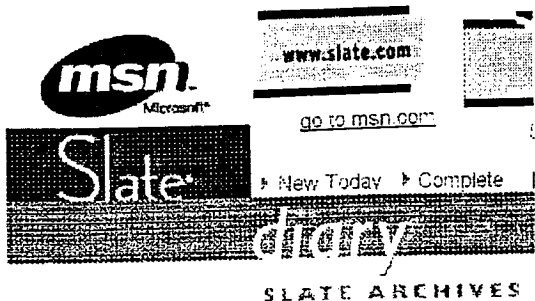


Slate is an online magazine [slate.com], and this is my contribution November 29 to December 3, 1999 to its invited "Diary"—a week's worth of How I Spent My Day, which has featured police and business executives and actors and professors.

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Posted: Monday, Nov. 29, 1999, at 10:00 a.m.
PT

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Sunday I bicycle to Grace Episcopal down the street in suburban Oak Park. The loft near the Loop I'm buying for a move to the University of Illinois has an Episcopal storefront across the street, so I guess in the spring I'll go there. Or maybe commute back to Grace, with its architecture and music and intellectual priest. I've made a few nice friends this fall at Grace. Nancy and I lament that all the available men at Grace seem to be gay. Though nice: Like other women, I love the style and thoughtfulness of gay men. I think this morning: Church is supposed to be a good place to meet husbands. Rats.

Amid the incense of First Advent a baby boy is baptized, like my grandson Connor. I have no pictures of him. I think as I watch the ancient rite of water: My son is so angry at my gender change. He hasn't spoken to me since 1995, in that meeting at the Palmer House, the day after the night in the madhouse arranged by my sister. I look at the little boy toddling up the aisle to the baptistery and my tears well. All right, all right. Put it away, Deirdre. Wait and pray.

After church, the thought forms of my leftover apple pie, hot, with maybe some ice cream. Well, I deserve it. I had made the pie for Thanksgiving dinner at Joel's house in Evanston, proud of my womanly skill (that is, Pillsbury prefab dough from the dairy case plus the package's almost idiot-proof recipe for the filling). I had waited too long to put the

completed pie in the oven and the bottom crust had sogged with the apple juice. Aunt Deirdre's tip among the women: Let the bottom crust bake a little before adding the filling.

While the pie is heating, I take my Yorkie, Jane Austen, along to the ice cream store across the parking lot. (Having a dog, I say to myself, is like having a little family.) Dogs will kill for "creamie," and Janie heels attentively as we hurry home salivating. I eat too much, spoiling my Suzanne Somers diet of the past few weeks by mixing fat (the ice cream) with carbo (the ice cream, *and* the pie) and fruit (the pie). Oh, well. If it's all I eat today. As a man I didn't worry about weight. Men think they look good no matter how they look.

While noshing at the dining-room table I watch part of a movie with a *Saturday Night Live* star as a mother in childbirth. I am fascinated and weep at the miracle, all joking aside. A week before, I had served as assistant midwife to a friend in Holland giving birth at home, and the movie brings back the amazed pleasure. Birth is so thrilling. (I remember being puzzled as a man at how women get thrilled by stories of birth. Heh, Walter Payton's running is thrilling. But a normal birth?) I cry some more, thinking about not seeing my grandchild at birth or at baptism. A weepy day. I'm very, very happy as a woman, and usually I do not cry as much as this, though I cry as Donald never did.

My mother calls from Fort Lauderdale, and we talk and laugh for a half-hour, mother-daughter style. As a son, I seldom called, and she was diffident; now we speak every Sunday. We've gotten closer, closer even than some born daughters get (a daughter-once-a-son has no aching history with a mother). My father is long dead. I think: How would he have reacted? Certainly I never would be Daddy's Little Girl. But you can't tell how people will react. I read about a choreographer in China whose soldier father, surprisingly, admired his new daughter's courage in changing from man to woman. My mother, who I thought would have great difficulty, loves her child regardless of gender.

Later in the day, I hear three men making women's points. I read an essay in draft by a philosophy colleague named Laden about "reasonableness": He says reasonableness is not

just a matter of logic but of human relations. A woman's point, I think, and true. Lying on the bed that afternoon, I read Robert Nozick's essay "Happiness" in his book *The Examined Life*, in which he says that happiness has less to do with games and acquisitions and more to do with the shape of one's life. Another woman's point. And hurrying in the dark down the Eisenhower Expressway to meet Rikki in her townhouse on the Chicago River, I listen to Garrison Keilor mocking the "queen mothers" of Lake Wobegone. They can shame their families into gathering up there for Thanksgiving. Look: My family loves me. The shape of my life is my human relations. What's yours?

What's mine?

