

Packinghouse <http://www.loc.gov/resource/wpalh0.07050418/?st=gallery>

Marge Paca, 24 years old; Irish, married to a Pole union member; June 15, 1939

The meat specialties, that is about the coldest place in the yards. That's where they prepare medicinal extracts from meats, for hospitals, I guess. Anyway, they have a room there that's 60 degrees below zero. Nobody is supposed to stay there longer than 3 minutes, but some of the men go in there for 15 minutes at a time.

I used to have to pack the brains in cans. They would be frozen stiff and my nails would lift right up off my fingers handling them. It's always wet there and very, very cold. I had to wear two and three pairs of woolen stockings, 2 pairs of underwear, a couple of woolen skirts and all the sweaters I had, and on top of that I had to wear a white uniform. My own. But I couldn't stand it there, it was so cold. It's easy to get pneumonia in a place like that.

In cleaning brains you have to keep your hands in ice cold water and pick out the blood clots. They have the most sickening odor. Cleaning tripe, though, that's the limit. Rotten, yellow stuff, all decayed, it just stank like hell! I did that for a few weeks.

Then I worked in the sausage department. In the domestic sausage. We'd have to do the pork sausages in the cooler. Sometimes we wouldn't be told what kind of sausage we'd have to work on and then when we'd come to work they'd say 'pork for you' 2 and we'd have to throw any dirty old rags we could pick up around our shoulders and go to work in that icebox. If they had any sense or consideration for the girls they could let them know ahead of time so that girls could come prepared with enough clothes.

In summer sausage, they stuff very big sausages there. That's very heavy work. A stick of sausage weighs 200 pounds, five or six sausages on a stick. They have women doing that. It's a strong man's job and no woman should be doing that work. The young girls just can't, so they have the older ladies, and it's a crime to see the way they struggle with it. On that job I lost 27 pounds in three months. That was enough for me. It's a strain on your heart, too. Women got ruptured. They pick the strongest women, big husky ones, you should see the muscles on them, but they can't keep it up. It's horses' labor. In chipped beef the work is much easier. You can make better money, too, but the rate has to be topped, and it's very, very fast work.

Helen Wocz; 26 years old, of Polish descent, American born; May 26, '39

On the night gang shift there's always a lots of rats. They don't come out in the daytime so much because there's so many people working and the trucks and the noise keeps them away. But they come out at night because it's quieter and run on the floors and even sometimes along the tables, especially where it's warm, like in the cook rooms. They run up and into the barrels of meat that the girls have to cut, and we'd hate to put our hands in deep in the barrels for fear we'd touch a live rat instead of a piece of meat.

Some of the girls wear those overalls, you know, to keep from getting so dirty and for warmth in some of the chilly rooms. Sometimes a rat would get into the trouser leg of a

girl and it would scratch and scramble and bite, trying to get out and the girl would be screaming and fainting and naturally the other girls would get so frightened it would start them screaming for the men. Once a girl had a rat, a great big thing it was, run up her leg and she was doing work that had to be done with a knife and she let go of it so fast it shot across the table into another girl's face. It made a deep slash and the blood just poured and here was the one who did it in a dead faint half on the table and sliding off. She was bit in three places by this rat. It was like a crazyhouse that time, girls crying and screaming, the men chasing the rat that had gotten out and was squealing and running along under the table, and girls sitting and standing on the table trying to keep their legs up in the air. Nobody was fit 3 to do any more work that night, with all that excitement. Every time an accident happens like that, the girls get so nervous they can't work. But the worse thing about that time is that the doctor was gone and there was nobody but one of these nurses who don't know how to patch up a sore finger right. It was about 12 pm when that happened and the doctor only stays until 11pm. The way they fixed this girl up at the plant they left her with a big scar on her mouth and cheek. That's the worst I ever saw there, but accidents are always happening there, all the time.

(She has her mother living with her, making 8 people in five extremely small rooms, no bath room, outside toilet in the yard, and their rooms are on the second floor. For the smaller children there is a slop bucket on the back porch, emptied twice a day into the privy downstairs. Her mother is a tubercular, and is supposed to be taking treatments in a city clinic, but because someone must take care of Helen's house and children, she rarely has an opportunity to get to the clinic. Besides the t.b. her mother suffers some sort of mental derangement which Helen says is due to 'change of life'. Notwithstanding all this, the house is kept clean by the mother. Pretty shabby, worn out rugs and 2 linoleum, beds in every room except the kitchen, no closets, but clean.)

