

Featured story:

A MAID'S HELPER

Written by Max Neil Maximchuk

Clarity comes quickly to some whereas others need time and experience for it to unfold and reveal its evasive secrets. I'm more of the second camp and working as a maid's helper turned out to be just the stepping stone I needed to face the directions that were calling me.

I was a little lost. I didn't have a plan or a guiding beacon anywhere. I thought trying different things out might be better than getting caught in a rut. I'd give one kind of job a chance and try it out for a while. You never know what it could stimulate or where it could lead. If after some time I felt nothing much would come from it, I'd look around somewhere else.

I was in my mid-twenties and really had no idea of where I was going, of what I wanted to do with my life. I had yet to make the decision to return to the mines, pay off my debts, start saving and later take the big soul-searching journey. But of course I didn't know all that yet. For the time being, I wasn't in a hurry, but the clock was ticking. With every month passing by I felt a little less comfortable hiding under the cloak of the youth. One day I would have to start making bigger or more successful decisions.

When I opened the newspaper in the classified section, most of the offered jobs seemed to be fitted for experienced professional bureaucrats or commission-hungry salesmen. I did try the salesman job, and it certainly was an experience, but I was glad to no longer be associated with that world.

I would reread the columns several times just in case I had skimmed them too quickly, missing an opportunity. I romantically sat in a café, circling possibilities, just like in the movies. But no-one walked through the door or clumsily stumbled, spilling coffee on me which would spark further interaction leading to a dream job in a new life. The newspapers would be neatly folded and filed in the nearest garbage container with only a few of the numbers been tried.

Then, one day, there it was. There was a Holiday Inn want ad. It wasn't too far from where I lived and they needed an assistant to aid the maids. The successful man (or woman) prepares himself (or herself) well. I got to work right away, imagining the duties required, what kinds of questions could be asked, the qualifications sought. I reworked my resumé into something more reasonably appropriate for such a vocation. I chose my interviewing costume, nothing too formal, yet not excessively casual either. And I answered the casting call.

I was sitting in front of this professional woman who was looking over my CV once again. She expressed reluctance at considering me as even with my stripped down CV, she still thought me as over-qualified for the job. I assured her I was her man. I was flexible, willing to work, dependable and didn't consider the job too menial. I would follow orders and do the work of anyone needing my assistance, not unlike my earlier Stylerite days when I worked after school.

She had her doubts but was in need of somebody so she took a chance. I realize in the social hierarchies with world leaders, nobility and money at the top, a maid is somewhat down the ladder, and then there is the assistant to the maid. That was to be my job. Maybe just as well as my bed-making abilities are not of the highest order as my wife is quick to point out. You couldn't bounce a coin off my not-so-tightly stretched bedspread. It would get lost somewhere in the folds.

The people I worked with were good people. They reminded me of the wide variety of those working in the smelter. They weren't of any one particular mold or way of thinking or being. It was a rich blend of personalities and backgrounds. I took some comfort in that while the job may not have been the most challenging, I could see myself

living with these people, or similar people on a daily basis. If for some reason I find myself incapable of finding a vocation that fulfills me in many ways, I would not be so badly off to work in the company of people like those.

My job was less demanding in finely-tuned skills. I would push the huge hampers on wheels laden with the dirty sheets from the freshly stripped beds. I'd be a retriever of odds and ends, a runner of messages. It was good to be on the go, especially after the sedentary life of a gas station attendant who just collects the money and peers out to catch license plate numbers.

There was another good reason to keep a high paced momentum. It had only been a matter of a few days since my breakup with a woman I had hoped to be with more than indefinitely. The maids had the habit of playing the radio while cleaning the rooms and every second song reminded me of HER and of US. How is it that at that time in my life so many songs were being released on the charts, knowing exactly how I felt and what I was going through?

I wanted desperately to be reunited with her. What then, was preventing me? I could try and approach her with the idea. Maybe I shouldn't have broken up with her in the first place if I wanted her so badly.

It was from the incessant reminders of unrequited love that after a long, tumultuous, on again off again relationship that I decided to finally pull the plug. I regretted it from the first hour. I knew it was the best thing to do, and that I should start rebuilding my life at some point, but how could I go on without her? Even if she didn't feel the same way about me. A million doubts and even more regrets were running through me, and every hotel room I entered, I was freshly assaulted by the next song blaring away on the radio, reminding me of my loss.

When I was sent to the laundry room on some distant errand I could momentarily escape those emotional hells. Yet they were not entirely undesired. I liked the passion of the feeling, much much better than the limbo I had been experiencing before the breakup. And now I felt the longing for a second chance. I was alive. In pain but alive.

Maybe after the passing of an eternity, or maybe it was two, I came home from work one evening. There she was, sitting in the hallway, her back hard against the door. It appeared she had been there for some time and was prepared to go the distance. My heart leapt and I invited her inside.

Just like the songs, we got our second chance. It was wonderful. Just like the songs. We worked out some of our differences and we lasted much of the winter. We both knew deep down that we were never fated to be a couple to last the infinity of time and some of the points which raised its friction earlier could not be eased away with our second wind. Still, we weathered it, enjoyed the good moments when we had them, and eventually geared ourselves up for the final breakup.

We were stronger that time, not crushed or so disorientated. I've always been thankful for that second opportunity and the many lessons it has provided me.

With the warming of the weather, I came to grips with the only decision laying before me. It was not the breakup, which this time came from a very mutual understanding. It was time to stop floating around. I went up north and found work in the smelter. I returned and gave up my apartment in the village area. And I was best man saying farewell to my best friend as he began the journey of his first marriage. And, of course, I bid adieu to my friends, the maids and the porters whose good company I shared while being their helper over that eventful winter.

AFTERWORD:

It's a good feeling to finally come to a decision that's been long in the making. Especially a decision which you know that is right. Trying again at a faulty relationship and accepting the second ending were both good decisions. As was moving up north to slave in the smelter. I knew it was going to be a hard road ahead of me, but there was no turning back if I wanted to get past it.