

Praise for *Finding Livelihood*

“Nordenson describes wrestling with work as with a large force that wants to have its way with you, even as you want to have your way with it. This wrestling, sinewy and particular as its wrestler, enlarges us as we read our way into her life with its incisive insights and explorations. Can one wrestle meditatively? This author has learned the art and we are the benefactors.”

—Luci Shaw, writer in residence, Regent College; author,
Adventure of Ascent: Field Notes from a Lifelong Journey and *Scape: Poems*



“Written with a rare wit and elegance, *Finding Livelihood* offers a profound, often surprising reflection on the necessity of earning our daily bread. This fine new collection by Nancy Nordenson, which gathers under one cover such unlikely bedfellows as venipuncture, a flute-playing cabbie, and the prudent way to unpack Russian icons, includes some of the best essays I’ve read in years.”

—Paula Huston, author of *A Land Without Sin* and *The Holy Way*



“This is an absolutely timely book, and an absolutely beautiful one too. Ms. Nordenson examines what it means to work, and does so in a lyrical, practical, moving, and spirit-filled way. In giving us her personal stories and universal observations, we are given as well the means by which, in these difficult days, to make sense of what it means *to work*. I like this book a lot for its voice and vision, and especially for its hope.”

—Bret Lott, author of *Letters and Life: On Being a Writer*,
On Being a Christian and *Jewel*



“In this extraordinary new book, Nordenson asks what we all want to know: Can our daily workplace grind really become our daily God-blessed bread? (My personal question: Can cleaning fishing nets of rotting jellyfish really

be redeeming work?) Nancy answers an unequivocal ‘yes!’ Through layered eloquent prose and her own vast experience, she offers us real ways of finding astonishment and transcendence even in the most stultifying jobs. This book is a revelation. It goes with me to my fishing camp.”

—Leslie Leyland Fields, author *Surviving the Island of Grace* and *Forgiving Our Fathers and Mothers*; contributing editor, *Christianity Today*



“*Finding Livelihood* is a breath of radical honesty for the workaday Christian. Nancy Nordenson does not fear the long dark night shift of the soul, but neither does she accept it. Her real world stories of people at work inspire and challenge at every turn.»

—Marcus Goodyear, Editor of *The High Calling*



“Nordenson’s prose is beautifully polished, lucid, and imaginative.”

—Gregory Wolfe, editor of *Image*, author of *Beauty Will Save The World*



“*Finding Livelihood* is deeply felt and deeply satisfying to the reader. Nordenson grapples with hard questions and avoids easy answers. Of work itself she writes: ‘You take the first steps in a state of delight, equipped with skill or talent, ready to make a difference. But the path is never straight, and it takes you through places you never envisioned.’ Nordenson’s book is practical, powerful, and rooted in biblical wisdom and the wisest thought of the Western tradition. With a light step, and gratitude, Nordenson teaches us to deal with jagged changes and ugly surprises, ‘to live and work in the flow of God’s love.’”

—Emilie Griffin, author of *The Reflective Executive* and *Souls in Full Sail*

Finding Livelihood

Finding Livelihood

A Progress of Work and Leisure

NANCY J. NORDENSON



Nancy J. Nordenson, *Finding Livelihood: A Progress of Work and Leisure*
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For my parents, Janet and John

What is a Progress but an account of a series of pitfalls
and illuminations leading to Revelation?

—Fanny Howe, *Winter Sun: Notes on A Vocation*

Is there still an area of human action, or human existence
as such, that does not have its justification by being part
of the machinery of a “five-year plan?”

—Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*

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Prologue

WHAT THIS BOOK IS AND IS NOT

The publication of Studs Terkel's *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* in the early 1970s gave the reading public eyes to see ordinary people at work. On his pages, readers met Heather Lamb, a telephone operator who confided, "It's a hard feeling when everyone's in a hurry to talk to somebody else, but not to talk to you." And Therese Carter, a housewife: "What I do is only important to five people." And Steve Dubi, a steelworker: "When your work sheet is sent in your name isn't put down, just your number." Terkel gave voices to more than 100 other men and women working at jobs ranging from airline stewardess to film critic to pharmacist.

I first dipped into *Working* when I was in high school. By then I had only worked assorted, sequential, part-time jobs, but the unknown future work world was an exciting hope. There would be college, a choice of major, a career, and off I'd go.