Posted: Tuesday, Nov. 30, 1999, at 10:00 a.m. PT

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Talk, talk, talk. I drove up to Beloit College on the Illinois/Wisconsin border, a two-hour drive with Janie, my Yorkie, in her little observation basket in the front seat, and spent the day chatting, discussing, lecturing. Odd that a stammerer earns her living with talk. I start the little talk to the assembled econ majors on "Economics as a Life" with: "When I was 11, I would fall asleep praying for two things. First, that the next day I'd wake up and not stutter. I'd just talk like other people. And that I'd wake up and be a girl. At age 53 I finally got half my prayer! As an Episcopalian, I guess that's a good percentage for the efficacy of prayer!" It's better to get these two Big Facts acknowledged early so the kids don't get diverted into giggling to each other about them.

I say that economic principles work in their lives. You should buy a coat when its cost divided by the number of wearings is lower than what you'd pay for each wearing, that sort of thing. (I confessed, though, that I'd just bought an elegant Irish cape suitable for ... the opera; well, there are other "wearings," or the opera wearing is worth \$50 a throw; or something: Prudence doesn't explain everything, a theme that day in all my talks.) You should take the trip to

Indiana to see your brother when the reasons to do so add up: to give him his Christmas present of that Edward Hopper reproduction from the Art Institute, to see if his room is OK, to use the nice day after Thanksgiving, to see cousin Phil and wife Reva in southwestern Michigan on the way back. Technically, add up demand curves for jointly supplied goods vertically. Uh ... OK, if you say so. Common sense, a little refined, which is what economics should always be.

The talk was made up on the spot, as a lot of my talks are. A minute before standing and delivering, I ask my host what to talk about. I stutter less if I'm not reading something, and anyway a certain crazy energy comes from not knowing what's going to come out of your mouth in the next 30 seconds. You sketch the talking points in your head and then read them off and ... talk, talk, talk. It seems to go all right.

Afterward, the professors of economics stay, one of them the father of a young friend back in Iowa City, himself married to a grad student in economics, friends from church. We talk in the winter afternoon's sunlight about economics--its future, its liabilities, how we love it and hate it. It's the kind of talk professors need to do frequently and often don't let themselves do with enough discipline and focus to arrive at much. Pure shop talk, like truckers discussing the best routes or accountants the latest IRS ruling.

Then I am taken by my host, Emily, a young economist at Beloit (we joke about being the only two postmodern free-market feminists on the planet) over to Women's Studies and talk about my gender change. The professor in charge gives me the sweetest, most intelligent introduction I've ever gotten--a little long, but nice to listen to, very nice. As a woman I am more embarrassed than I was as a man by fulsome praise. But, heh, I can take it.

The gender talk goes well, I think, I hope. I am afraid in academic situations of attacks from a certain school of second-wave separatist feminists, who for what I regard as goofy reasons long ago decided they don't like gender-crossers--men "invading" women's territory. When one woman sitting by the door gets up and goes out, I am alarmed. But she comes back in. It's so hard to judge audiences. How well is it

going? Lecturing is like what I hear about theatrical performances, for example from my ex-actress mother, who speaks of holding the audience in one's hand. Yeah. One would wish.

The evening talk on "Bourgeois Virtue" is still harder, because the audience is miscellaneous, from demonstrably bored sophomores who attend only because required to do so by their teachers to bright young college professors to perky senior couples who attend every public speech at the college but are not themselves academically oriented. I sweat, metaphorically (ladies "glow"). But afterwards people praise me in that fulsome way again. Was it that good? I don't think so. One would wish.

I sleep in the guest house, late on a cold, starry night, Janie cuddled in her carry case.

Posted: Wednesday, Dec. 1, 1999, at 10:00 a.m. PT

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I rise at 5 a.m., dressing hurriedly in the Beloit guest house (I time it: 25 minutes from rising to leaving; my black cotton knit from Land's End is so easy; I make up quickly, no foundation or powder these days, I reflect, since the hormones have taken effect). Janie the dog and I drive back to Chicago through the tangle of commuting traffic. It takes more than three hours, worrying all the time about the morning's *Slate* deadline: 9:30 Midwest time. I try to avoid the tangle by taking local streets but as usual get lost and end up taking longer, arriving with relief finally at my office at the University of Illinois to write the column. Just in time, like a Japanese auto factory. Professors are not deadline people.

This day I am to be looked over by the Department of Economics. I resigned from the University of Iowa last week, for a rising pile of reasons: Chiefly, the administration at Iowa was neglecting me (professors always feel neglected, because their jobs don't trigger a hierarchy of praise, and most university administrators are idiotically stingy with praise anyway). The administration has known for six months that I was being courted by UIC and its new leaders (the amazing Stanley Fish is my new dean at UIC, for example) but has not lifted a finger, I reflect bitterly, to keep their big-deal professor.

Anyway, I need to get into my pension fund to pay for the new loft I am buying downtown, and you can't do that without quitting.

