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## Pissing blood

Abbey Volcano

November 7, 2012

This is a story about anger, “non-profits,” and pissing blood. I was in my fifth year working at an independent health food store run by religious fanatics in a suburb outside of the city and I needed more money. I started off part-time at a cultural center, working the events. I would mainly be there at night, during performances and exhibits—taking people’s tickets, helping the artists set up, serving hors d’oeuvres, cleaning the toilets, etc. I was paid \$12/hr to do this work and it was the most I had ever made in my life and it was the only job that wasn’t in the service industry, so I was pretty excited. Pretty soon after I started they asked me if I could take over the secretarial position. This was a full-time desk job. I really needed the money, especially because the health food store was closing down since a Whole Foods had moved into town. I took the job since I couldn’t have really done much better as far as pay went.

I know some people think that non-profits are non-capitalist or are somehow better for society and people who work there and so on. People who work in management positions at non-profits tend to be kind of smug because of this. The place I worked didn’t really operate much differently from any other job, so if there’s a non-profit difference, I didn’t see it. This job had been salaried before I

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took it but they switched it to hourly and they had me work 10-5p instead of 9-5p so they could opt me out of health insurance, sick days, vacation leave, or bennies of any variety. At first I was happy about being able to start working later in the day (I'm a nocturnal insomniac) and I had never had insurance through a job before, so didn't think much of it. But I realized pretty quickly that this was bullshit. Everyone else in the office was on salary. Sometimes I felt bad for them because if they worked longer hours, they still received the same pay, but I was mainly upset that I was the only unsalaried person. Others clocked in: the janitor, the tech people, part-time people, but I was the only one in the office who had to clock in.

Pretty much everyone mostly just fucked around on the job. Now, I've done my share of fucking around on the job. I'm all for fucking around on the job. It beats actually working. But in this job, other people would get mad at me if I needed to do something that meant they had to do some work instead of fucking around on the job. My job made me the first person anyone calling or coming into the cultural center made contact with. If I wasn't there, someone else had to take calls or questions, or give tours, or the worst: make their own copies and fax their own memos. The other people in the office would be pretty pissed if I wasn't there on time, or if I was in the bathroom, or late, whatever. They weren't mean to me, but it disrupted their regular schedule of fucking around in the back and I could tell it annoyed them.

So there was me in the front office and four people in the back: grant writer, administrative person, accounts manager, and the executive director. Everyone else had a lot of flexibility, like you would expect at a salaried job at a cultural center to have. When they had dentist appointments, doctor appointments, their children were sick, they were sick, or anything that required them to be out of the office, they were allowed to go without penalty. Now I didn't have health insurance like the rest of them, so I didn't need to worry about getting time off to go to the doctor or dentist.

was having and why I didn't do things the way they would have. I didn't mince my words, so they started to get it a little. Then they just walked around in a kind of guilty manner the rest of the day. These are the same people who could've made my job full-time, offered me benefits, etc. They made the choice to change the job when I took it. I think they knew I'd take it since I was desperate and they weren't worried about filling the position, so why not screw me over? Worst is, 35 hours in my state is considered full-time and I believe I was entitled to sick leave. Trimming my position to 35 hours/week made them feel better about taking away any benefits, but it wasn't legal. They felt guilty when they found out how their decision to change my job had affected me, but not so guilty as to pay me more or provide me with health insurance. Fuck liberals, their useless guilt, and their loyal opposition. Furthermore, like I said, fuck work.

Lucky me! I was pretty bitter about these dynamics, especially since we were all supposed to get along and be friends and what not. I found myself pretty focused on the fact that they had access to all these things and I didn't. I'd see them laughing and joking around and I'd just think to myself how much easier it is to put a smile on at work when you at least get bennies. (Of course, work sucks, full stop. Fuck work.) So I hated my job, I hated almost all my co-workers because they were smug and on power trips. The executive director—that's another story all its own; she is a character. A character you love to hate. She's a rich liberal who thinks she's a radical. Gross.

