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Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago

Christine J. Walley

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Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago Christine J. Walley
Winner of CLR James Book Prize from the Working Class Studies Association and 2nd Place for the Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing.

In 1980, Christine J. Walley's world was turned upside down when the steel mill in Southeast Chicago where her father worked abruptly closed. In the ensuing years, ninety thousand other area residents would also lose their jobs in the mills—just one example of the vast scale of deindustrialization occurring across the United States. The disruption of this event propelled Walley into a career as a cultural anthropologist, and now, in *Exit Zero*, she brings her anthropological perspective home, examining the fate of her family and that of blue-collar America at large.

Interweaving personal narratives and family photos with a nuanced assessment of the social impacts of deindustrialization, *Exit Zero* is one part memoir and one part ethnography— providing a much-needed female and familial perspective on cultures of labor and their decline. Through vivid accounts of her family's struggles and her own upward mobility, Walley reveals the social landscapes of America's industrial fallout, navigating complex tensions among class, labor, economy, and environment. Unsatisfied with the notion that her family's turmoil was inevitable in the ever-forward progress of the United States, she provides a fresh and important counternarrative that gives a new voice to the many Americans whose distress resulting from deindustrialization has too often been ignored.

This book is part of a project that also includes a documentary film and interactive website. For more information, and the chance to share your own stories, photos, and artefacts regarding the history of Southeast Chicago, please visit: http://www.exitzeroproject.org/

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