

# Good Reading/Good Writing

For 31 years, Jennifer Jones worked as a steelworker in the Midwest. Through a union program, she went back to school and earned her college degree and a masters degree in public management. She also took a writing workshop. Two of her personal stories were published in a book called *The Heat: Steelworker Lives and Legends* (Cedar Hill Publications).

In this excerpt from “Day One,” Jennifer describes the time she was an unwed mother living in her parents’ home. She was faced with the choice of getting a job or going on welfare. She decided to apply at the Inland Steel mill and kept calling the personnel office until a job opened up.

## DAY ONE BY JENNIFER JONES

**F**inally, the day is here when I am a full-fledged employee. Part of me is glad for the job, but the biggest part of me is at the lowest point of despair. The only thing that keeps my feet going is the echo I hear in my head of my dad saying he will not raise any more children. And if he wouldn’t, and I couldn’t, who would? There is nobody but me. I just want a paycheck that will allow me to take care of my child.

In the new employee orientation there is a group of us sitting in a room watching a movie on the steel-making process. While the video covers the whole process, I only focus on the furnaces and the open hearths where I can see hot liquid steel being poured. I just know that is where I am going to end up. I can see me now sweating and trying to avoid being killed.

They shake our hands and say, “Welcome aboard.” While they make it seem like a good thing, it looks like my worst nightmares are coming true.

They begin to divide us up depending on where we are going to work. I am dropped off at a place called No. 3 Cold Strip. Maybe that means it is going to be cold in there. Maybe I won’t have to work in a hot place....

We go into the Cold Strip mill. We descend about five steps and we turn down a long corridor. The corridor is dimly lit and the walls are painted a pale yellow. As far as the eye can see, yellow covers everything. I can feel my heart start to pound. I can feel my hands start to sweat. I try to remain calm and act nonchalant, but I am sure my darting eyes betray me....

How do I begin to describe what I am seeing? How can I describe things I’ve never seen before? The only thing I know for sure is that there are people everywhere. There are people in overhead cranes. The cranes are like single-seat trolleys on the ceiling and are used to transport coils, scrap, and any other objects that need to be moved from place to place. There are coils rolling on a mill, coils stacked on the floor, and coils on the edge of coil tractors. There are people walking, talking, sweeping, mopping, and just standing still. It is like a three-ring circus. My head keeps spinning so I can catch all the acts going on simultaneously. The noise is incredible, with horns blaring and tractors beeping. I can’t even think or even hear the guide talk.

MEET

# Jennifer Jones



1. “Day One” is a kind of memoir: it is Jennifer’s personal story of experiences she has had and her interpretation of those experiences. Are memoirs fiction or non-fiction? Explain your answer.

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2. When people write a personal story, they often have to reflect upon their motivations — the reasons why they decided to do a particular thing at a particular time. What motivated Jennifer to look for work at the steel mill?

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3. Here are four vocabulary words from the passage. Can you connect each one to its definition?

a. **full-fledged**

1. **at the same time**

b. **nonchalant**

2. **completely trained; having full status**

c. **simultaneously**

3. **making a loud, brassy sound**

d. **blaring**

4. **not showing interest; indifferent**

On a separate piece of paper, write a short personal essay about the first job you ever had, or about the first day on a new job. Put in details about the sights, sounds, and smells that have stayed in your mind. Write about how you felt being there and how the job affected your life.

**Save your work for  
YOUR PORTFOLIO.**