My first non-babysitting job came during my high school junior year. On a whim, I applied to be a hostess at a dinner

theater in the neighborhood shopping mall and was hired for several evening or weekend shifts per week. My job description included showing guests to their reserved seats, serving soft drinks during the meal and intermissions, and changing the towel dispensers in the women's restroom. During the show, I was free to watch or to sit in the lounge area with the waitstaff, who doubled as a talented singing troupe that performed before the shows and during intermissions. On the stage were celebrities on a circuit: a former Miss America, former film stars and teen idols. The first week or so, I initially watched the show but then joined the waitstaff's huddle in the lounge and listened to conversations well beyond my age. In the weeks that followed, I moved to a separate table where I did my history, trigonometry, and anatomy and physiology homework.

For the singing troupe and celebrities, this theater, situated between a grocery store and a discount retail store, or places like it, was their livelihood; my future was somewhere else. In the introduction to *Working*, Terkel wrote that although the book is about work, "...it is about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying." I had every intention, while sitting at my homework table, that my future work would be satisfying and meaningful, but the conversations at the other table suggested that life takes unexpected turns.

I started writing this book after my husband lost his job shortly after I began graduate school to pursue what I felt was a call, a dream, a passion. I had hoped to drastically cut back my full-time workweek to give it my all. There was no easy solution when he came home

with the news. We had two sons in college. A mortgage. My husband began the difficult task of looking for a job in his field, one in which he had felt a long-term call. I worked longer and harder to meet requirements of both school and job. In the prelude to and the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, his unemployment, like that of so many others, particularly men, became chronic underemployment.

This is not a book for the young girl at the table doing her homework and dreaming of the future. It is a book for when the future has arrived. It is not about choosing a career path but about making your way on a path that you have either chosen or been given.



In my adult life, I have worked part time and full time. I've taken maternity leaves for babies, brought children to daycare, negotiated longer days but shorter work weeks, negotiated a job share arrangement and an employer's first-ever telecommuting arrangement, started a sole proprietorship that failed and another that succeeded, and from time to time—although I'm not proud to admit it—paid my children to not interrupt me at the computer or during work calls unless one of them was bleeding.

While grateful, very grateful, for all the opportunities I have had to earn a living, I have also yawned in boredom or disinterest, cried in discouragement, fumed in anger, and kicked a door or two. I have been scolded by difficult bosses, felt sick to my stomach driving to work in the mornings, lain awake at night wondering if the debit and credit columns would add up, had pay freezes and work intensifications, been followed with a stopwatch for time-motion studies à la Frederick Taylor, seen merit raises abolished under the name of Deming's quality improvement, and been

grief-stricken and afraid at my husband's loss of jobs. I have heard my friends' stories of harsh and unreasonable supervisors, threatening customers and clients, long hours, irresponsible co-workers, damaging management decisions, and financial stress—even ruin. No matter how carefully you choose your work path or cultivate that path with professional development and sweat, most jobs do not equate to ongoing passion and bliss. I have stared into the question, *Is this all there is?*

Like Terkel's workers, I too, now far from my high school day-dreams about the future, am on a search for daily meaning as well as for daily bread, for living rather than dying. I want to cast my net on the side of astonishment, even though a workweek often tempts me toward torpor. I want to find God at work in me and through me. I want *livelihood*.

Livelihood: the word gathers up and bundles together the simultaneous longings for meaning, satisfaction, and provision. In the fullest sense of the word, livelihood means the way of one's life; it means the sustenance to make that way possible; it means both body and soul are fully alive thanks to what has been earned or received by grace. On one level we make our livelihood; on another level we keep our eyes open and find it.

My point of view has long been one of transcendence, and I'm hoping now that focus helps me make peace with work. I don't use transcendence to imply a pep-talk mentality or a message of conquest. Transcendence, instead, speaks to a quest. I'm on the lookout for signs of the transcendent, God-filled reality that buoys the universe and enfolds our quotidian activities in vital participation. Juxtapose this point of view with the nagging question, *Is this all there is?* and that's as good a definition of faith as I know.

This book admits that work, even good work for which we are grateful and love, has a shadow side. It is not about disengaging from unsatisfying work or finding a new job. Instead, this book is about developing openness to meaning and beholding meaning where you find it. This book is about watching for signs of transcendent reality and participating in that reality, even when work fails to satisfy. This book is about work—and it is about more than work.



