

WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION
Women's History Month 2005

NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2005 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2005 or Spring 2006 to be eligible. (Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor: Patti See

Dept. Educational Support Services and WMNS

Course Number and Name: WMNS 210: Culture of the 3rd Wave

Semester completed: Summer, 2005

Title of Nominated Work: My First Experience with a Power Saw
or How I Became a Tool Tart

Pick one-
CATEGORY:

Sampson:

~~X~~ Undergraduate Research Paper

X Undergraduate Project

~~___~~ Graduate

~~___~~ See

~~___~~ Olsen

~~___~~ Kessler

~~___~~ Turell

~~___~~ Belter

(The judges retain the right to reassign categories for all nominated works.)

STUDENT INFORMATION:

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****WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

~~As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach~~.....
to your nomination form.

Submission deadline is February 13, 2006.



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January 18, 2006

 To: Women's History Month Awards Committee

From: Patti See

RE: Nomination of Amanda Schaefer's Undergraduate Research paper

I am pleased to nominate Amanda's paper "My First Experience with a Power Saw or How I Became a Tool Tart."

For an assignment in my summer course WMNS 210: Culture of the Third Wave, she challenged herself by using power tools for the first time. She does a wonderful job weaving her personal narrative with solid research to create a well written and intriguing paper. Her research led her to research Rosie the Riveter and to her family's own Rosie: her grandmother who worked in a defense plant during WWII.

Amanda's paper does a fine job reflecting her "everyday activism" as a young feminist.

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Undergraduate Research Award

My First Experience with a Power Saw or How I Became a Tool Tart

WMNS 210: Culture of the Third Wave

Amanda Schaefer, Senior, English Literature

Patti See, Instructor

I've never been big on using tools, fixing things or "doing it myself." Granted, if it needed to get done and I knew how to do it, I'd do it. But I never thought I'd volunteer to help with a full-blown home improvement project. Anything that involved safety glasses I had given up in high school. Then one day my friend Chris called me and told me he was laying down new laminate floor in his room. Knowing that I would probably say *no*, he asked me if I wanted to help. Now, even though I don't use power tools, I am still very stubborn.

For better or worse, when someone tells me I can't do something, I'm more likely to try to do it. So I told Chris, "Yeah, I'll help, if you let me help." He said all right, so I went to his house. I got issued a pair of work gloves and safety glasses. I helped lift particle board and drill them into place in the room. And then, the moment of truth: my turn to use the power saw. As I put the guide to the wood, I held on for dear life, thinking that the moment I flipped the switch, it would fly out of my hands and hurt someone. I turned it on and moved the saw forward. It didn't feel different, it was just really loud.

I was concentrating on the guide when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned off the saw and looked at Chris. "What?" I said. Then I looked down. I was holding the saw so tightly that the blade was actually a few inches above the wood. I laughed and tried again, this time making contact. Sawdust flew everywhere and I felt powerful not only for being able to do something I never thought I would, could or even wanted to do. After doing my empowering act, Chris and I grilled burgers and drank beer (what a perfect ending). I started thinking about women who do this for a living, for whom this type of work is a passion. I also started thinking about my grandma.

During WWII many women were called to work outside the home. Many went to work in defense plants, building airplanes, ships, and other machinery needed for combat. My grandma Christian was one of those women. She was born in 1928, so she was only in her teens when she went to work in the defense plant. Unfortunately, like many women's histories, nobody knows much about that part of my grandma's life. She died 10 years ago, didn't keep journals and didn't give many details to her children. All I know is that she worked as a riveter in a defense plant in either Great Bend, Kansas or Wichita (Schaefer).

My grandma was one of many women inspired to go to work by Rosie the Riveter, a character from a song used to recruit women to the work force. She was also featured on recruitment posters. The image on the posters was painted by Norman Rockwell, and first appeared on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in 1943 (\$5 Million Dollar Woman). This image has stayed with American society as a symbol of female empowerment. A few years ago, Rosie the Riveter even got her own park in Richmond, California. Built on the old Kaiser Shipyards, it honors the women who worked there and in defense plants across the country during WWII. President Bill Clinton even signed a bill designating it a national park, and it was dedicated in October of 2000 (Rosie the Riveter Memorial).

While during the Second World War women were encouraged to get jobs in industry in order to help the country, now women are encouraged to get jobs in industry and construction to help themselves. In a study done by USA Today, on what kinds of social projects work the best, the Women in Construction Project received high praise. Located in Richmond, Kentucky, this project encourages women into construction

careers by offering low-cost classes while also offering childcare. This is designed to help low-income women (usually single mothers) learn a trade and make more money.

