

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

It wasn't as easy as it looked.

I Think I Can Do This

Fortunately there was a nationwide regime of exploitation in place.

I had just finished a master's degree. When I walked into the English department chair's office at Henry Ford Community College, I was hired on the spot and given two classes to teach. Two days later I walked into the department chair's office at Macomb Community College, was hired on the spot, and given two more classes to teach. I was pretty good at math. Two plus two was four. That was almost equal to full-time work. I was pretty good at math. The pay was a fraction of a real full-time position, a tenure-track position. A very small fraction.

This was the summer of 1976, the year of our nation's bicentennial. My car's license plate looked like the state of Michigan had taken scissors to the American flag: on the left, a narrow column of four white stars on blue background, along the bottom, a narrow row of two white stripes on the plate's red background. My car was my office. Three days a week I drove across metropolitan Detroit on I-94. Every day on AM radio I heard the theme song from Rocky, with its inspiring trumpet fanfare and swelling brass chorus, reminding me that the little guy could triumph.

At each college I was given a syllabus and a textbook. Figure it out.

Once I got started I realized I didn't really know what I was doing. I wanted to be a professor, I wanted to *profess*. Mainly, I realized now, I had to keep students busy three hours a week.

At the end of the term, the ax fell. I lost the Macomb classes. No explanation. That gave me more time to figure out—did I really want to do this, and if so, how to be good at the job.