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A Personal Note

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A PERSONAL NOTE[®]

BY VICKI SMITH

Page 6—OBITER DICTA—Monday, October 20, 1980

It's just after 9 a.m. and Parkdale is already humming. The chairs in front of the Queen St. West. window hold a row of waiting clients of varied ages and ethnic origin. Students in jeans clomp downstairs to show them into nearby interview booths. Coffee is offered (and refused if the clients are not newcomers to Parkdale!) People jog across the room to grab ringing phones. A meeting comes to order in the small library. The staccatto of typewriters punctuates the din. An ordinary morning.

Coffee, mail, and messages in hand, I head upstairs, nodding on my way to the calm receptionist who, (with everlasting good humour), withstands the continually ringing phones and lineup of clients. The second floor holds open-plan student offices of carrels, exploding bulletin boards, and stacks of files. "Hi gang." "Mornings!" rise from every desk. The agenda for today (so efficiently prepared last night) sits resolutely in front of me: "morning intake, contact caseworker, write to J's lawyer, get adoption consent forms signed, speak to women's group re: FLRA, get trial brief okayed, prepare client for tomorrow, call Dr. re: SARB appeal, start Mrs. P's support affidavit."

I haven't even read my phone messages when the P.A. announces I have a new client. (Who could possibly have a problem this early in the morning?) She is a young mother and she looks afraid. I am reminded that in spite of its shabbiness and deliberate lack of presence, the first visit to Parkdale is intimidating for many. Or perhaps it isn't Parkdale, perhaps it's the husband or landlord at home who would be enraged if he knew. We find a spot to talk that affords some privacy. Three-quarters of an hour later we are becoming friends. She trusts me and that's a start. I open a new file and give her a list of questions to answer and documents to bring next time.

A forgotten family group meeting, unexpected clients wasting time "on hold" with several government agencies—by noon my agenda is shot to hell. Again.

I refuse to augment the Kentucky Fried order (no, Parkdale eating establishments do not endanger one's budget) and head up the street to the Parkdale library. A dynamic, articulate group of single mothers wants to know all about the FLRA. I can't answer all their questions. (Hey, aren't poor people, well you know, sort of dull?)

Afterwards I am writing letters, waiting for my client who is half an hour late. I try not to be angry. I am learning what it means to be poor—not student loan, fashionably poor but just poor; that defeatism, hopelessness can become irresponsibility. But I worked all weekend and the hearing is tomorrow—he's got to show! Finally he arrives and we go over what will happen and what might happen tomorrow in court. I prepare him for the worst. It's only fair. The best is easy to take. Well, we both know we're ready.

Upstairs I gather up my coat and notice my crumpled agenda in the corner of my desk. I smile as I cross out "Monday" and write "Tuesday" at the top. The height of organization

An ordinary day.