Philosophers and theologians espouse theories of work: work as co-creation with God, work as call to a divinely ordained place, work as the means to leisure. These and other theories represent efforts to give work meaning or to underscore one's participation in life through work. Most people, however, carry out their work untouched by theory. We live in the physical world of desks and pens and cash registers, not in the pages of rhetorical abstractions. We are caught in work's daily grind, whether the venue is a downtown office or the neighborhood grocery store. The tasks build; chores swirl one into the other; labor falls heavy. Yet, life woos, life calls from beyond the canopy of work.

Expert voices easily address the never-ending search for job satisfaction with career advice from behind the lectern or multimedia presentation. They talk of passion and bliss, the chosen life, and aspirations achieved in 10 steps. Anything short of success by those standards and you are left to wonder, *Did I take a wrong turn?* From behind the pulpit, other voices paste spiritual lessons of victory on work's challenges, but things look different from the pews.

Even the often quoted and highly respected advice of theologian and writer Frederick Buechner is problematic: “the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” While Buechner’s words, an amplification of a sentiment first voiced by Aristotle, offer a starting point for dreams and plans when the future is in front of you and the choice is yours, who but a very small minority can find that exact intersection and from it feed a family? Or at that sweet spot sustain their position for a lifetime? Glance at history or literature and count the heroes who are swept into events not of their choosing, sometimes kicking and screaming. Consider the pivotal, but sometimes hidden, events visited upon the common man or woman who work far from deep gladness, the world’s greatest need, or both.

This book is not about the modern work ethic. It is not a celebration of work, but neither is it an exposé or complaint. This book is about wrestling with work as with any large and powerful force that wants to have its way with you while you simultaneously want to have your way with it. This book adds another view to the body of literature about work. It adds not just another way of thinking about the experience of work but another voice, a meditative and contemplative voice, a voice trying to speak into the tension between passion and need, between aspiration and limits, between the planned life and the given life.



The style of *Finding Livelihood* is lyric, which means there is a nonlinear structure, white space, metaphor, and slant-angle perspective. It is a way of exploring, not a way of explaining. Lyric structure

bypasses the default problem-solving logic of self-help books and the chronologic reportage of memoir to more closely mimic the nature of a complex issue that can't be resolved in 10 easy steps but can be seen and understood in new ways when explored from multiple directions.

Lyric style finds clues and layers them or braids them together. It uses story, collage, and juxtaposition. It invites you to join your thought process to mine. It invites you to dwell on its pages, to enter the experience of contemplation. I wrote this book looking out from where I sit at my own work desk, but this book is not about me. Let the words and images spin you off into meditations of your own experiences of work.

Come along with me, and consider the journey that is livelihood.

ACT I

Where we encounter ground level and metaphysical realities; unfair rules, job stress, and bad bosses; idealistic work experts and criteria for “good work”; hiddenness and exhaustion; and a longing for meaning and a will to be satisfied.



Jobs are not big enough for people. It's not just the assembly line worker whose job is too small for his spirit, you know?

—Nora Watson, editor in Studs Terkel's, *Working*

ONE

Travels in Sunshine City

ON THE POINT OF LAUNCH

I live under the roar of airplanes. A flight path to the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport extends in a trajectory overhead. The planes are on their final descent. A Boeing 757 or Airbus 320 flying over my backyard passes northwest to southeast in the time it takes for me to say, “I wonder where they’ve been.” Looking up, I can see a plane’s underbelly, flat and smooth like a shark’s. I can see its strand of windows and the logo on the fuselage or wing. I can see the plane’s nose, where in the cockpit the pilot lowers and steers the body of aluminum and various composites, slicing through the sky. Then it’s gone, toward the runway only minutes ahead. The engine rumble lingers, like the thunder that travels through space long after lightning flashes.

It is Holy Week.

I’m working against a deadline.

Today, I’ve moved my workstation from the desk to the porch because winter has become spring. I can do my day job

anywhere, and so I do it everywhere and always. My clients' timing becomes my own.

I am a freelance medical writer. I write on medical topics for clients, converting case notes into teaching tools, bullet points into slides, and data into prose. Breath and blood, flesh and brain, heart and bones.

I am a “penman,” an appellation earned by virtue of the word’s second definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: a person skilled in writing. More often than not, I serve according to the parameters set forth in its first definition: a person employed to use the pen on behalf of someone else.

In front of me, I see on the computer screen a PowerPoint slide with a blue background and words in white Arial font—always Arial in 24 to 32 points—anchored by square gold bullets to match the slide title’s gold Arial 40-point font. I estimate conservatively that 8,000 or more slides in this format have passed before my eyes in the last 15 years.

