

My Job in an Apple Plant

By John Langan

Introductory paragraph In the course of working my way through school, I have taken many jobs I would rather forget. I have spent nine hours a day lifting heavy automobile and truck batteries off the end of an assembly belt. I have risked the loss of eyes and fingers working a punch press in a textile factory. I have served as a ward aide in a mental hospital, helping care for brain-damaged men who would break into violent fits at unexpected moments. But none of these jobs was as dreadful as my job in an apple plant. **The work was physically hard; the pay was poor; and, most of all, the working conditions were dismal.**

Plan of Development

F i r s t supporting paragraph First of all, the job made enormous demands on my strength and energy. For ten hours a night, I took cartons that rolled down a metal track and stacked them onto wooden skids in a tractor-trailer. Each carton contained twelve heavy cans or bottles of apple juice. A carton shot down the track about every fifteen seconds. I once figured out that I was lifting an average of twelve tons of apple juice every night. When a truck was almost filled, I or my partner had to drag fourteen bulky wooden skids into the empty trailer nearby and then set up added sections of the heavy metal track so that we could start routing cartons to the back of the empty van. While one of us did that, the other performed the stacking work of two men.

S e c o n d supporting paragraph I would not have minded the difficulty of the work so much if the pay had not been so poor. I was paid the minimum wage of that time, two dollars an hour, plus the minimum of a nickel extra for working the night shift. Because of the low salary, I felt compelled to get as much overtime pay as possible. Everything over eight hours a night was time-and-a-half, so I typically worked twelve hours a night. On Friday I would sometimes work straight through until Saturday at noon -- eighteen hours. I averaged over sixty hours a week but did not take home much more than one hundred dollars.

T h i r d supporting paragraph But even more than the low pay, what upset me about my apple plant job was the working conditions. Our humorless supervisor cared only about his production record for each night and tried to keep the assembly line moving at a breakneck pace. During work I was limited to two ten-minute breaks and an unpaid half hour for lunch. Most of my time was spent outside on the truck loading dock in near-zero-degree temperatures. The steel floors of the trucks were like ice; the quickly penetrating cold made my feet feel like stone. I had no shared interests with the man I loaded cartons with, and so I had to work without job companionship. And after the production line shut down and most people left, I had to spend two hours alone scrubbing clean the apple vats, which were coated with a sticky residue.

Concluding paragraph I stayed on the job for five months, hating all the while the difficulty of the work, the poor money, and the conditions under which I worked. By the time I quit, I was determined never to do such degrading work again.