

THINGS IN MOTION...

All things are in motion and nothing is at rest ... you cannot go into the same (river) twice. —Heraclitus (540?-480?) B.C.

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A LONG HOT SUMMER

IN THE SPRING of 1948, I was eager to find gainful employment. At age 16, even though I was a high school graduate, the job market had little to offer in my area except farm labor, so I jumped at the chance to work at a small foundry where my older sister was employed as bookkeeper. My previous work experience in the fields and in a grocery store on weekends was woefully inadequate preparation for entry into the world of industrial labor, but ignorance served me well and I happily reported to work on a bright and sunny spring morning, full of enthusiasm and great expectations.

The supervisor took me on a tour of the old foundry. We visited the molders, the core room, the furnaces, the sand-blasting areas and the pattern makers. My senses were swamped with the sights, sounds, and smells of the new and strange environment where some men were openly friendly, some indifferent, and some as cold and aloof as I imagined icebergs to be. My last stop was the area where castings were removed from their flasks, often still red with heat, then moved by the overhead crane to the area where trimming and sand-blasting were done. This would be my assigned work place. I quickly discovered that it was the dirtiest and most despised job in the foundry and the one where every new employee worked first. A large part of each day was spent pounding the steel flasks with a seven-pound sledge hammer to dislodge the freshly poured castings, then to hook chains to them for movement by the overhead crane; it was hot and dangerous work that left a large pile of empty steel flasks of various

sizes, steel clamps, wooden wedges and the lumps of sand that often reached three feet in height. The flasks, clamps and wedges had to be sorted for re-use and the sand had to be loaded onto a dump truck for removal. At the end of the workday, my pants were so grimy that they could almost stand without support.

On the morning of my second day on the job, I awoke to find my hands and fingers swollen and sore—a condition I hid from my sister when she inquired as to how I was doing. It was a full week later before my hands returned to normal. At the end of my third week, a new man was hired and I was moved into the core room, where smaller castings were made. After a month, I was assigned to run the mixing machine where sand was mixed with various additives to make the “mud” used for forming molds for castings. My last assignment was to be a helper for one of the molders and I felt honored to work with such skilled and highly respected employees. The degree of exactness in dimensions that these molders achieve with a mixture of primarily sand is amazing, and I felt a new respect and appreciation for their work.

After suffering the usual tricks, deceptions, and embarrassments that senior employees visit upon “fresh meat,” I finally felt accepted by my co-workers. I was eager to hone my molding skills and jumped at every chance to prepare a flask for casting on my own. Then a mosquito upset my plans.

I scratched an itching spot on my left hand and in three days my left arm was swollen to the elbow and I was taken to the company doctor by my sister. The doctor injected me with a massive dose of penicillin and prescribed a similar injection for the next seven days. With my arm in a sling, I was sent home where my parents officially notified me that my work at the foundry was over. It had been a long hot summer—but my education benefited greatly.

