

## **My Mother Never Worked**

- Bonnie Smith Yackel

In the essay "My Mother Never Worked," Bonnie Smith-Yackel recalls the time when she called Social Security to claim her mother's death benefits. Social Security places Smith-Yackel on hold so they can check their records on her mother, Martha Jerabek Smith. While waiting, she remembers the many things her mother did, and the compassion her mother felt towards her husband and children. When Social Security returns to the phone, they tell Smith-Yackel that she could not receive her mother's death benefits because her mother never had a wage earning job.

A tremendous amount of irony is used in this essay. The title, in itself, is full of irony; it makes readers curious about the essay's point and how the author feels about the situation. Smith-Yackel uses the essay to convey her opinion of work. Her thesis is not directly stated; however, she uses detail upon detail to prove her mother did work, just not in the eyes of the government. Although her mother never was employed at a public or private business, she worked at home relentlessly. During the day, she worked on the farm, cooked for her family, and cleaned the house; at night, she sewed rugs and clothes for her children.

Martha Smith continued to sew and plant a garden in her old age as well as when her children were grown and on their own. The passing of time was revealed in the years Smith-Yackel's siblings were born. They were also revealed in the passing of seasons for farming.

लेखिकाले आमा बितिसकेपछि आमाको नाममा सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता मागेको सम्झिन्छिन । सामाजिक भत्ता दिनुभन्दा अगाडि सामाजिक सुरक्षा संस्थाले आमाको विगतको रेकर्ड हेर्नुपर्ने बतायो । केही दिनपछि उनलाई फोन गरेर नदिने कुराको घोषणा गर्‍यो । नदिनुको कारण थियो उनकी आमाले निजी तथा सरकारी संस्थामा काम गरेकी थिइनन् । उनले वास्तवमा आफ्नो परिवारका लागि खेतमा, खाना पकाउने काम, घर सफा गर्ने काम, लत्ताकपडा सिलाउने काम गरेर जीवन बिताएकी थिइन् । बुढेसकालमा बगैचा गोड्ने काम पनि गरेकी थिइन् ।

वास्तवमा शीर्षक आफै व्यग्यात्मक छ । आमाले परिवारका लागि यत्रो धेरै काम गरिन् तर पनि राष्ट्रले देशका लागि केही योगदान नगरेको भन्ठानेर आमाको मृत्युपश्चात् लेखिकाले सामाजिक सुरक्षा भत्ता पाइनन् ।

## Question Answers

### A. Comprehension :

**Q.1.** What kind of work did Martha Smith do while her children were growing up? List some of the chores she performed.

**ANSWER:** Martha worked on the farm raising livestock, tending to crops, carried water, did laundry by hand, sewed clothing for her children, cooked, and did housework. These tasks were only a portion of the labor Martha performed over her lifetime.

**Q.2.** Why aren't Martha Smith survivors entitled to a death benefit when their mother died?

**ANSWER :** Because Martha was not a "wage earner" and didn't work for an employer, her family is not entitled by law to a death benefit through social security.

**Q.3. How does the government define work?**

**ANSWER :** The government defines work as a task done by a husband.

**B. Purpose and Audience :**

**Q.4. What point is the writer trying to make? Why do you suppose her thesis is never explicitly stated?**

**ANSWER :** The author's whole point of the essay is to make the reader feel sympathy for her mother, because of the hardships she went through working on a farm while raising eight children, which leads us to believe she is deserving of the Social Security benefit check. Another point is general; even though, women do so much work towards their home, they don't get any credit from our society.

**Q.5. This essay appeared in Ms. magazine and other publications whose audiences are sympathetic to feminist goals. Could it just as easily have appeared in a magazine whose audience was not? Explain.**

**ANSWER :** I think it could easily appear in a magazine whose audience was not sympathetic to feminist goals. I would say it would not be the most readable topic, and it is probably would have a lot of argumentations and critics after all.

**Q.6. Smith-Yackel mentions relatively little about her father in this essay. How can you account for this?**

**ANSWER :** She does this because she is disappointed to hear that her mother never worked by the person on the phone. The author tried to show as many details about her mother's work as possible; Smith Yackel gains empathy throughout the essay for her mother by repeating the numerous jobs she had to do. This is to reinforce the message that person, who spends their whole life tending to others, is told by the society, that her work is not recognized and appreciated.

**Q.7. This essay was first published in 1975. Do you think it is dated, or do you think the issues it raises are still relevant today?**

**ANSWER :** The issues it raises are still relevant today because even now most people think the same way. Women's rights are still a controversial issue today in equal partnership world.

**C. Style and Structure :**

**Q.8. Is the essay's title effective? If so, why? If not, what alternate title can you suggest?**

**ANSWER :** No, it is not effective. I would suggest "My stay-at-home mother is a hard-working person."

**Q.9. Smith-Yackel could have outlined her mother's life without framing it with the telephone conversation. Why do you think she includes this frame?**

**ANSWER :** This is done to bring a sense of reality to the text and appeal to readers. Yackel also takes full paragraph out of her mother's diary, to make an emotional connection between the reader and Yackel's mother. This also helps the readers directly relate to Yackel's mother by including dialogue that show exactly how her mother is feeling.

**Q.10. What strategies does Smith-Yackel use to indicate the passing of time in her narrative?**

**ANSWER :** Yackel includes all the dates, especially the years, so the readers can recognize or even relate to surrounding environment. Such as in 1931. Yackel's mother went through a drought, therefore people who had experiences such as this can relate to Yackel's mother's hardship.

**Q.11. This narrative piles details one on top of another almost like a list. Why does the writer include so many details?**

**ANSWER :** The author wants the readers recognize, appreciate and even relate to her mother's work as she does. And not discard years of service and hardship towards her family, as Social Security did. For the same reason she describes the most smallest of the details from her mom's diary.

**Q.12. In paragraph 20 and 21 what is accomplished by the repetition of the word still?**

**ANSWER :** All the hard times the author's mother had that period, did not stop her to take care about her family. She still continued to work hard even after all her kids grew up.