It's over, as we say. I get a pain at heart. I've been at the university in the sweet state of Iowa for 19 years, three as Deirdre, 16 as Donald, the father of two Iowans. I loved the place, I think, as I climb the stairs to the Econ. Dept. Yet to love is to lose, eventually. Though that's no reason not to love. Now I love Chicago, my city, hog-butcher, stacker of wheat, freight-handler for the nation.

A group of people from Economics take me to lunch to discuss my future. They are thinking: Is she still an economist? After all, she does English Department stuff and Philosophy Department stuff and Lord knows what other weird stuff. Not our stuff, they think. I try to persuade them that I really am an economist. I'm good at that persuasion, trained at talking the talk for so long. I drop names of the Many Famous Economists I Have Known. But I try gently to get my new colleagues to grasp that I don't want to be "just" an economist. I can't use the word "just," since it would be insulting, as though the only respectable career for an academic were to wander further and further from her field of training, making paths back to the home base only occasionally. Dabbling in Latin and Greek (the Department of Classics might honor me at UIC with an adjunct position, and I am thrilled). Criticizing economics from the English Department. Changing gender. Jesus, what is she?

The seminar after lunch is thronged with faculty and graduate students. I need to show that I'm still an economist and economic historian, but I've not had time to prepare the lecture. Oy. I substitute classroom energy for pre-class preparation, my usual trick. This time it works, and I deliver a display of diagrams and math and quick reasoning that says, "I am an economist." Early on I worry about the somber older men who do not like Professors Who Perform. One of them leaves, but he had courteously said he would have to, and I make it all right to the end and the good discussion. I am struck as I always am by how productive of new ideas this strange academic chatter can be. A "lecture" sounds to outsiders like a transfer of

data from one mind to another. No. When done well it is a conversation, an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. Lord, I love it, I say to myself as the audience claps with evident appreciation. There's the praise.

I rush to the end of a lecture by Alasdair MacIntyre, an Irish-American philosopher I admire and know slightly. I can say "Alasdair" as though he was a friend. Stupid, of course. Then I go with Janie in her bag to the reception at the Newman House, then a dinner with a colleague in economics and a visiting fireman-friend, then to Oak Park, and so to bed.

Posted: Thursday, Dec. 2, 1999, at 10:00 a.m. PT

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Does God want me to move to Chicago? I suppose she does, but wants me to do so as an act of free will, in full awareness of what it costs. I go to the rental office of Prairie Court, my temporary apartment building in Oak Park, and complain about the 14 days of rent I will pay after I've left the apartment Dec. 16. The woman at the rental office, and the woman at AMLI Corporate Homes, which charges \$2,000 for the place, won't budge. Tough luck, dear. Heat can't be turned off in the unusually warm autumn? AMLI's telephone contract is extortionate? Tough luck, say the women. Tough, tough, the Chicago way. I then go to the Irish Shop in Oak Park to exchange a cape I had just bought, worn once, finding it to be not as warm as I had expected considering the big price. The Irish woman who owns the store won't budge. No solidarity for Deirdre just because of her Irish name. Where's your tag? Go home and find it. I go home and rummage through the trash baskets: no tag. The Irish woman is adamant. No tickee, no laundry.

So? This (says God to me, like a mother instructing a daughter in the realities of life): Notice, dear, that neither could have happened in Iowa City. I remember when I moved from Hyde Park in Chicago to Iowa City in Iowa long ago, the feeling of taking off tight shoes, of not having to worry about keys and locks, of coming to expect store owners and landlords and

businesspeople to act always like gentlemen. So? This (she says): Notice, dear, that all your minor tormentors here (and calm down--these are not the Big Stuff) are women. That was no lady, that was my landlord.

I drive to work at UIC close to downtown and go to a seminar given by a visiting fireman, as we say, a younger man I have known a long time: I tried to hire him at Iowa once, for example. His seminar is ill-attended but well-delivered and we have a good conversation about British tariffs and French wine from Louis XIV to 1900. Huh? Such a tiny topic? It's well-crafted scholarship: The young professor answers and re-answers the master question--So what?--in every paragraph. His argument shows that Britain was not a saint of free trade in the 19th century (see the World Trade Organization riots in Seattle); that British governments got their income from an alliance with big brewers and distillers (see the corporate politics of 1999); that French wine was what British people drank before the alliance developed, around 1700 (see the negotiations now in the Common Market over chocolate and, yes, wine).

So? An intellectual life can take place for Deirdre at UIC: better, maybe, than Iowa?

Afterward, I read the mix of hate mail and worthy praise in *Slate's* "Fray." The hate mail is illiterate; the praise is not. The haters run to obscenities with lots of incompetent grammar or to fundamentalist sermons couched in clichés. I wonder if this news is good: People who have been to college and paid attention--or people who have educated themselves by reading--are more tolerant. But that's too easy, as the history of our waning century suggests: The intellectuals supported communism; a startlingly high percentage of high SS officers in Nazi Germany had advanced degrees in the humanities.

