirt floor, or of playing in share-croppers' shanties. I wrote to my mother and asked if she could tell me if and when. They were real memories and not fantasies; a cousin of hers had a burn-out and the family had to live in their dirt-floored garage. I was in shanties several times, when the family bought watermelon and molasses. Evidently these were profound experiences for the child that I was then; they were fairly profound even to remember. -- An awful lot came back to me during those six feverish days, some that was even less pleasant than the memory of vast poverty. I remembered some things about my mother, who was at that time only about the same age that I am now, which makes her actions of that time more understandable, I guess. I haven't yet digested it all nor come to terms with it, especially the more disturbing recollections. But at least now I know why I retreated into fantasy so much.

I suppose the only capturable moral of this paragraph is that Natural is Better, and if you wanna get high, try the flu.

ROBIN I'm especially sorry that I missed the last few mailings because I've been enjoying your stuff so much. Perhaps we'll finally build at least a paper relationship; it seems that there is little immediate prospect for us to develop much of an in-person relationship. I was disappointed that I didn't get more of a chance to talk to you at Lunacon (..and the same for the rest of the apans, too. Somehow this Lunacon didn't lend itself to depth conversations.) I had particularly been looking forward to seeing you; it seemed that when I was conversant, you weren't and vice versa. And, of course, it's always nearly impossible to have decent conversation at a con party, especially when the rooms are so small. When you left the party Saturday night, I came fairly close to suggesting that we go someplace quieter to talk. However you seemed very tired and I decided not. Perhaps another year. -- Knowing that we've had several common experiences, my tendency should normally be to telephone you. But, as I suppose most people know, I find telephone conversations almost impossible. I feel smothered by phones. Strangely, I handle the phone very well in my work..but that's only for Exchange of Information, and doesn't really mean anything. When it gets personal and my life starts being touched, I fall apart on the phone. Arnie's the only person I've ever been able to talk to by phone since I first developed this phobia. The fact that he was able to get me to loosen up enough to talk to him might, I hope, mean that someday I'll be able to completely overcome it. But it'll take time and work.

Establishing identity independent of the men we marry, live with, and sleep with is the most commonly shared problem of women. It's especially heightened when we choose strong verbal types, particularly if we are less assertive. (Considering the attraction of opposites, this is frequently the case.)

I hope you'll be able to work out your own self-image so that you'll be happier. I'm sorry to say, though, that I think your self-image has a great deal better chance of improving than there is a chance of your working out the Independent Image problem with everyone you meet. Even though many people are coming to recognize a woman as independent from her bed-partner, it's an unfortunate fact that everyone, male and female, is having to struggle against all of our childhood experiences..in fact against multiple thousand years of human experiences..to come up with a better attitude toward women. And, just as a woman can't suddenly stand tall and straight one day and say Today I Am A Whole Person, neither can the people she comes into contact with suddenly one day cast aside all of their hang ups. You and I personally are fairly fortunate that the majority of people that we have social contact with are enlightened enough to at least want us to have independent identities. But, even the people who want to do right by women have their burden of bad-thinking to overcome, just as we women do. Worse yet, even though we're blessed by

Enlightened Friends, the majority of the world is not yet impressed by the independent value of a woman. This is the reason that I think the most successful move a woman can make on this identity-crisis thing is to get her own opinion of herself straight. Once you've got a real clear feeling, albeit an ever-changing, hopefully growing feeling, of who and what you are..you can pretty well do anything and be with anyone and maintain your own feelings of worth, regardless what ridiculous circumstances you may find yourself in. Oh, sure..you'll still have a healthy outpouring of rage at someone who offends your sensibilities; god forbid you should become so complacent as to cheerfully accept it. But you'll be able to cope with the realities of the world much better. At least, I throw this out as my opinion...more or less my philosophy of How To Cope.

I'm not sure that I made my point, in the conversation we had at the con, about jobs. To repeat myself a little, I think that (for most of us non-professionals with no particular avocation we're dedicated to) the amount of rewards we can expect for our work is almost in direct proportion to the amount of bullshit we'll put up with. A person can stay at home and pursue his favorite hobby and get paid nothing, but be doing exactly what he wants, with the absolute minimum of bullshit. Or he can walk over burning coals and get paid one hell of a lot of money by the freaks who want to watch him blister. Most of us find some compromise in between. We figure out how much hassel we're willing to put up with, and the minimum amount of daily bread we want to exist on, and we take a position that produces the highest return possible for the smallest possible amount of suffering. The precise place that each of us set our level is extremely individual; some people can take more bullshit, some can take less. You indicated, in your conversation, that you were beginning to have passing thoughts about working more in the mainstream business world where the financial rewards are greater. I feel certain that, if you decide you are willing to put up with the increase in bullshit, you'll be able to do so with no trouble at all. -- As you know, it's been my decision for several years that, since I'm going to have to spend 8 hours a day doing something that isn't my favorite activity, I might as well get enough money from it so that I can pursue my favorite activities in my spare time without too many financial problems. Consequently, I work in insurance/finance.. and I don't believe anyone anyplace ever figured insurance premiums as a hobby..and I take a moderate amount of bullshit, and put up with ego-trips from bosses, and smile quite prettily when spoken to by important clients...and they pay me a hell of a lot of money for doing so. I could, no doubt, find a job in a bookstore (which is an occupation that all of us quant-stuff intellectual types consider desirable.) But it would still come down to 8 hours a day spent doing something to increase some boss's fortunes, doing something that I wouldn't do for fun. I'd rather make the extra hundred per week. A highly personal, individual decision: I wish you luck on deciding what your level of compromise will be.