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In Katherine Paterson’s novel *Lyddie*, the main character faces several difficult decisions as she tries to take care of her family after her father disappears from their small mountain farm in Vermont. When there is not enough food, her mother and younger sisters go to an uncle’s house while Lyddie and her brother Charlie spend a winter alone on the farm trying to keep it so the family can come home one day. In the spring, Lyddie and Charlie have to leave also. He is apprenticed to a miller, and she takes a job at a local tavern. Eventually, however, she starts thinking about going south to Lowell, Massachusetts, to work in the textile mills. Some would say that this is a foolish move for Lyddie because it takes her far away from the home and family she loves. This is the right decision for her to make because by leaving she at least stands a chance of improving her situation and making enough money to buy back the farm.

One of the reasons that Lyddie has made the right decision to leave her job at Cutler’s Tavern to go to work in the mills is that it will be a better life than the one she is leading at the tavern. While working at the tavern in Chapter 3, Lyddie has to endure difficult living conditions. She “slept under the eaves in a windowless passage, which was hot and airless even in late spring. She was ordered to bed late and obliged to rise early for the mistress was determined that no paying guest in the windowed rooms across the narrow passageway should know that they shared the floor with the kitchen girl” (24). This shows that Lyddie is treated badly, without even a bed to sleep in or a room of her own. She also works very hard and has no friends or companions. The only person who notices her at all is the old cook, who becomes a sort of protector. Even though Lyddie is not far from where her brother lives, she only sees him once in the year she works at the tavern and she never sees her mother and sisters. Making the decision to go south to Massachusetts is the right one for Lyddie because her situation at the tavern is harsh and lonely. Working in the mills offers the possibility of a better life.

The other good reason for Lyddie to leave the tavern for a mill job is that it will pay her much better. Ever since her family had to give up the farm, she has had the dream of buying it back. She wants to save her pay to do that, but she is only paid \$.50 week at Cutler’s and that money is sent directly to her mother, not given to her. In Chapter 3 when Lyddie meets a factory girl who is traveling through town and stays at Cutler’s, she is amazed at how well dressed and rich the girl is. The girl tells Lyddie that because she is a good worker, she would do well in the mill and could “clear at least two dollars a week” (25) as well as being independent. This means that if Lyddie could make that much money, she will be able to save enough to one day buy back the farm and unite her family. She wants that so much that she is brave enough to leave Vermont, ride on a coach, and face a big, strange city. Lyddie does the right thing by becoming a mill girl in order to make a real living wage.



Even though there are reasons Lyddie should not have gone to Massachusetts to work in the mills, her decision to go is the right one for her. It will allow Lyddie to improve her life by living more comfortably in a boarding house, making friends with girls her own age, and learning more about the world. The job will also pay her a living wage so that she can save money to help her family. Although she isn't sure when she gets on that coach headed south to the mills, she is going toward the freedom to make her own way in the world, and this is clearly the best decision for her.

Work Cited

Paterson, Katherine. *Lyddie*. New York: Puffin Books, 1991.