Lately, in lieu of working, I find myself doodling arcs: an upside down U, a mountain’s silhouette, a long drawn-out frown, the arch of a brow, a standard bell-shaped curve. How steep shall I make the slope upward, how long the plateau forward, how gradual the descent? How shall I label the horizontal and the vertical axes? The arcs could signify a plane’s flight, or maybe the shape of one’s life with a single ascent toward living and living, perhaps with an apex, followed by one descent toward death, but neither of these explanations is on my mind as I move my pen left to right across the page. An X marks the point of launch.

My tool is wearing down with miles left to go. A number of the keys on this computer keyboard are nearly or completely bare:

A, B, C, E, F, L, M, N, and V. The black lettering has rubbed off by typing certain words so many times—my name with its five Ns, virus, cancer, liver, bone, blood, malignant, mL, hepatitis C—and the keyboard shortcuts for copy and paste, save and find. I punch the keys in a rush and the clicks send messages zigzagging around the labyrinth of wiring inside this rectangular box I cannot work—cannot live—without. When I look at the keys, disconnecting my actions from habit and touch to concentration on sight alone, my fingers slow and stumble, looking for markers. With so many letters rubbed off, I work best on autopilot. My fingers move where they've known to move before. I've heard it said that people do what they do because they can't think of alternatives, but viable alternatives are hard to come by. Winds of recession or depression have been blowing through these streets, and no mark of Passover exemption has been made on my doorpost.

A couple of months earlier, my husband had arrived home from work, hours late, and stood in the doorway of our kitchen, dark but for a dim light over the sink. He told me his job was gone. No warning. Only the day before, his boss had told him, You're doing great, no worries. Yet there he stood, holding his box of personal belongings from his desk: a framed picture of me, another of our sons, a mug, his calendar.

It is Holy Week. These days, more than any others, ask that the ordinary yield to the extraordinary, but how is it possible?

I'm working against a deadline.

In the visual field dancing along and past the white plastic border of my laptop, my neighbor Bob, a retired electrician, is working in his yard. He kneels on the ground from which hosta will emerge in a few weeks alongside his house. He is clearing out

the clutter that the melted snow revealed. He is tan and fit in his jeans and gray T-shirt. Handful by handful he removes the dead leaves and debris and places it all in a plastic bag. The bag's top ripples in the breeze. Bob, in his eighth decade, easily rises and kneels again before a spirea bush, repeating the cleansing ritual.

Other visual fields call. Like a choir with a missing member or a cityscape absent a tower, the neighborhood's arboreal skyline from this vantage point at my computer has a space where an oak tree recently stood. The mighty oak dated back to when this city land had been farmland. My husband and I saw what happened, sitting outside on a sunny and still day. Witnessing doesn't prove causality, but how could we not have a strong suspicion? Whether an intuitive sense or the rumble of subliminal thunder prompted us, we turned our heads at the right second. The puff, the swoosh, the bursting current lasted about a second, the time it takes to blow out a candle. If we had been distracted by so much as a mosquito on the arm or a ball rolling into the yard or tipping back our cups for the last drop of coffee, we would have missed it. A wind—was it wind?—pierced the canopy of the old tree, back to front.

I once heard a man on television say that we were on the verge of discovering parallel realities right where we live. A locomotive could be passing through us here and now, he had said. I was a young girl then and his words stopped me in my tracks. I tried to imagine standing against the rush of an invisible train. *What's really going on here?* That question stays with me.

The tree's limbs parted like the Red Sea, and a hole opened up big enough for a car to drive through, the leaves shivering on the fringe. Then it was over. The limbs hurried back in place, and

the afternoon went on, sunny and still. The oak stood in its hardwood glory throughout that summer. In fall, its leaves changed color on schedule, then dropped as expected at the threshold of winter. By the next spring, the tree was dead. Its limbs, dark and empty, silhouetted against the sky. Later that summer a truck arrived, and men hung on belts from branches, chain sawing it down piece by piece.

In front of me is the work, and side-by-side are questions that summon like a pair of unseen eyes you sense are looking your way. I want work to be smooth sailing, and it sometimes is, but I learn little from those times I whistle or dance in my office. My mind whirls with questions asked and answered only when I'm pushing against something that's pushing back. A hidden reality rises up and says, *Deal with me*, like something encountered only because I tripped over it in the dark.

