

TIMELINE (#11A) GENERAL CONVEYORS EXPERIENCES (SUMMERS 1956 & 1957)

Editor's Note:

This Timeline provides my remembrances of working at GENERAL CONVEYORS during the summers of 1956 and 1957. My remembrances of the summers of 1954 and 1955 are included in Timeline (#11).

SUMMER OF 1956

1. The company was still located at 420 E. 10 Mile Road, in Pleasant Ridge, Michigan.
2. On 5/22/56, I visited our chief engineer, J. Nelson Lauzon, and he offered me a summer job. I was very pleased with the offer of \$2.00 per hour, a 33% increase over the previous summer. He requested that I start work on Monday, 6/11/56, three days after finishing school. Although I had no inkling of where I would live or how I would get to work, I accepted the job immediately.
- 3 I took my last final exam at U of M on Friday, 6/8/56. My parents picked me and my belongings up that same afternoon and whisked me off to Royal Oak. We spent that weekend getting me organized for the job, buying a car, and finding a place to live.
 - a. We bought a 1952 Ford (light blue in color) from a used car dealer. We planned to sell it at the end of the summer because student cars were not allowed on campus.
 - b. I rented a nice, shared, 2nd floor apartment in an older house at 500 E. Troy St, Ferndale, owned by elderly Mrs. Perry. It was conveniently located 2.1 miles due south of General Conveyors. This furnished apartment consisted of 2 bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. Included in the \$13 per week rent were use of her television set and front porch glider. Mrs. Perry's TV was unusual in that its picture was beamed vertically and bounced off the 45 degree-angled open lid. Parking on the street adjacent to her corner lot was very close to the stairway to our apartment.
4. I met my roommate, 25 year-old Martin Murphy, that same day. He came from Ireland 5 years earlier and was a pleasant and interesting person. However, he spoke with a heavy brogue and was difficult to understand. His job was to install windows for a plate glass company.
5. My Job:
 - a. To my surprise, I found Don Hopps (Bob's cousin) and Bob Clark (my friend from Lloyd House, U of M) were also employed there as designers.
 - b. I was assigned a few easy drawings at the beginning since I had forgotten a lot. Soon I was up to

speed and was assigned much more complex designs. Unlike the previous 2 summers, I had no menial jobs.

- c. We typically worked 9.5 hour days plus 8 hours on Saturday for a total of 55.5 hours a week. Starting in mid-August, we worked 59 hours a week instead of 55.5. The extra 3.5 hours (at time-and-a-half) generated an extra \$10 a week in my take-home pay.
- d. Unlike previous years, I worked many hours "in the field" (primarily at the Chrysler Jefferson facility). I learned some divergent truisms about real-life engineering design (reflected in my July, 1956, letters to my parents):

(1) Good:

- *"Had to go to Chrysler Jefferson [6/30/56] and check some existing conveyors. I really got a big thrill while I was there. I saw the \$500,000 conveyor we put up last year and it is really something! It goes all over the place - on one side of Jefferson, across the new Jefferson St. bridge to the other side of the street and then back again. It's about 1.5 miles long! Saw a lot of stuff I drew last year.*

(2) Not so good:

- *"Went to Chrysler Jefferson [6/30/56] in my oldest clothes. Boy, I really got greasy and dirty!"*
- *"This is really a fouled-up job [7/11/56]. We are using a lot of old conveyors and building them into new conveyors. We have to design everything to suit the old stuff. That really gets messy since the drawings we have of the old stuff don't agree with what is actually down there."*
- *"Went to Chrysler again [7/16/56]. This job gets more confusing all the time!"*

- e. I felt very good about the money I earned and saved, as indicated in my 8/27/56 letter: *"So that'll be about \$800 I've saved this summer - almost enough for a year of school. It should be a lot cheaper to go to school this year - working 2 jobs and not living in the Quad."*

- f. My first day of work was Monday, 6/11/56 (starting at 7:45am), and my last day of work was Sunday, 9/16/56 (8 hours at double-time). I worked at General Conveyors for exactly 14 weeks (for the second summer in a row).

6. Once again I had many enjoyable times with the Hopps family, composed of Bob, Mary, Craig, Barbara, and Gary. All 3 children had significant health issues. Timeline (#11B) is a summary of many of our activities.

