



Jimmy Kerr

02-11-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach



Jimmy Kerr was the Boss for a Denver Company assigned to remove, all right, tear down obsolescent buildings, Denver, mid 20th Century. His name blares Irish ancestry. His size belies his sometimes ferocious nature. Jimmy bossed a team he chose, led by voice and example, in the era immediately after WW II, when the city of Denver was moving from renown Cow Town to a slightly more glamorous, Queen City of the Plains.

In the years following employment with Jimmy, his crew would absorb more of his character than in simply following his clear instructions.

And learn to like him even more.

Jimmy ran everything by voice.

The Company had won the bidding for demolition of the Mack Building, 16th and California. Initial work was complete when two more laborers were needed. Work had begun. The sidewalks, both streets, covered with wooden tunnels allowing safe pedestrian traffic during destruction of the 6 story building.

Needing two more roustabouts, he barged into Labor Union Hall #20, saw two applicants, shouted, "Follow me if you want to work today".

Shortest job interview, ever.

At the site, task explained; cart the building piece by piece into truck, that to dump. Work had begun. To the new men, "Do what the lead, Jesus, says. Eight hour day. You'll join the 13 already here, ask for instructions from anyone.

Otherwise, all works alone."

It was grunt labor. Smash everything into pieces, shovel into wheel barrow, push that to the chute, tip barrow vertical, dump.

A small engineering marvel, gravity used to get every part of the building into the dump truck, a shovel at a time, from the then top floor.

Work began on the roof. Tools provided, wheel barrow, sledge, broom, shovel.

No modern equipment. Not exactly tools of ignorance, by close enough for these artisans.

While the crew worked, Jim roamed, spoke to few.

On an early day on throwing the debris from a loaded barrow into the chute, its rotation continued beyond 90 degrees; all goes down the chute, the barrow catching two floor below. Jim and others are watching the mishap,. Jim's comment," Well, go get your barrow!" The 100 pounds has to be carried up two flights, to the laughter of all others; they had been stupid too.

Loaded trucks, often beyond capacity, exited the building, right turn onto California, head to city dump; too often debris falls onto the street at this sharp turn. When citizens protest, police come, obvious debris on the street beginning right of trucks exit. Jim would don his gracious Irish wit, apologize, give an ugly chastise to the laborer nearest him for overloading trucks, pledge to clean up debris on California immediately, promise to desist overloading. The Patrolman who admonished, suspected these pledges were insincere, yet left without bribe, admiring this Irishman, for he never lied, said the debris was not from his workmen.

When the Policeman left, Jim tells all,
"Don't change anything, just try to be neater. We have a schedule to meet."

Jimmy Kerr seemed to see everything, never get dirty, always ready for the task ahead, avoided vulgarity or threat. He expected, received willing work from his crew, kept a calm approach to any bump in the road. Jim rarely had a Irishman in a crew, yet without exception was treated as a father by these burly laborers.
Steal for him? Are you kidding?

Jimmy's employer would sometimes consider work involving a group of building nestled together. His employer would bid on one, at a very low price. When awarded, sometime before scheduled destruction, Jimmy would take a small crew to the cite, pillage all dwellings of valuables;
iron, brass, wood, artifacts; items where profit nestled.

Some things beyond Jim? Probably. Once had his own Company, had it taken from him. Never complained or spoke of those days.

A proud capable Irishman in a time of great change to the Post WW II face
of downtown Denver.

Jimmy made an impression on his city and its people every day.