I want to know, What meaning can be claimed on the shadow side of work where rules of the game don't feel fair? In what other economy can work gain purchase? For what other arcs of progress is work a point of launch? *What's really going on here?*

Bob's attention will soon turn to his roses. The two trellises of violet clematis. The hyacinth and lilacs. The peonies. When the maple tree launches its whirlybird seeds later this season, he will pluck them up one by one, again on his knees. Sometimes he sits on a lawn chair and reaches to suck them up with a vacuum. The whirlybirds that cross our yard line get no such special treatment but take their chances with the breeze, the thatch, and the lawn mower. Bob looks across at our lawn and sees bare spots, the residual effects of a dog and two boys. "Don't worry," he once told my husband, "the kids are more important." He has no view here

of flowering trellises, and our uncultivated ground offers no hope of return on the tomatoes and cucumbers he has grown and left at our back door for years.

Here in this neighborhood, in this area under the curve, in this city just beyond the reach of the Great Plains, in this mysterious metaphysical God-filled universe is where I live and work. Here, I find my livelihood, even while I am making it.



Engines thrust forward and in a matter of seconds, I lose my bearings. Whenever I'm on board a plane, seated and taking off, the wide-angle, top-down view of where I live never fails to disorient me, so at odds it is with the view up close and from below. The urge to find familiar markers comes fresh with every flight: the river, the mall, the stadium, the helicopter pad on the hospital where I used to work, a stretch of highway with its Celtic knot exchange, the chain of lakes. Like a game, look fast. The plane, while facilitator of the view, is also my opponent. It banks before my eyes can travel far enough or focus. I may or may not find my way before the rate of ascent overtakes my ability to see the familiar with clarity. If I were to keep ascending while the world kept turning, I'd see the curve of the horizon with cities, towns, and neighborhoods stretching from Pacific to Atlantic and back again.

Holy Week edges toward Good Friday, and at the grocery store down the street, the food was heaped in glorious display: asparagus, broccoli, celery, Red Delicious and Granny Smith apples, potatoes for scalloping and mashing, hams, and turkeys. My grocery list stated needs, but how I long for something more than necessity to seduce me. Hot cross buns and marshmallow chicks;

white lilies and fuchsia azaleas; cinnamon and cloves. Someone has placed mounds of green, yellow, and blue plastic grass along the inside of the deli counter with two pastel-dyed eggs in every third mound, perhaps the woman who sliced the smoked turkey for me, thin for sandwiches.

At the bank, the teller joked with the man at her window as she cashed his check. She fake-ordered him, “Now get out” when their transaction concluded. This teller knows her customers by name. Every month she sends thank-you letters to 40 military men and women serving overseas, different people each month, none of whom she knows. She tells me about this when I come to make a deposit or withdrawal. Once, she slid a letter across the counter for me to read. A soldier to whom she had written took the time to write her, and she was all smiles. Today, she wore new glasses with purple frames. At my turn, she deposited my paycheck, and we tried to find something funny about it all going back out in taxes in a few days.

Outside, a man who works in the bank stood near the door and smoked a cigarette in the sunshine. He nodded as I walked past. I looked through the window of the adjacent coffee shop. A barista steamed milk behind the counter, and a small crowd of people sat at tables with their laptops open. Just beyond the intersection, a mason wearing all white—cap, T-shirt, and painter’s pants—repaired a collapsed retaining wall along the sidewalk. He had already swept the original crumbled stone to the side. Bending over, he spread wet cement then smoothed it. Spread, then smoothed.

“Sunshine City” was the name—as I remember it—that my seventh-grade social studies teacher gave to a special two-week unit. When she called it a game, we thought it would be fun. She was fun.

Between classes, Mrs. D would stand at the intersection of the two perpendicular hallways just before the stairwell and joke with students as they passed, her hair a bouffant of blond teased curls. Her classroom had pale green walls with a bank of windows to our left as we were seated at wood desks. Mrs. D's desk and blackboard were at the front. My good friend Susan and I sat next to each other, one row back from the front and a couple rows over from the window.

Earlier there had been the lesson on opposable thumbs. Tape your thumbs tight against your hands and find out how hard it is to grab the paper Mrs. D hands to you, the paper she hovers high above your head, or to unwrap your sandwich at lunch. Go through an hour or a day blindfolded and appreciate the ability to see. The lessons escalated. "Help yourself," said Mrs. D as she presented platters of dried grasshoppers, chocolate-covered bees and ants, and canned whale and bear. The degree to which we hesitated to chew a crunchy insect or longed for a grilled cheese sandwich while doing so was the degree to which we were bound to our culture, a somatic learning of "ethnocentric." With white chalk Mrs. D wrote the word on the blackboard. One class period she did the now-famous experiment designed by Jane Elliott: treat the blue-eyed students well and the brown-eyed students badly, then watch what happens.