Post Carrier <http://www.loc.gov/resource/wpalh0.07030417/?st=gallery>

Initials: M.F., B.D., S.B., H.F., J.C., G.R.; DATE 6/22/39

They're mostly old people in this hotel. They bother hell out of you every time you bring in the mail as if it's your fault they don't get anything...

Lots of people, and especially old people, rich old people like the ones around this hotel, are always trying to raise trouble for the carrier. But I bullcrap them to a million, and they never know it; I've been on a long time, long enough so I really have a neat way of handling them. I can't describe how I do it, I do it, that's all; the trick's mostly to keep agreeing with them and keep twisting their statements inside out as you go along—after a while they think you you're a goof and a goof can get away with anything, almost. You've got to know to laugh a bit, too, ag at their jokes. It's the guys who're smart, smart and aggressive, who get in dutch.

Three times I've been asked why I'd hanged a WPA check. (leaving it hanging over box instead of handing it to adreesee in person)— But I don't hang them, I never do. I ring the bell where it says the guy's name and someone comes out and says he's that guy. But he's not, and he takes the cheek. Then he figures he can't get away with nothin' and puts it in the box. I get a kickback on it. I had a funny one happen to me the other day.

You know how the Negros live. You'll find a family in a room and a whold colony in a flat. And they're always movin' or havin' to move. Some of them haven't any toilets and some of them don't even have any water. The halls are dark, and even if they weren't you wouldn't be able to tell who lives there from the names over the mail boxes—you ought to see it. You can ride through the neighborhood or even walk in it and never have a hint of the way they actually live, of the kind of dirt and misery they have. I feel honest to God sorry for the poor bastards, honest to God, I do.

I've got a check to deliver to a guy named H. G. His name's not up, but I sort of remembered that an H. G. 'd lived on the first floor so I ring the bells for the first floor. A guy comes out and says he's not H. G. but H. G's brother-in-law; H. G. lives with him, he'll take the check. I give it to him, and while I'm distributin' the reit of the mail for the building H. G. himself comes down from upstairs and [aksa?] for his check. I tell him I'd already given it to his brother-in-law. "I got no brother-in-law," he says, so I had to go in with him and get the check. This other guy was standin' there—you could see his lips moving spelling outletter by letter what was on the check.. All H. G. 'd done was move from the first floor to the third.

The carrier's a heel to everyone, the public, the clerks, even to the guys on WRA. There's one fellow I know who quit the service because he couldn't stand it any longer. He isn't even making fifty-five dollars a month; he's not on WPA, He's on relief. I meet him one day; it's snowing and I'm lugging a full pack around, and you know that he says to me? -"Boy, I'd hate to be lugging your bag around"— he's never been sorry he quit.

There're about ten-thousand clerks an' only about three-thousand carriers. The carriers' union's always been weak, the clerk's stronger an' more active, too, an' that's why they aint driven like us. They get things done.

I remember when I was takin' the exams. There was a big burly lad that ought to've been drivin' a truck or somethin'; he yells out, "Where d'you put your name for clerk on, this?" I thought, you big goof, you'd be lucky if you got high enough on the list to get a job carrying, let alone clerking. We Take the exams, but most fellows put down they want to be clerks an' it's harder to got high up on the clerk's list. You sign up for carrier an' hope after you get on someone'll be goofy enough to want to transfer with you. I like carryin', only they drive us too much. They really do; they drive us like all hell.

The only time there was life in that damn postoffice was when them Goddamn temps were there. That was because they could tell the boss to go to hell.