7. Other family members I visited were: Mary & Bob Gordynec, Slim & Jenny Hechlik, Bob Kowalski & Family, Marion & Eleanor Boyer, and Carolyn (Boyer) Sherwood and her new husband Clayton Sherwood.

8. I also visited old friends from Milton St, female friends from Lost Lake Woods, and current friends from Lloyd House.

9. The highlight was serving in the wedding party for cousin Ilene (Cookie) Kowalski and Edward Janusz's marriage. (Cousin Johnny Hechlik was also in this wedding party.) Both Cookie and Ed are of Polish descent. Their reception (at the Greenbush Township Hall) was a genuine Polish affair, which lasted well into the next day.

Then and in subsequent months, I had several dates with Ed's cousin, one of their bridesmaids.

10. My activities included many rounds of golf, driving range, miniature golf, bowling, ping-pong, pool, swimming, theatre in a tent, drive-in movies, and dating.

11. The professor I worked for in the low-speed wind tunnel said I would need a car to pick up equipment and run errands during the next school year. He wrote a letter to that effect and I received a Business Permit. Of course, I was supposed to use the car strictly for business purposes.

12. On Sunday, 9/16/56, I drove to Ann Arbor to join Bill Parks at our rented second floor rooms in an old 3-story house on East Ann St. The rooms were nice and very clean and cost each of us only \$7 a week.

13. Our previous roommate, Jim Black, had joined 4 others from Lloyd House. They rented an entire old house directly across the street from Stockwell Hall (a girls' dorm), where most of them worked in the dining hall.

14. Bill, Jim and I started classes on Thursday, 9/20/56, for our senior year in the Engineering School at the University of Michigan.

SUMMER OF 1957

1. The company was still located at 420 E. 10 Mile Road, in Pleasant Ridge, Michigan.

2. On 5/13/57, I called our chief engineer, J. Nelson Lauzon, inquiring about a job.

a. He offered me a summer job and said, "We're waiting for you." The offer was \$2.50 per hour, a 25% increase over the previous summer. He requested that I start work on Monday, 6/10/57, three days after finishing school. I was very pleased with the offer and accepted it immediately .

b. He added that if their business picked up in the remaining month before I started and if I planned to stay with them after I graduated, they would offer me more than \$2.50 an hour. I was excited about the prospect of working there permanently after graduation in a year and looked forward to talking to him again in a month.

3. I still had my 1952 Ford since I hadn't relinquished it during the school year.

4. On 5/25/57, I drove to Ferndale to inquire about the availability of the 500 E. Troy St. apartment I rented last summer. I was relieved to find that it was available so I snapped it up from Mrs Perry. I was very happy that I would be living in the same clean, inexpensive, convenient house.

5. I took my last final exam on Friday, 6/7/57. On Sunday, 6/9/57, I loaded my belongings into my car, drove to Ferndale, and unloaded.

6. I met my new roommate, 22 year-old Istven (Steve) Farkas, that same day. (I was 21 then.)
 - a. He was a refugee who actually fought in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. He managed to flee the country, but his family remained there. Naturally, his English was very poor and it was almost impossible to understand him.
 - b. However, we managed to get along very well and enjoyed preparing many meals together. He was a skilled tool and die maker who already had a job at a small shop north of Detroit. He owned a 1957 Plymouth with huge rear fins. (On 11/21/59, 2.5 years later, Steve would be one of the 3 men in my wedding party.)

7. Beginning my employment at General Conveyors proved to be a very unpleasant experience.
 - a. Nearly a month earlier, I had accepted their job offer to begin work on 6/10/57.
 - b. On 6/7/57, the day of my last final exam, Mr Lauzon called me. He asked me to delay my 6/10/57 start date by 1 week because their business was very slow.
 - c. On 6/10/57, one day after I had moved into my apartment, I visited the Hopps family in Royal Oak. Bob shocked me when he told me that their conveyor business was so bad that he wouldn't be able to hire me for the summer. He recommended several other conveyor companies where I might find work.

