

# To be of use

**By Marge Piercy**

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

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Marge Piercy was born in Detroit, Michigan. An extremely prolific writer, Piercy has published 17 volumes of poetry and 17 novels. She has also written plays, several volumes of nonfiction, a

memoir, and has edited the anthology *Early Ripening: American Women's Poetry Now*. Much of her work addresses themes of feminism, Marxism, and environmentalism. Piercy has also played an active role in a number of political causes, including the anti-Vietnam war movement, the women's movement, and the resistance to the war in Iraq.

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