

Temporary

by Robert Vaughan

I like temp jobs. But there's something about getting close to people, office parties, cakes for babies about to be delivered. I'm not cut out for the long haul.

I like those cubicles with the partitions so I can pick at my teeth, yawn when I've been up the previous night until two in the morning watching re-runs of *The Twilight Zone*.

Secretaries ask me "how many days," their voices edged with envy, like they'd love to know when the monotony will end. It sounds like a question asked between prisoners behind bars, or within the walls of a 12 Step Meeting.

When I was at the law firm last year, Mickie, one of the paralegals, told me that I'd make a good candidate for the bar. I said it depended upon whether the bar served Kettleone or not. She bellowed, and I could see every tooth in that horsy mouth, and beyond: throat, epiglottis. I could have been swallowed by that mouth had I wanted to. That's what these companies do: swallow you whole and spit you out.

I worked picking flowers in the towns around Humboldt County: Arcata, Eureka, Forestville. I had to watch a safety video about picking safely, equipment handling, etc. In the room were three other men, all Mexican. The video had no sub-titles in Spanish and they looked wary, like the images would somehow translate enough of the story. But I realized that this was the story of their lives, and mine, too. How much more did I comprehend any of it than them? How much less?

Once in between temp jobs in New York City, I volunteered at a soup kitchen for homeless, battered women. My sister said, "That's horrible! How can you expose yourself to these victims?" Years later, divorced from her first husband, she quickly married the man who plowed their driveway. He had HIV. I said, "How can you expose yourself to this illness?"

I was a marching band co-ordinator in Pembroke, New York. A flautist told me all pianists are notoriously control freaks. I'd no idea there was any kind of pecking order among the orchestra members when I helped to market for the Santa Fe Chamber Orchestra.

I've worked many sales and marketing jobs where I'd tell strangers, "You're going to love this gel!" or "Imagine how you'd feel wearing that Chronograph." I offered money back guarantees, two for one bargains. There would be dialogue scripts that I'd place little tweaks on: change the word "FANTASTIC" to *BRILLIANT* or "PRETTY" to *ENGAGING*! I've sold jewelry to the Japanese, catheters to cardiologists in Daytona Beach, butterfly nets to Science & Nature stores.

During a heated discussion, a former girlfriend once retorted, "Why don't you get a *real* job?"

It wasn't the first time I'd heard this.

I didn't tell her that the thought of doing one job, any one task for more than a few months made me crazy. I didn't tell her then that I felt the same way about girlfriends.

Instead I changed the subject. "Did you know that we spend a third of our lives sleeping?" She waited, used to my peculiarities by now. "I don't want to sleep through the other two-thirds."

"You're just a big scaredy-cat," she teased. "Commitment phobe."

They were forever pressing to hear the L word, to move in, to exchange rings, or vows. Most nights, I'd lie awake wondering why the exchange of body fluids wasn't enough. Why was it always more, more, more when I wanted less, lesser, least?

Then another place would beckon: San Diego, where I could sell surfboards, or run the front desk at the Angola Inn in northern Minnesota. Or put out fires in Angels Rest State Park, Utah.

