

First Job

07-06-2014 by Harry Zirkelbachl

It's complex.

Where I learned so many things.

When a small child I was lowered into a brick lined well, given a bucket and shovel, spent hours filling the bucket with silt; it was raised by the owner of the property, the content placed on his garden; this kept up until all muck in the well had been removed. I was given \$5.00. This went to the family.

Then 1935 to 1939 I delivered the (afternoon) Erie Daily Times Newspaper, Monday thru Saturday. Missed one day in 1939, watched Lou Gehrig and the Yankees play baseball in Cleveland, immediately after Gehrig had played his final game in Detroit.

After that I had short term work at the New stand, then the St Lawrence Hotel. A summer job for the largest Dry Goods store too. Finally, Doorman for the Colonial Theatre. These in two years at Cathedral College, Erie

To the best memory, there was no Income Tax withheld on any of these jobs.

Beginning September 1941 I attended the University of Detroit. This Jesuit school's Engineering School required all students to attend classes for four weeks, then mandatory 4 weeks work in an industry related to the Course studied. All year long. The thought, through study and modest living, earn enough to support the student, pay the next semester tuition, finish two years of study in three.

October 1941 I began working at McLouth Steel, 300 South Livernois Avenue. Withholdings for Social Security began, 1% of the gross; the wage 72 1/2 cent an hour, to begin; 77 1/2 cent after three months, plus bonus.

This bonus was based on the total tonnage of the shift, all workers sharing equally. Three months, 30 year, all hourly pay identical.

The mill produced galvanized steel, sheet and roll-ribbon. Initially, the customer was the auto industry. This would slowly translate to the defense industry.

I was the only teenager on our shift. The next in age, in their mid thirties. These sturdy, acid-stained, bib-overalled, family men, became my teacher in everything done and said, for a year. I could never have sought more qualified tutors.

The initial shift began in the afternoon, ended at midnight. Young and fit, the tour was not physically punishing. However, I had never worked in a “noise” factory.

On the five mile bus ride home, the din in my mind seemed permanent. A nights sleep restored mental quiet, and though the Mills noise never lessened, I would not be bothered as on that initial shift. Lesson, the mind is adaptable; once outside the plant, noise was left behind.

Excepting a short interval in the depression, my dad had been the sole bread winner. On pay day, he gave the check to Mom; she handled all spending. If dad wanted a fishing license, shotgun shells for hunting, a beer, he asked Mom for the cash. There was no checking account.

At McLouth Steel, I saw diversity in budgeting. Most used Dad’s bank system. None. A minority cashed paychecks at a bar on the way home, had a alcoholic drink, decided how much to keep for pocket money, giving their wife the balance for the operation of the house, There seemed no hint this was a lack of trust for the spouse; just family tradition, acceptable to both parents.

In a year of four-week cohabitations with these stalwarts, I never would meet a spouse, hear a negative word from any about their family, complaint about their circumstance. Work was where you gave your all, with a group of ever changing buddies, then go home and enjoy life’s benefits with family and neighbors.

These teachers became my friends.

I left them after a year;
then worked at the University’s Aeronautical Wind Tunnel,
testing the limits of aircraft,
not that living flesh and blood of those I knew I’d be with all remaining years.