The opportunities for trained tradeswomen are great. The word “tradeswoman” includes many occupations, including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, engineers and a lot more, including women who own their own companies. In 2004, there were 652,807 privately held women-owned firms in the U.S. (Center for Women’s Business Research). The type of woman who usually goes into the construction business is in her late twenties or early thirties who is looking for more money from a job. Construction work pays women a lot more than many other jobs that women usually hold, and women and men in construction get more equally than a lot of other jobs. The more training a tradeswoman gets, the more money she is offered. That’s more than other jobs offer—most traditional women’s jobs (retail, waitressing) offer no additional training. What’s more, training in the construction business is recognized across the country. But even though the number of women in construction is growing, there is still a problem of sexual harassment for these women. A lot of men in the industry have trouble accepting women in this traditionally male-dominated industry. In order to cope, women have to remain confident. Construction worker Karen Lynn Hill, who has been a tradeswoman since 1979, says that she has to leave her emotions at home, and when she gets hassled she just says, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but I make \$21.80 an hour” (Green).

Women not only have come a long way in the construction industry itself, but have also taken leadership positions in organizations about the construction industry. For example, in 2003 Patricia Galloway was the President of the American Society of Civil Engineers. This organization was 151 years old and had never had a female president

until Galloway. The same year Carole L. Bionda was the chair of Associated Builders and Contractors, and Anne Bigane Wilson was the president of the American Subcontractors Association. They work to further the position of women in construction and also do a lot of outreach to students (Women Take Leadership Positions). There is also an entire organization led by women for women in construction fields, called the National Association for Women in Construction. It was founded in Fort Worth in 1953 by women working in construction who felt they needed a support network. NAWIC creates a community for female construction workers, promotes education on the industry, and encourages contributions to the industry. They also work to make female construction workers aware of legislation that affects them and their profession specifically. According to the NAWIC website there are over 900,000 women working in construction industries in the United States today (www.nawic.org).

Whether these women consider themselves feminists or not, they are definitely pioneers in the fight for gender justice. From the women just starting out in apprenticeships to the women leading the organizations I mentioned above, they're all fighting to have the opportunities that men have in the construction business.

One of the first women to fight for gender justice in construction was architect Julia Morgan. She was born in 1872 in San Francisco, the daughter of a carpenter. She took after her father and showed an aptitude for carpentry and math. She graduated with a degree in architecture from the University of California at Berkeley (www.greatbuildings.com). She was the first female graduate of the French school Ecole des Beux-Arts and was the first female licensed architect in California (Castle for the Chief). She established her own firm in San Francisco and helped rebuild many of the

city's buildings after the 1906 earthquake (www.greatbuildings.com). At the end of her 50-year career, Morgan had finished over 700 projects (Castle for the Chief). Some of her projects were clearly meant to help the position of women. She designed the YWCA in Chinatown, as well as a female residence hall on Powell Street. About the YWCA project, Morgan said that "it offers girls and young women in the cities a safe place to board, learn skills, recreate, and get acquainted with other professionals" (Jackson). Not only did Morgan use her position as an architect to further her passions and dreams, but she used it to help the position of other women and girls.

As I brushed the sawdust from my hair and took a swig of my Grainbelt Premium, I felt as if I had broken some sort of barrier in myself. The girl who never used tools, the girl who was always considered too small to do any hard labor for herself, had actually done something productive with power tools. I thought of the women who do this for a living, and I had a newfound respect for them. By fulfilling their desires and talents, by earning the money they deserve (and often the same amount that men in the same job earn), women in construction embody Third Wave values: formulating their identities and taking traditional male roles and making them their own. I also thought of my grandmother as a young woman, working a job that was traditionally a man's position. She was independent, making her own money. I don't know if she called herself a feminist, but I certainly do. I doubt I have the desire or talent to work the type of job she worked, or those of other tradeswoman, but I hope to have the same independence and drive in my chosen work. Meanwhile, I was enjoying the fact that I had surprised myself, my friends and my family by doing something we never thought I'd do. Chris was glad that I could actually be of some help laying down his floor—he told me it would have

been a lot harder without me. When I told my dad, he was actually proud of me. And when I told my friend Nancy (a feminist herself), she was happily surprised and called me a “tool tart.” Thanks to the women I’ve discussed here, and many women like my grandmother, I have been given choices to use power tools whenever I want to, and choice is what I consider the most important aspect of feminism.

Works Cited

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