

TIMELINE (#11)

GENERAL CONVEYORS EXPERIENCES (SUMMERS 1954 & 1955)

Editor's Note:

1. *This Timeline provides my remembrances of working at GENERAL CONVEYORS during the summers of 1954 and 1955. My remembrances of the summers of 1956 and 1957 are included in Timeline (#11A).*
2. *The following excerpt was lifted from the letter written by me to Bob and Mary Hopps on 9/27/98 on the occasion of their 50th Wedding Anniversary. My entire letter is included in Timeline (#4).*

"It is absolutely no coincidence that, like Bob, I attended and graduated from the University of Michigan as a mechanical engineer. During my college days, Bob gave me my first engineering job - at General Conveyors. Looking back, I believe it was my all-time favorite engineering job. Those 4 summers were a lot of fun. You may recall that I was at your house in Royal Oak several times a week, for care and feeding and to enjoy the family you were starting."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. During the summers of 1952 (age 16) and 1953 (age 17) I worked at Lost Lake Woods located in Lincoln, Michigan, 20 miles north of Greenbush. I started my third summer there in June, 1954 (age 18). I was earning \$5.00 per day plus room and board. Additionally, I earned my portion of the service charge imposed on all guests as well as personal tips (e.g., a \$1.00 tip was considered to be outstanding for hauling people's luggage).
2. I had completed my freshman year in the engineering school at the University of Michigan from 9/53 to 6/54.
3. Bob Hopps had become my uncle on 9/25/48 by virtue of marrying my dad's younger sister Mary Bojnarowicz. Bob graduated from U of M with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering.
4. Bob became the chief engineer at General Conveyors, located north of Detroit. At the time I wasn't really sure of what his job was. For that matter, I wasn't sure what a conveyor was. The only type I was aware of was the wide rubber belt conveyors used to transport groceries or iron ore from one place to another.
5. For the 4 summers I worked there, Bob and Mary Hopps lived at 710 N. Vermont, Royal Oak, Michigan; with their 3 children, Craig, Barbara, and Gary. Mary's mother (thus, my grandmother) Bushia also lived with them. For a more complete description, see Timeline (#10).

SUMMER OF 1954

1. In mid-July, while working behind the desk at the Lost Lake Woods resort, I received a surprise telephone call from Uncle Bob Hopps. He asked me if I would like to have a design engineering job at General Conveyors. I was flabbergasted and didn't know how to respond. He calmly assured me that this would be an excellent opportunity for a novice engineer. He said that he had already discussed this change with my parents and had received their approval.

a. He wanted me to start immediately even though I was over 200 miles away, had no car and no place to live in Detroit. He said that my parents had already agreed to help me with these problems. I don't remember if I had to answer immediately, or if he gave me (not more than) a day to think it over and talk to my parents. They were 20 miles away in Greenbush, and I had no wheels to get there.

b. Within a day, I told him that I would accept the job and report to work in a couple of days.

2. I told the manager of Lost Lake Woods, Mr. Harry Duff, that I was quitting my job to accept an engineering job, effective immediately. Contrary to my expectations, he was very happy for me and agreed that it was the right thing to do. I spent the rest of the day saying "goodbye" to my fellow workers and packing my clothes and other belongings, including my golf clubs and a small wooden dresser.

3. That same evening, my parents arrived, packed their car to overflowing and whisked me away to Greenbush.

4. My parents helped me get organized and pack for my exciting new adventure. Within a day or two, we were organized, the car was packed, and we were off to Detroit.

5. As promised, they tried to help find me a rental room that was either within walking distance to my new workplace or close to a convenient bus stop. Using the advertisements in a newspaper, we investigated many potential places in 1 day. By the end of the day, we were in despair because none of them was suitable.

6. Finally, my parents suggested that I live with Slim and Jenny Hechlik. I'm almost positive that my mom and dad had never before broached this subject with them. We drove to their house on Rogge St and, fortunately, found them home.

7. We were extremely happy that my mother's brother Slim (real name: Stanley) and his wife Jenny agreed to put me up for the rest of the summer. They did so on the spot with no qualms or question of payment! They immediately moved sons Johnny and Jimmy from their comfortable downstairs bedroom to the unfinished attic. I moved into the boys' room on the first floor.

