The Worst and Best Jobs of My Life
by Fidel Sanchez

Any job you choose can greatly influence your life. Jobs can give you a feeling of hope, meaning, accomplishment, and fulfillment or leave you feeling broken, devastated, depressed, with a sense of hopelessness that never seems to go away. I have had two jobs in my life that have greatly affected me, one job made me feel important and useful, while the other job made me feel the exact opposite.

The first job I had was as a teacher’s clerical assistant in high school. The credit hours were essential if I were to graduate, so I took the job. I would help my teacher, Ms. Witherspoon, with the hordes of student papers that came her way. She would decorate them with soul-crushing “F”s or award-winning “A”s, along with tidbits on how to do better next time. I would then leisurely type in all the information about each student’s performance poor or near-perfect academic performance into the computer. Correcting the piles of homework assignments and multiple-choice tests was time consuming because she had so many students, but this task became easier once I had all the answers in my head. That line of work made me feel important, and, furthermore, I knew what I was doing, and I felt I was making a difference.

Now, my second job was the exact opposite of the first. I wanted to go to college, and my parents wanted to help me by paying my tuition. However, my parents, due to medical reasons, could not work, so it became my responsibility to support them and to earn money for college. I started to search for job openings around my neighborhood. Finally, I found employment at a company call Sun Optics; there I would make a fair amount of money.

The company made glasses for people with visual problems. I thought the job would be exhilarating since I was trying something new in my life. I would receive clear, see-through bags of frames along with an ophthalmologist’s description of what the customer wanted for his or her glasses. Then I would put them on a specified colored tray with a round circular piece of plastic that soon would become lenses. My first day on the job was atrocious. Nearly cutting my finger as I tried to dull the sharp edges of freshly cut lenses did not impress my boss. Learning how to heat plastic frames with burning hot sand in order to put in the lens was challenging, too. Sometimes the job required a little something extra like drilling a hole in the lens. My employers were supposed to teach me how to do these extra things, but they never did. When I talked to them about it, all they did was bellow at me and make hostile remarks.

I was more a liability than an asset as I continued to work for Sun Optics. Dread came over me as I would get up every morning to go to work. This anxiety left me the day my parents told me they could start working again, so I was able to quit this job and start college. The thought that I might have to face unpleasant jobs later in life made me realize that I had better start making good, sensible, and well-thought-out choices about what I want to do with my life, so it’s up to me to choose a career that will make this enterprise enjoyable and rewarding.
Please write your essay in blue or black ink in a large (8 ½ x 11 inch) examination book (also known as a greenbook or even a bluebook).

Do not put your name or your instructor's name on the cover of your examination book. Your instructor will give you a letter (to identify the instructor) and a number (to identify you); please write the letter and the number in the top right corner on the cover of your examination book.

When writing your essay, skip every other line (double-space) to leave room for possible revisions; you may go back and cross out words, insert new ones, or make other changes to clarify your essay.

Carefully read "The Best and Worst Jobs of My Life" by Fidel Sanchez. Be sure to look up any unfamiliar words in your dictionary. Afterwards, write an essay of approximately 450 words.

Your essay should answer all three of the following parts; plan your writing before you begin.

1. Explain what was good about Sanchez's first job and what was negative about his worst one.
2. Explain several ways co-workers' attitudes and work environments can affect individuals?
3. Describe one of your jobs (or team activity) and how it affected you.
Excerpts from *THE SOUL OF A CITIZEN: LIVING WITH CONVICTION IN A CYNICAL TIME*
by Paul Rogat Loeb

We can never predict the impact of our actions. When she was two months pregnant, Rebecca Hughes worried about how she’d find the time to continue her work as a self-employed writer, and also be a good mother to her first child. **On the spur of the moment,** she approached a woman in the elevator of their large Boston apartment. The other woman was about eight months pregnant. Although they’d never spoken, Rebecca introduced herself and blurted, “I see you’re pregnant. I am, too. What if we exchanged baby-sitting?” **Scrawling** her phone number on a scrap of paper, she placed it in the other woman’s hand.

The woman looked alarmed, but took the note and hurried off the elevator. Rebecca felt embarrassed, but a week later the woman called her. “I’ve been thinking about it,” she said, “Would you like to start exchanging even before your baby is born?” Rebecca accepted the offer. She and her new friend invited several others they’d met in the neighborhood to participate, including a nun who took care of the baby of a single **surgical intern.** The group soon became a close-knit extended family, babysitting each other’s children daily, holding a weekly play group, sharing emotional support, volunteering together at a local community help line, and exchanging tips on raising children, staying healthy, and managing crowded lives.

In time, twenty families were involved, and the **co-op** had become permanently **woven into the fabric** of their neighborhood. “It just seems like a more hopeful way to live,” Rebecca recalls years later. “Finding group solutions to individual problems, I felt a lot less alone.”

