

Po-cash

by Ann Bogle

My savings account had \$16,000 in it. There were \$16,000 in my savings account. I was on this side of the economy. I sided with the economy: get on up, banks, get on up!

Barbara hadn't called for a year before her position at the biotech company had been eliminated: Six years after her chapter seven, she owed \$16,000 in credit card debt, and her wisdom teeth teemed with cavities. She was unemployed, and her wisdom teeth hurt.

Aaron called to say his wife's sister had been killed. She'd been beaten for an hour then shot between the eyes by someone she knew, someone backing a jealous girlfriend. I didn't believe that, but I believed someone had killed her -- until they knew more -- *slain*. He asked me to pay for the funeral. After his divorce from his rich second wife, he had filed chapter seven. He said, "You have money," and, "My wife's family are white trash." At one time he had wanted to marry me. He could have said "my third wife's family," but he said "my wife." He had a job. I said, "Aaron, you earn \$90,000 a year," and he said, "Shut up" and "fucking bitch" as I might have said "goddamn."

Nancy called to say the housing market had slowed to a creep, and she was running out of cash. Her mother had died leaving her several million in real estate and locked assets. She was tired of it! she said.

My sister called to ask for \$200 for a dress form for her clothing design business. She pitched it like a saleswoman. I had spent \$400 on her birthday the week before that, thinking it was extravagant and due to having something.

My mother called to invite me to a play. I felt like I owed her, and I did. I bought the tickets.

At 60, Brian, a music prodigy, who had rent control and a house he inherited in New Jersey, never called. I called him. He and his wife, a publishing executive, couldn't buy groceries except rice and beans. Chop-chop salad, I said.

Jason called before his chapter seven to ask me how to file. He worked nine-hour days trying to sell Chevrolets and had borrowed \$60,000 to pay bills: daycare, mortgage, food. "Black is up, red is down," I said, knowing he turned to pleasant memories of lawbreaking when he felt discouraged. I asked him to meet me for coffee. He said he hadn't bought a coffee in a year.

When I was poor, too poor for lunch out or coffee, cash poor but rich in time, the word *broke* had too catastrophic a meaning, so I said *poor* to give it balance, to live inside it. I was eating, practicing at gentility and at saying "fixed income." My friends lived flamboyantly with millionaires they ended up not marrying. The therapist for the county suggested I move out of my mother's house and into government housing.

Who remembers? What do any of us remember of those times?

I am a would-be philanthropist with my nest egg, but I would go down. The egg came from winning a poetry contest: \$20,000. The text of my poem is as follows and appeared in a hard cover volume called *Touch of Tomorrow*, \$80 a copy:

*Florence's Weekend
Grace brought Ryan
with his saw
to grind the trunk
and make the logs
build the stack
and clear the leaves
the tree left
when it died*

I had told three people who later called broke of my success. I said they can write a poem, too: anyone can! They said they didn't want to write a poem. They said they were too busy working to write poems. When they realized all I intended to give them was a story about a poem, they said: Why didn't I get a job (if I couldn't be useful)?

Anger management, the therapist said, so I went. The therapist there scowled at me for coming in late. I realized I was angry

because I knew no one I could meet for lunch. Why did poor people go to therapy? They borrowed money for housing; why not borrow money for business school? What had I learned at leisure school: the days went by slowly, the weeks went by fast. I didn't know how to pass time; it passed me, and it couldn't be saved. Time kept running at me, flapping its salty deck in my face like A/C.