8. Here's an excerpt from a letter from me to my parents, dated 8/9/54 (about two weeks after moving in): *"We finally decided on a price for room and board. I offered Jenny \$20 a week but she said that was too much and settled for 15 dollars a week. So I paid her for the first two weeks."*

9. At that time, General Conveyors was located at 22930 Sherwood (near the southeast corner of 9 Mile Road) in Van Dyke (now Warren), Michigan. This facility was less than 1.5 miles north of Slim and Jenny's house on Rogge. (Not so coincidentally, Uncle Eddie and Aunt Blanche lived on Rogge, about 2 blocks farther south and on the same side of the street immediately before they moved to Greenbush in 1947.)

10. Uncle Slim worked at the Detroit Tank Arsenal, located in the same direction and north of General Conveyors.

11. Usually, I got a ride to work but often had to walk back home. Here's another excerpt from my 8/9/54 letter: *"Slim and his friend take me to work. Slim leaves just before 7 and I get to work 4 minutes late every day but I guess they allow you until 5 after 7 to get there. I always get a ride back to 8 Mile Road and sometimes I even get a ride to the door."*

12. My job:

- a. My wages were \$1.25 per hour with time-and-a-half pay for overtime. Since we typically worked 55 or more hours a week, my gross pay was often as high as \$80 per week. This was a substantial increase over my earnings at Lost Lake Woods.
- b. I was the lowest level draftsman of conveyor (primarily overhead conveyors for the auto industry) parts, assemblies and installations.
- c. There were about 6 other designers and 2 cost estimators employed there. Starting this summer and continuing for 3 more, my leadman and mentor was a 1-armed designer named Clarence Young (nicknamed Cy, for his initials). His left arm had been amputated between the shoulder and elbow years before. (I never learned why.) Cy could wield a parallel straightedge, triangles, and other drawing implements with the best of them. I was told that he built his own house, and I personally witnessed him playing golf.
- d. An excerpt from my 8/9/54 letter shows: *"Well, my job is going pretty good. It seems that I'm making pretty good drawings now of days. I'm making a blueprint of each of my drawings so I can show them to you. I really like the job. I don't even mind getting up at 6 in the morning. Got my pay check for the first week I was there Friday. The check came to \$55.22."*
- e. Extant from that summer are drawings I made, dated 7/28/54, 8/16/54, and 9/1/54.
- f. An indicator of my status as the junior member of the team was that I got the worst drawing board. From my 8/9/54 letter: *"The one I've got doesn't have a drawer in it and all my stuff is on top of the board which makes quite a mess."*
- g. I made all the production blueprints (actually light blue in color) and distributed them. The prints were made using the large original vellum, lining it up with the copy paper (rolled beneath the copy machine opening), running both sheets through the machine together, and cutting off each copy cleanly with a wire.
- h. I also made many Ozalids, reproducible copies that could be modified. I hated making them because I could never do so without a wrinkle. Sometimes I had to remake them. It made me feel better when I learned that no one else could make them without wrinkles, either. I used to love drawing on Ozalids because, using a small bottle of smelly stuff, I could make the lines disappear as if by magic. But I had to be very careful not to make too many lines and words disappear.
- i. As soon as I arrived, I became the official "go-fer." Every afternoon, I took orders for coffee and other drinks (paid for by a community fund). Then I took my metal wire mesh basket (with cup

compartments), went to the small restaurant (less than a block away), and placed the order with the counter lady. After she filled the order, I brought the drinks back and distributed them. I absolutely did not mind being the "go-fer." I knew that I was going to start at the bottom and I accepted it.

- j. My first day of work was Tuesday, 7/27/54 and my last day of work was Saturday, 9/11/54. I worked there for exactly 7 weeks.

13. The remainder of the summer was pretty care-free. All 4 members of the Hechlik family were very accommodating. I was living in a very nice, exceptionally clean, house, Aunt Jenny was feeding me and washing my clothes and Uncle Slim (with paper bag hat on his head) was teaching me how to use the power tools in his garage.

14. Cousins Johnny and Jimmy didn't mind that I had displaced them from their room. We played many games together and walked to the Nortown Theatre (less than a mile away) to see double-feature movies several times. I helped Johnny with his math homework regularly.

