

Wednesday August  
8 2007

## **Please don't hate me: I'm a CEGEP teacher in summer**

But come December, my colleagues and I will be up to our necks marking papers

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Freelance

*Wednesday, August 08, 2007*

I am one of those people you love to hate - a teacher. Why? Simply because I don't work in the summer. You'll hate me even more when I confess that I am a CEGEP teacher and, therefore, have an even longer holiday - mid-May to mid-August.

(If you didn't hate me before, you probably do now.)

How do I know you hate me? I see it in your faces when I meet you at the store or on the street and you are counting down the days until your two or three weeks off begin.

What can I say when you tell me that you can't wait, that you feel as though you are being pickled in the stifling air of your office, or that your feet swell on your way to work, then throb all day as you stand behind your counter?

Our own families hate us the most. At a recent get-together, my sister lamented that she'd have to wait until September for her holiday, since summer is her busy period. When I expressed sympathy, she snapped, "How could you possibly understand?" Since no one came to my defence, I have to assume the rest of my kin felt the same way.

The resentment makes me feel that I've done something wrong, like I've organized the school system this way in order to morph into a lazy sod. An apology is often poised at the tip of my tongue, along with the overwhelming desire to explain.

The same resentful sister said she heard from another family member (I guess I never had the nerve to tell her myself) that I teach "only" two days per week. Now, I have another confession to make: I am the worst of the worst - a part-time teacher. I organize my life this way so that I will be able to write - mea culpa!

It was my opportunity to explain the profession: "You see, we don't work only when we're in the classroom," I said. "There is all the preparation that needs to be done - at least one to two hours for every teaching hour - and then the marking. Do you think that pile of essays marks itself?"

But her eyes glazed over. She wasn't buying it. And neither do you, when I meet you on a Friday night during the semester, desperately trying to get in your groceries because your weekend is filled to the brim with chores

and places you have to drive your kids. I'm there only for milk, because I was able to do my groceries Wednesday morning.

So what am I to do? Unless you witness the job first-hand you'll never believe me. My mother's was the only sympathetic face at our gathering. Why? Because she has stayed in my home during the heart of the semester, when books and papers cover the dining room and kitchen tables (we are two CEGEP teachers in my house - double the shame), and stacks of essays and quizzes reach from the floor to the table tops, standard home decor in our house all semester long.

My mom has seen it, but the rest of you scowl, incredulity marking your faces. I ask myself if it's worthwhile, knocking myself out to persuade you? Deep inside, I know it isn't.

The truth is, I'd feel just like you, if you were I and I were you. I can't pretend that summers off isn't something to envy, especially in Canada with our short summers (although I hear they resent us in other countries too).

I can't pretend it isn't something I'd hold against you, too, if I didn't understand the hidden aspects of the profession.

I can't pretend it's not top of the list (or near the top - okay, top - be honest here!) of things I love about my job.

But I can't keep feeling guilty in summers. It's ruining the peace of mind that is essential to people like me, whose jobs entail meeting the needs of hundreds of people every year.

Next time we're talking and I say insensitive things like, "Don't you just love the tone of summer? The long, slow, lazy days that meander, one into the next, like a long bubbling brook in some peaceful pasture?" just hit me over the head.

Then remember, come December, my fellow teachers and I might not have time to breathe. Our immune systems will be low, our tempers raw, our writing hands sore, our eyes red from so much marking.

In fact, if you're seeking to take revenge, that would be the time to do it. We probably wouldn't hear you coming. And, if we did, we might not have the energy to fight you off!

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