In Sunshine City, we grew up fast. We were not seventh-graders but adults with our own lots in life. On our first day as residents in Sunshine City, we each drew a card from a bowl. The card assigned our name, age, race, occupation, and salary. The socio-economic demographics defined where we lived, and we moved to reassigned desks, our new neighborhoods. Susan drew her card,

and it was a ticket to move to the right toward the wall; I drew mine and stayed on the left by the window, the track's wrong side.

Like most games, the goal of Sunshine City was to accrue points. Our individual point total determined our grade, which would carry significant weight for the quarter. In this honors class, we cared about grades. Points could be gained or lost in several ways. The way I remember it is that each identification card came with a predetermined, baseline set of points based on the given character's demographic characteristics. A white man came with more points than a white woman, who came with more points than a black man or a black woman. A doctor came with more points than did a mechanic.

Susan became a white businessman who owned the buildings in which lived most of Sunshine City's citizens who were seated with me on the left side of the room. I became a black man with a blue-collar job. From Susan's first card, she had enough points to get an A for the entire unit. When she moved to the right side of the room, she took a paperback book out of her bag and started reading. My card's baseline points suggested I was failing from the start, as were others in my neighborhood. A chorus of murmurs rustled from the room's left side, "unfair, unfair," as we calculated our grades.

A bowl of event cards circled daily, like a wheel on which people's lives continually turn, dealing each of us another round of weal or woe: laid off, lose 100 points; injured in car accident, lose 500 points; evicted from apartment, lose 200 points; promoted at work, gain 300 points; inherit money, gain 1,000 points. We could actively earn points by reading suggested books and writing book reports. Within the game's rules of play, we were free to do whatever we wanted for those two weeks.

Susan and I drew our daily cards from separate bowls, the contents of which were dictated by the algorithm set up by the initial card draw. Her cards were formalities and never budged her from setting the grade curve. While she alternated between reading mysteries and embroidering floral embellishment on a satin blouse, I read books from the reading list and wrote reports, during class time and also after school. Some days through a card draw, I lost whatever points I had earned by the report I just turned in. Once, Susan drew a card that raised my rent.

Those of us on the left side of the room voiced our righteous indignation. Surely Mrs. D would not grade us based on this game. Of course, we'd all played monopoly and clapped our hands to gain a house, traded up for hotels, and grabbed our money with each passing of Go, but this game taught hope and frustration beyond our years. Its outcome felt real and lasting. How do you work your way forward in a world when what you do and what is done to you all count the same on a score card?

"Of course you'll be graded," said Mrs. D with her proud and defiant curls. "Let your parents call."

Grown up and away from Sunshine City, in my neighborhood's morning sunshine, I walked back from the grocery store and bank and passed the homes of a preschool teacher, a daycare provider, a transportation specialist, more than one stay-at-home parent, an air traffic controller, a minister, a warehouse worker, a butcher, a baker, and a candlestick maker. Today and the next and the next, they open their doors and step outside. They back their cars out of driveways or hop on buses. The mail carrier walks among them sliding bills into mailboxes, relentlessly through snow and rain and heat. From the church tower, bells named for the four Gospel writers ring, marking the time.

Author's Note

I have changed the names and identifying characteristics of some people, projects, and institutions.

About the Author

Nancy J. Nordenson is a nationally recognized author and essayist. Her writing has appeared in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, *Indiana Review*, *Comment*, *Under the Sun*, *Relief*, and in other publications and anthologies, including *The Spirit of Food: 34 Writers on Feasting and Fasting Toward God* (Cascade), *Becoming: What Makes a Woman* (University of Nebraska Gender Studies), and *Not Alone: A Literary and Spiritual Companion for those Confronted with Infertility and Miscarriage* (Kalos Press). Her work has also earned multiple “notable” recognitions in the *Best American Essays* and *Best Spiritual Writing* anthologies, and Pushcart Prize nominations. Her first book, *Just Think: Nourish Your Mind to Feed Your Soul* was published by Baker Books.

By day, Nancy earns her living as a freelance medical writer and has written for a variety of venues, including continuing medical education programs and national and international medical symposia. She is also an accredited medical technologist and has worked as a laboratory consultant and educator. Nancy graduated from North Park University in Chicago with a BA in biology and chemistry and earned an MFA in creative writing from Seattle

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