15. On 9/12/54 (Sunday), the day after my last work day, my roommate Jim Black and his family drove us back to Ann Arbor. We arrived there at 2:30pm and settled into our rooms at 217 Lloyd House, West Quadrangle. Soon our other roommate, Bill Parks arrived. We were set to start our second year in the Engineering School at the University of Michigan.

SUMMER OF 1955

1. Sometime before this summer, General Conveyors moved to a larger facility (located 6 miles west of the Sherwood facility) at 420 E. Ten Mile Road (0.5 miles east of Woodward) in Pleasant Ridge, Michigan.

2. They were apparently pleased enough with my work the previous summer to offer me (well in advance this year) a job for the summer.

3. My dad bought me a used car; vintage, boxy 1951 Plymouth. I never knew the details of this purchase. For comparison purposes, at this exact time, Bill Parks bought a used, more-streamlined, 1950 Studebaker for \$250. My car had about 30,000 miles on it, had a few problems in those 3 months, but generally served its purpose well (including serving as a place to sleep).

4. I rented a very nice upstairs bedroom in a brick house at 1029 N. Pleasant St in Royal Oak, owned by a young couple, Mr. & Mrs. Jack Ferris. It was conveniently located 2.6 miles north of General Conveyors and 1.4 miles west of Hopps' home. Included in the \$11 per week rent was use of the kitchen facilities plus Mrs. Ferris prepared my workday breakfasts.

5. My job:

- a. My wages were \$1.50 per hour with time and a half pay for overtime. I was very happy with this and knew I had the opportunity to gross \$100 a week! Here's an excerpt from a letter from me to my parents, dated July, 1955: *"Well, I finally hit into 3 figures for one week's pay - \$102 (take home pay for 69 hours). That will probably be the highest of the summer."*

- b. The company informed me that I would be doing more drawing and less blueprinting and other menial jobs this summer. Later, I reported to my parents: *"It's pretty much the same stuff every day especially when you make a drawing with no mistakes (like I did yesterday)."*
 - c. However, I wasn't quite done with menial jobs. Excerpts from my 7/13/55 letter: *"I now have a Coke concession. We have a Coke machine out in the shop but the guys out there complain that we can come out anytime and get one, but they can't. There is a refrigerator in our department and I'm in charge of the pop (keep it full, etc). It costs me \$1.25 a case and I sell it for 6 cents giving me a profit of 19 cents a case. I usually sell about a case a day."*
 - d. Extant from that summer are drawings I made, dated 6/14/55, 7/5/55, 8/31/55, and 9/12/55.
 - e. My first day of work was Monday, 6/13/55, starting at 7:45am and my last day of work was Saturday, 9/17/55. I worked at General Conveyors for exactly 14 weeks.
6. Disaster struck at the Hopps' home on 6/29/55, when 2-year old-Barbara got her right arm severely burned in an Ironrite Mangle Ironer. For a complete description of this accident and aftermath, see Timeline (#10).
7. With the exception of Barbara's accident, it was another care-free summer:
- a. I had some great times with the Hopps family. Bob, Mary, and (not yet 5-year-old) Craig did many things together including eating meals at their house (often), restaurants, television, double-feature movies, cribbage, golfing and driving range.
 - b. Additionally, I enjoyed many activities with my U of M roommates, Bill Parks and Jim Black, who lived nearby. I had a girlfriend (blind date via Bill) and Bill was dating his future wife Carol Larwin who lived in Grosse Pointe Park. We enjoyed going to Bob-Lo Island, Belle Isle, Metropolitan Beach, swimming, golfing, drive-in theatres, drive-in restaurants (hot dogs and Vernor's ginger ale), and visiting friends and family living in Detroit and Ann Arbor.
 - c. This care-free living is illustrated by 2 comments I made in my 7/5/55 letter:
"Boy, this is the life - nothing (much) to worry about, go where you want (don't have to worry about a place to sleep because there's always the car). This all costs money, of course, but we sure had a lot of fun spending it."
8. I had to relinquish my used car and return it to my dad since student cars were not allowed on the U of M campus then.
9. Arriving separately in Ann Arbor, Bill Parks, Jim Black and I settled into our rooms at 217 Lloyd House, West Quadrangle. We registered for school on Thursday, 9/22/55, and started classes on Monday, 9/26/55, for our junior year in the Engineering School at the University of Michigan.