8. Job hunting:
 - a. I applied for jobs at the 4 conveyor companies Bob had recommended. Each said that they weren't hiring for the summer or weren't hiring at all.
 - b. Mary Hopps tried to find me a job at her old company, R.C. Mahon. She called an old friend, the president's secretary, who found that the company had no openings for the summer.
 - c. I considered returning to U of M to work full-time in the low-speed wind tunnel or possibly even going to summer school. I drove to Ann Arbor and talked to my boss/professor at the wind tunnel. He said that they would hire me for 40 hours a week at my same low pay but could offer no raise or overtime.
 - d. In desperation, I contacted cousin Eugene Kowalski to ask for his advice. He suggested that I try the General Motors Technical Center (where he worked at the Chevrolet Division). There were 3 G.M. divisions located there: Chevrolet, GM Tech Center, and Fisher Body.
 - e. The next day, 6/18/57, I went to the Fisher Body Division (12 Mile Rd and Van Dyke St). After 4 hours of interviews and waiting, they offered me a job as a design engineer for the summer. Their offer was \$375 per month (about \$2.15 an hour) for a 40-hour week with no chance of overtime. Although the job didn't compare to my non-existent job at General Conveyors, in terms of money or caliber of work, I accepted it.

9. On 6/19/57, at 7:30am, I started work at Fisher Body Division at the GM Tech Center.
 - a. They started me with very simple drawings that I could have made 3 years earlier. They weren't a challenge and I didn't feel any sense of accomplishment.
 - b. Within a few days, the job had improved and I was being assigned more difficult drawings.
 - c. On 7/2/57, Mr. Lauzon called me to say that General Conveyors had recently obtained a number of new jobs. Even though he knew I was working at Fisher Body, he asked if I would like to come back to work at General Conveyors for \$2.50 per hour and 54 hours a week. I was overjoyed and told him that I would like to.
 - d. The next day, 7/3/57, I explained the situation to my Fisher Body supervisor. I told him that I wanted to quit and he seemed to understand my reasons. After filling out a mountain of paperwork, this was my last day there. I had worked a total of 10 days at Fisher Body.
10. I returned to work at General Conveyors on Friday, 7/5/57 (3.5 weeks after their original start date of 6/10/57).
 - a. Within one day, I had been assigned a job that would last all summer! According to my 7/14/57 letter to my parents: *"I sure am enjoying this job a lot more than the other one."*
 - b. My last day of work was Saturday, 9/14/57. I worked for General Conveyors for 10 weeks (4 weeks less than each of the previous 2 summers).
11. I spent less time with the Hopps Family than I did during the previous summers. They all seemed to be reasonably healthy. They had added a fourth child, Robert Hopps Jr, on 11/21/56.
12. Other family members I visited were: Mary & Bob Gordynec, Slim & Jenny Hechlik, Bob & Elsie Kowalski, and Eugene Kowalski. I went to Johnny Hechlik's high school graduation in Detroit.
13. I also visited my standard array of friends from Lloyd House: Bill Parks, Jim Black, Larry Green, and Jack Watson. I went to Bruce Fox's wedding in Ann Arbor.
14. I did many activities with my new Hungarian roommate Steve Farkas. An old Milton St. friend introduced me to his fiance's sister.
15. My activities included golf, driving range, attending the final play-off round of a professional golf tournament in Toledo, attending the U of M graduation ceremonies in Ann Arbor, picnic at a Hungarian park, open-air concert, musical theatre in the round, swimming, water-skiing, movies and dating.
16. The lowlight occurred when my mother had a nervous breakdown. In August she had to move to Detroit to be near appropriate doctors, medical facilities, and hospitals. My father remained in Greenbush to tend to the tavern business.

- a. I saw mom or talked to her on the phone often. I transported her to her doctors and took her shopping. On 8/30/57, Bill, Steve and I took her to see "South Pacific" at the Music Circle Theatre and we all thoroughly enjoyed it.
- b. Just before school started, her doctor said she was improving and was sleeping about 7 hours a night. However, he also said that if her medications didn't help, she would have to undergo shock treatments.

17. Bill Parks, Larry Green and I decided to live together for the next school year. After searching for several weekends, we finally found a partially-furnished, 2-story, 3-bedroom house at 317 South St. in Ypsilanti, 8 miles from Ann Arbor.

- a. We were joined by Bill's friend, Carlos Murillo, recently from Costa Rica.
- b. During the week before school started, we cleaned the house and brought furniture from home. We bought some used furniture but never did get a television set. The 4 of us moved into our large house on Sunday, 9/15/57.

18. A few days later, Bill and I started classes for our fifth and final year in the Engineering School at the University of Michigan.