The guys are always gripin' about their jobs, but what the hell, I say they're better off than most guys in private industry—an' look at all the guys who don't have no jobs at all. Sure, the drive us all right, an' I don't like it no more'n the next one, an' I'd like to see somethin' done about it. You'd think the government would set an example; but it don't; it drives the hell out o' you in the service, just like anyone else. But where else can you be sure of a job for life long 's you keep your nose clean. What would these guys do if they did lose their jobs, quit or get fired or somethin'? What are they fitted to do? An' even if they're fitted for somethin', what the hell! -they'd find out soon enough there aint so damn many jobs floatin' around where they'd make nearly as much. They get around an' they know that as well as I do; you notice there aint so many of 'em quittin, don't you? - they're holdin' on all right, [byu?] you bet they are. If I lost my job today I wouldn't even know where to start lookin' for a job—I was thinkin' of it only the other day; I was feeling so damn lousy when I come home.

When we were temps, being in uniform, we'd never have to pay for smokes or eats or drinks. But when payday came....Why, when payday came I had a sheet a paper a mile long, with 5¢ I owed to this patron, and a dime to that one, and 15-20 cents to someone else.

Polish <https://www.loc.gov/resource/wpalh0.07030716/>

DATE 7-21-39, Multiple Sources

There's a girl who lives over on Sacramento who teaches school over on the west side, over in the Polish neighborhood. One of the Polish kids, he had an awful bad pair of tonsils. You know how the schools nowadays have medical examinations and all that kind of stuff. Well, the doctor orders them tonsils to come out, an' the kid, he comes to school regular but his tonsils, they never come out. The teacher gets sore an' she sends a note home with the kid, sayin' he can't come back to school till he's got his tonsils out. This girl, she told me the story herself. It's true, so help me.

Next morning there's the kid back in school again, big as life. The teacher said "I thought I told you you couldn't come back to school again till your tonsils were taken out."

The kid, he says, well, his tonsils was taken out. But he'd been in school only the day before, and the teacher's sort o' sore. She says:

"How could you've had your tonsils out? -You were in school yesterday. What doctor did it? Didn't he tell you to stay at home an' in bed?"

But the kid, he says, nope, it wasn't no doctor who took his tonsils out, His old lady took 'em out. With a scissors. So this girl, she looks in the kids mouth. Sure enough, hold had his tonsils out.

That's how tough them Polacks are, tough an' dumb.

Tough? That one aint nothin' to the one I heard. This one happened in Morris' Packin'. A woman who's workin' there, she stops workin' an' goes to the toilet. She's in there a while, an' then she comes out an' goes to work again. While she was in there she'd had a kid. That's how tough they are.

The kid? I don't know what happened to it. I'm only tellin' you what I heard. I know the guy who told it to me, an' he runs around with a girl who works in the same place with this dame I'm tellin' you about. She told it to him.

Taverns <https://www.loc.gov/resource/wpalh0.07030317/?sp=4&st=text>

May 11, 1939

I could tell you more stories about the taverns than anything else, I guess. They're a crummy bunch of places and a crummy lot of people, them tavern keepers I mean. Take all in all, though, the taverns that cater to the Irish are the dirtiest of the lot and the ones that cater to the Salvs are the cleanest. Not casting reflections on the Irish, understand, and not throwing bouquets at the Slavs. I get around, that's all, and that's the way I've found it. In my line, a guy sees more than the average, and if he keeps his eyes and ears open he sees and hears a lot the average man don't ever get a chance to see.

A lot of fellows, ice men and guys like that, have to spend a certain amount of time and money in the saloons, just to hold their trade. Well, I'm working in a place, and in comes a guy, a German or a Swede or something like that. We were talking about it afterward, and we sort of agreed he must o' been a Swede. The saloon being one of his stops, he tries to be sociable. He's an ice man, sort of big an' hulking an' dumb as hell. He tries to make talk an' blunders at it somethin' awful. But that aint the point. The point is, when he goes out, the tavern keeper turns to me an' says:

“He acts like a——— Jew.”

I don't look Jewish, an' no one ever takes me for a Jew, so I hear lots of things like that. You'll find a lot of that kind o'stuff around these taverns.

Two Irishmen had been bullcrappin' each other for hours. These Irish. They'll be standin' around drinkin', and' someone'll know a Mahoney, say, an' someone else'll know a Mahoney, an' so he'll hear the first guy speak of Mahoney an' want to know, “Is that the Mahoney that lives down on Racine and 50th,” or wherever the hell, and that's the way they break the ice, and pretty soon they're all thick as jelly and talkin' hell for [leath?], each one tryin' to out-bullcrap the other.