

My name is Abigail Gergen and this fall I plan on attending Carroll University; however, there was a point in time when I considered joining a trade and becoming part of the union. I have many family members who are part of various unions and I also know a few people from my graduating class who decided to take that path and go into the workforce out of high school. I know unions are an important part of our society but they are not presented as an option as much as they should be to newer generations who are looking to explore their future careers.

Growing up, I was lucky enough to have my dad in the construction union and both my grandpa and uncle in the painters union. They all chose these careers right out of high school knowing it would provide a good future for them and their families without needing a four-year degree. The union supplied my family with stable jobs, healthcare, and more. We also have many family friends that work in the trades, including farmers, mechanics, plumbers, electricians, and welders. They are very passionate about their jobs and are more than happy to teach others about their careers. This is very inspiring to me, and my siblings, who have had the chance to learn about what it means to put hard work into your job. I have learned about many options that are available to me, but there are others who do not have the same access to those options.

Though some people are very willing to go into the workforce and begin working relatively quickly after high school, I do not believe that schools talk about the unions as an option as much as they should. Often we talk about what we should do to prepare ourselves for college, such as how to write college applications and essays, how to find a roommate, etc. Hardly are we shown how to find apprenticeships and different job opportunities that do not require expensive extra schooling. Of course, kids who take specific classes, such as autos, metals, woods, or other trade-specific classes may be guided on those matters, but students who do not miss out on those opportunities to gain more knowledge of what they may be able to do

after they graduate with their high school diploma. In my uncle's graduating class, only two students went into the trades after graduating high school. That is shocking because of how large and important the union is to workers. My father's construction company does go and try to help students learn about the advantages of joining a trade, and how it may be a good alternative to college. My own high school offers apprenticeship programs that help students learn a trade and begin a career right after graduation but there are many schools that do not provide as much information on how to join a union. Also, many families are ready to send their children off to colleges and universities for higher education and pressure them to make that choice because of what they believe about trades, especially if they themselves are not as educated on the topic. That means those children are less aware of other jobs and fields they could be a part of such as painting, construction, welding, and many more. Though there are other fields in the union that do require a degree like teaching and nursing, those are more well-known and many students aspire to join those workforces.

For a while I did not have a good and solid plan for what I wanted to do once I graduated and my family always reminded me that I had many options and never pressured me to go to college, or said that I had a direct path I needed to follow. I was definitely open to joining the trades like many of my family members. Ultimately, as for now, I have decided that college was part of my journey but my plans may change at any time as many people's do. I live with three of my younger brothers, and I believe that one day at least one of them would be more than happy to join a trade and become part of the union. Hopefully, by then, there is more awareness of roles in that field for children, especially young girls who may not understand the opportunities that are available to them through the union. As for myself, I am fairly confident that college is the

right choice for me and as I am entering college, I am keeping my options open and knowing that my journey may lead me somewhere different in my future.