

HOBBY

04-28-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

A hobby is described as an activity done for pleasure.

With that in mind, few whose income depended on their employment, can be accused of considering their job a hobby, having removed any pleasure from punching a clock back in some forgotten yesterday. The definition might also assume, those exercising a hobby should not be paid.

Is marriage a hobby? Consider.

Like a hobby, marriage is a life long commitment, and the while participants are never paid to punch a clock, there can be long moments with/without pleasure.

I am reminded of my Uncle Martin, whom I never met. He and my dad, brothers-in-law, self-taught machinists; give either a piece of metal and blueprint, they could make anything. They shared many attributes; loved their family, could be workaholics, laughed easily; they differed in that Uncle Martin, had served in WW I, was a devoted alcoholic. Unfortunately, while drunk, totally unpredictable.

Uncle Martin worked as machinist for Bucyrus-Erie, maker of steam shovels. While less than a dependable employee, his skill made him a keepable asset.

With the birth of his first son, Uncle Martin decided to make a working model of the company's large steam shovel, Daily, made a small scaled replica of one of the hundred of that monster's pieces, taking each home in his lunch pail. Assembly at home made sure his replica fitted, operated, before the next piece was begun.

In less than a year, he was able to provide an indestructible steel toy for his son, James. In summer, Martin and son, neighbor dads and sons, dug and filled holes in empty lots all over their neighborhood. Then on quiet winter nights, the ground outside frozen, Martin taught his growing family how to take the machine apart, repaint pieces, reassemble for next summer's earth movement.

Bucyrus-Erie, never shut down during the depression following 1929. But they did come to a parting with Uncle Martin because of his alcoholism.

This proved disastrous for the family. Even the most skilled found NOT HIRING signs everywhere they turned, especially when not sober.

Unable to change, still devoted to their four children, Uncle Martin drifted to other parts of America seeking work, continued drinking; finally severed family contact.

Martin's wife, Dad's sister Ruth, was unable to support her children, placed them in a Catholic Orphanage.

In 1933, my dad, was offered a employment in Erie Pa. Our family joined his Sister Ruth, other relatives who had lived there for two generations. This would be a first meeting with this branch of the family for my sister and me; and in most cases Mom's initial meeting too.

In the chaotic years surrounding the destruction of Uncle Martin's family, his hobby, that indestructible steel toy, made with love for pleasure, disappeared.

To me and my sister, Uncle Martin and his hobby remain legendary. Maker of a toy as big as a child, but could not be broken!