Here's a brief story to demonstrate her fake radicalness, her loyal opposition. The executive director seemed to fetishize me as a radical. She knew my politics since I had been cooking with Food Not Bombs for a couple years and we used the center's kitchen. So we had chatted a bunch and she considered herself a fellow radical. I'm not sure why she thought this of herself, but she did. When I first started the secretarial position, it was not explained to me that I was to be both a secretary and a personal assistant to this woman. One of the first things she had me do was look over a schematic she came up with that demonstrated how the office was organized in a non-hierarchical manner. She asked me to look it over and offer her suggestions—I think she wanted to pass these out to the office workers to boost morale, but I'm not really sure. The only suggestion I could offer is that it was completely untrue. She was interested in why I thought this, so I took the time to explain to her that the office is not organized in a non-hierarchical manner, as she had clear authority over tasks and the division of labor, she clearly made about \$50k more than the other salaried employees, and as looking at it from my own standpoint, I didn't even have insurance, sick-leave, vacation days, nor salary. It wasn't just pay that divided us, but the division of labor was clearly and rigidly set by the board and the executive director who also established the various rules and regulations (formal and informal) which we were all to follow.

It was really gross to have my boss try to convince me that we were working in a cooperative, non-hierarchical office situation. I continued to oppose everything she offered to support her argument, but she eventually dropped it and just laughed it off. I never saw that schematic again.

So one day I felt like I had a urinary tract infection (UTI) coming on. For those of you unfamiliar with this particular malady—congratulations because they are the worst. It causes you to have to pee constantly, but when you try to urinate it doesn't really work, and it feels like razor blades are coming out of your urethra instead of urine. It's awful. Vaginas are more susceptible to them and if you've had one, you'll likely have another since it causes scar tissue, which causes more UTIs, which causes more scar tissue, etc. There are some over-the-counter drugs to ease the pain, but you need to take an antibiotic to clear up the infection so you can pee normally again. When you have a UTI, you can't really leave your house. It's awful. A 5-minute ride to work can be too much to handle. When I say you have to pee constantly, I mean it. Sometimes you just sit on the toilet waiting to pee. Sometimes you wear a pad so you can let out little bits of pee. Perhaps I'm getting a little TMI. But the point is, holding in your pee, even if it's a miniscule amount, is pain that no one can bear.

So I had a UTI coming on and I knew it. I did whatever I could to try and address it with natural things so I didn't have to go to the walk-in clinic. I drank incredibly expensive gallons of 100% unsweetened cranberry juice, I drank more water than I thought possible, and I also took incredibly expensive cranberry extract pills. That will usually steer me clear and take care of things, but not this particular time. I had symptoms for over a week. I was incredibly uncomfortable and in a lot of pain, but I knew that I didn't have money to pay for the walk-in, to pay for the meds, and especially to take time off from work and lose those hours.

One morning, about eight days into this ordeal, I woke up to go to work and realized I was now peeing blood. UTIs that get

bad enough to piss blood are rare. They're rare because most people wouldn't put up with the amount of pain and length of time it takes to have an untreated UTI develop into one which causes peeing blood. Peeing blood is kind of the last straw. So I was peeing blood and knew I had to get to the walk-in as soon as possible. I reluctantly called into work, explained the situation, and told them I'd get there as soon as possible, but that I needed to go to the walk-in first. This was a pretty difficult task since I also didn't have a car at the time since mine had been stolen from that same job (wee! And also my wallet was stolen off my desk at one point). So I borrowed a car, went to the walk-in, they confirmed I had a UTI and scolded me on waiting so long to treat it, gave me a prescription, and sent me on my way. I went to the pharmacy, got my pills, and drove to work so I could at least make some money that day.

UTIs are treatable and one of the most common infections—all you really need is to take an anti-biotic for a few days and it's over. My co-workers were shocked that I was peeing blood, they were very concerned and asked why I waited so long to take care of things. The women, especially, winced when I told them the pain I was in. They even told me to go home for the day. At this point, I had pretty much lost any ability to remain calm. I explained to them that I couldn't afford to take time off of work, I couldn't afford the walk-in clinic, and I couldn't afford the prescription, and that was "why" I waited so long. I stayed the rest of the day, of course. I didn't speak to anyone and my eyes were daggers.

The fact that I had to be peeing blood in order to justify taking off a few hours from work is bullshit. When smug well-off women at "non-profits" are shocked and ask you why you waited so long to go to the doctor when you have a UTI, you pretty much want to kill them, and anyone else, hell, everyone else. They couldn't understand what it meant not having insurance, not having sick-leave, and not having the ability to even get to a doctor without borrowing a car. They were so used to their salary, their benefits, their vacation time, that they seemed unable to understand the problems I