So? It's easier to change gender in a job that has a lot of educated people: Congratulations, Deirdre, for choosing to be a professor rather than a farm-equipment mechanic.

That evening I go out to eat with a male law professor from the University of Chicago and a female English professor from UIC in one of the numerous Italian places near the university that serve its rapidly yuppifying neighborhood. We

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talk about our shared past at Harvard in the 1960s and the movements. The English professor had been a left activist; I, an observer, gradually moving from left to right as I studied economics.

So, so? Nu?

Yeah, God wants me to move to Chicago. But she wants me to know that not all the world agrees with me, not all the world loves me, not all the world cares. A hard lesson for anyone, and harder for a woman, especially a novice. Grow up, Deirdre. Oh, it's hard, isn't it, it's so bloody hard? To go on loving and yet know that love is not always for you.

Posted: Friday, Dec. 3, 1999. at 10:30 a.m. PT

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At 10 in the morning, I work through the tangle of broken elevators down to the ninth floor and the History Department, to speak to its chairman, an amiable British man, long American. We discuss my potential appointment in the department, and then our shared enthusiasms for Chicago and for cricket. The only sporting interest to survive my gender change is the sweet British game, white on green, the click of bat on ball. The chairman notes that it's a Man's Game--the dangerous, heavy ball hurled at speed, hit to fielders standing within yards--and I agree, though with a different perspective. I look at it from the outside, as something men do.

Then at 11, I go further down the building to Stanley Fish's office on the fourth floor to negotiate the offer. Do professors spend all their time rushing about Doing Business? Do they teach and read and think? Yet the business between Stanley and me gets done in a conversation of ideas. We discuss the theory of academic politics and then Milton (John, not Friedman): "of man's first disobedience & all our woe." We read a scene in "Paradise Regained" in which Satan tries to trick Jesus. We slip between thinking and doing for two hours, and end with a contract. It's the way of the bourgeoisie, mixing work and pleasure, calculation and poetry: Walk with me, talk with me; what news on the Rialto? We conclude that I am to be a multi-disciplinary professor of the "human sciences," a phrase we both like. French

in origin, it means the study of who we are, and covers the humanities and social sciences, from bourse to poetry reading. History. Economics. English. Others.

I stop at the Classics Department's Christmas party on the 12th floor. The hideous brutalist building, University Hall, houses most of my interests, from the College of Business Administration to the Department of Classics. When the elevators are working, the building is ideal for intellectual life among the disciplines. I hate academic departments (I say to people in departments all day long, trying to persuade them): The departments break up teaching and thinking, typically to service a dull-normal science which kills intellectual progress. The chairman of classics is welcoming. I am a classics groupie, following the Latinist Band. In German they call classics *Altertumswissenschaft*, literally, "ancient's science," or "the study of the ancient world." One of those human sciences. I determine to take more Greek next spring. Everyone needs more Greek. To get more human.

I then drive up to Evanston, arriving late to a seminar in economic history. Janie, my dog, wanders around the room looking for crumbs and head-scratching, and the humans try to help the man sharpen his argument about the history of self-employment in the United States this century: a decline; shockingly lower rates for blacks; no change in the black/white ratio; and so forth. It's good economics--not an existence theorem or t-statistic in sight, just getting the data and asking intelligent questions about who we are, economically speaking. Part of those human sciences.

I drive over to a pizza place in Evanston and eat an entire "small" stuffed pizza, Chicago-style. I've not eaten all day: The three remaining pieces of turkey bacon early that morning; for lunch a Tootsie Roll (less fat than most; but the sugar?). This is not a good way to diet, dear, arriving famished. And a pint of Guinness. "Guinness Is Good for You," the British ads used to claim, so I think of it as food. 'Tis, thinks the economic historian as she blows her diet to pieces: One-third of the medieval grain crop went into beer. Monty Python and the drunken peasants.

I stop at Great Expectations bookstore in Evanston. Jay is not there, but the former owner, Truman, is, and tells stories as I pretend to look at the books. I buy a book on the attitudes of single women who do not spend their evening weeping alone over a TV dinner. Instruction, and my own life.

Janie and I drive to Lakeview, the trendy neighborhood 30 blocks north of the Loop, to attend a two-hour meeting about legislation to keep gender-crossers from being murdered. I've met some of the dozen people at the few other "trans" meetings I've been to this fall. It's good to do, my Christian duty. But it's not my life: My life is among women, and men; my life is among the disciplines, and within them; my life is alone, and with friends; my life is with Janie, and with humans; in Chicago, and in Europe.

Fifty-seven years old. Have I gotten it right? Keep working on it, dear. Less pizza. More Greek.

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