In both intent and outcome, Rebecca’s effort was modest. It resolved an everyday personal dilemma, while helping nurture an old-fashioned sense of community in an urban setting. Yet it also had a powerful emotional and spiritual impact on her life. It helped replace isolation with connection.

We can take the lesson of Rebecca’s story—that our problems can often best be solved through common effort—and apply it on a larger stage as well, addressing the major issues of our time. When we open ourselves up to those around us, asking for and offering help and support, we discover strengths and passions we never knew we had. We begin to reconnect with our fellow human beings, with our wisest and most humane instincts, and with the core of who we are, which we call our soul.
Seeing With the Heart  
by Stephanie Disney

Looking at my daughter, the clerk behind the counter asks, "What is she?"  
Since this is not the first time I have heard that question, the stored up,  
smart-aleck answers swirl through my mind. Instead, understanding that I  
am my daughter's role model for handling life issues, I stifle the and respond,  
"She's beautiful, and smart, and well-behaved, too."

The clerk says, "Oh," and glances at me, wondering if I just didn't  
understand the question, and I smile because I understood the question right  
away, but I am only just now beginning to understand the real answer that  
family is defined by bonds much deeper than birth, or skin color, or genetics.  
Like anyone lucky enough to experience "found" love, I believe that family is  
defined only by the heart.

I met my daughter, Rudy, while working as an audiologist at the  
Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs. She was a small,  
quiet, non-communicative two-and-a-half-year-old—and my heart recognized  
er immediately.

I am the whitest of white women, and my daughter is some indefinable  
combination of all that is beautiful from at least three races: curly dark hair,  
petite features, freckles, a golden tan skin tone, one blue eye and one brown.  
If her race had only one name, it would be perfection.

My daughter and I share so much in common, it never occurs to me that  
others may not see us as a family. That's why I was startled the first time a  
stranger inquired about my daughter's race and our relationship. I had forgotten  
that we didn't look alike. The next time I was asked, I politely explained that  
we are mother and daughter and that Rudy's race is unknown. The twentieth  
time somebody asked about my daughter's race and our relationship, I  
explained why the questions were inappropriate. The fortieth time someone  
asked, I just pretended not to hear.

Now, after much time to reflect about the purpose of these questions, I  
understand. I understand that everyone wants love and acceptance. And  
these are such rare gifts, that when people see them freely demonstrated, they  
are compelled to seek the source.

Recently, Rudy surprised me when a white-haired lady, standing right beside  
us, asked if I was her mother. Rudy threw the lady a disbelieving glance and  
said, "Well, she helps me with multiplication, fixes my hair, and we both have  
freckles on our noses—who else could she be?"

When Rudy asks me to explain why people need to ask questions like that,  
I tell her not to worry; it's the answers that really matter. The questions of race  
and family can be complicated to be sure, but I believe all of the answers can be  
found by seeing people first with the heart.
Always Go to the Funeral

by Dierdre Sullivan

I believe in always going to the funeral. My father taught me that. The first time he said it directly to me, I was sixteen and trying to get out of going to the funeral for Miss Emerson, my old fifth-grade math teacher. I did not want to go. My father was unequivocal. “Dee,” he said, “you’re going. Always go to the funeral. Do it for the family.”

So my dad waited outside while I went in. It was worse than I thought it would be: I was the only kid there. When the condolence line deposited me in front of Miss Emerson’s shell-shocked parents, I stammered out, “Sorry about all this,” and stalked away. But, for that deeply weird expression of sympathy delivered twenty years ago, Miss Emerson’s mother still remembers my name and always says hello with tearing eyes.

That was the first time I went unchaperoned, but my parents had been taking us kids to funerals and calling hours as a matter of course for years. By the time I was sixteen, I had been to five or six funerals. I remember two things from going to funerals: bottomless dishes of free mints, and my father saying on the ride home, “You can’t come in without going out, kids. Always go to the funeral.”

Sounds simple—when someone dies, get in your car and go to calling hours or the funeral. That, I can do. But I think a personal philosophy of going to funerals means more than that.

“Always go to the funeral” means that I have to do the right thing when I really, really don’t feel like it. I have to remind myself of it when I could make some small gesture, but I don’t really have to and I definitely don’t want to. I’m talking about those things that represent only inconvenience to me, but the world to the other guy. You know, the painfully under-attended birthday party. The hospital visit during happy hour. The shiva call for one of my ex’s uncles. In my humdrum life, the daily battle hasn’t been good versus evil. It’s hardly been so epic. Most days, my real battle is doing good versus doing nothing.

In going to funerals, I’ve come to believe that while I wait to make a grand heroic gesture, I should just stick to the small inconveniences that let me share life’s inevitable, occasional calamity.

On a cold April night three years ago, my father died a quiet death from cancer. His funeral was on a Wednesday, middle of the work week. I had been numb for days when, for some reason, during the funeral, I turned and looked back at the folks in the church. The memory of it still takes my breath away. The most human, powerful, and humbling thing I’ve ever seen was a church at 3:00 on a Wednesday full of inconvenienced people who believe in going to the funeral.