

CHAPTER XI



With most able bodied men away fighting the war, the work force in the defense plants was, for that time, a rather motley mixture of people. There were wives whose husbands were away in the service, widows of servicemen killed in action, men who had come out of retirement, and people who had given up previous jobs for the higher pay and the need to contribute to the war effort.

For example; members of my department included, "Bones" O'Brien who had been the arranger and piano player for the Ted Wheems Band, Bob Rupert the former president of the Mack Motor Company, Jesse Livermore the son of Jesse Livermore, Sr., the wonder boy of Wall Street who had a fortune of several million dollars by age 21 and then lost it all in the 1929 stock market crash and ended his life by jumping out of a New York skyscraper. The Jesse in my department was married to the well know actress and dancer, Ann Miller. Then there was Walter Barling, a famous aircraft designer who had developed a remotely controlled pilotless flying bomb during W.W.I and a four-engined plane that was the largest bomber of its day. He also produced and marketed a series of successful private aviation planes during the 1930's.

With 80% of the production work force consisting of untrained local people who had never even been close to an airplane before it is no wonder we had a myriad number of problems out on the factory floor. The

amount of rework to correct errors was enormous and costs were going sky high. By the war's end we had only completed and test flown three of the planes and had another thirteen in various stages of completion. None of the TBYS saw any action in the war although one of them had been shipped to the South Pacific.

During our first year in Allentown I received an offer to teach adult night classes in production management at the University of Pennsylvania. I accepted the offer for the added income and taught there for the remainder of our stay in Allentown. One of my students was Sam Cohen, a funny little fat Jewish man who had a garment factory in town that made women's underclothes. He would stay after class asking me a lot of questions and I finally found out he was having a difficult time competing with the shops in New York and that he needed to do something to get his costs down. I offered to take a look at his operation and see if I could come up with some ideas. I went to his factory which turned out to be a typical sweat shop full of sewing machines and tubs of garments in various stages of completion. I did a number of motion and time studies and developed a production flow chart for him and then told him what I thought he needed to do. True to his nature, or else in desperation, he effected the changes and suggestions I had given him with amazing results. His production rate jumped up overnight and he was ecstatic. I refused to accept any pay for my service because I really liked and felt for the little guy. From then on Virginia began receiving a regular supply of nylon stockings, panties and other garments. It took her several years to wear them all out.

Drinking was the main method of relaxation and beer was the primary ingredient. The liquor stores in Pennsylvania were all owned and operated by the state and no liquor, other than beer, was sold in the markets or drug stores. There was no such thing as convenience stores in those days. The state issued ration stamps that allowed you to buy one gallon of hard liquor a

month and if you wanted a bottle of scotch you were required to also purchase a bottle of rum. Seems that rum was not popular in that area and it was the only way they could get rid of it.

The annual Lehigh County Fair was held each year at the Allentown fairgrounds and all the local breweries, of which there were many, had booths where they sold their beer. You had to buy tickets at 5 cents each that were good for a mug full. You would see people wandering around with a whole fist full of beer tickets, but no one seemed to be drunk and there were no fights or rowdiness. Pennsylvania also had what they called "Blue Laws" that required all night spots to shut down at 2:00 a.m. during the week and at midnight on Saturdays. No liquor could be sold on Sunday.

As a result of the Blue Laws private clubs called key clubs were abundant. For a deposit of one dollar you would be given a key to the door. The one I joined was on the second floor of a building that had a Firestone store on the first floor. With a key you could go to your club after all the bars shut down and continue your drinking and partying. Most clubs had a Polka Band that played until daylight and also sold sandwiches and pickled eggs. The combination of pickled eggs and beer led to some really smelly farts emanating from people sitting at the bar. Table service beer was only sold by the pitcher full which cost all of 50 cents per pitcher.

Another key club we belonged to was on the second floor of the volunteer fire house. Some nights a whole group of us would make the rounds of several key clubs and then pay for it the next morning. Amazingly there were very few serious auto accidents as a result of all this drinking but a lot of people ended up driving their cars into snow banks in the winter. One night a bunch of us were at a local cocktail lounge and Marie Metcalf, who was psychotic and the wife of one of the department heads, got stupid drunk and accused the bartender of stealing her purse. This ended up with her

husband, Nelson, getting into a fight with the bartender who floored him in nothing flat.

Nelson was in no condition to drive so I offered to take them both home and when we opened their car, Marie's purse was lying on the front seat. By the time I got to their house they had both passed out so I carried Marie into the house, undressed her and put her to bed and left Nelson sleeping in their car. Another of the guys at the bar followed me in his car and then took me back to the party. I had a devil of a time convincing Nelson the next day that I did not rape his wife. Twelve years later Marie killed Nelson with seventeen stabs of a kitchen butcher knife. As far as I know she is still locked up in the women's prison in Tehachapi.

Among the attractions at the Allentown Fair were: horse racing, aerial stunts, carnival rides and the usual assortment of side shows. It was in one of the side shows that I saw my one and only true hermaphrodite. It's name was Alice John and it performed on a stage from which a high curtain stretched to the entrance to the tent. For the performance the ladies were placed on one side of the curtain and the men on the other side. Alice John then gave a lecture on hermaphroditic and proceeded to strip buck naked so all could see her deformity while she performed some indecent acts.

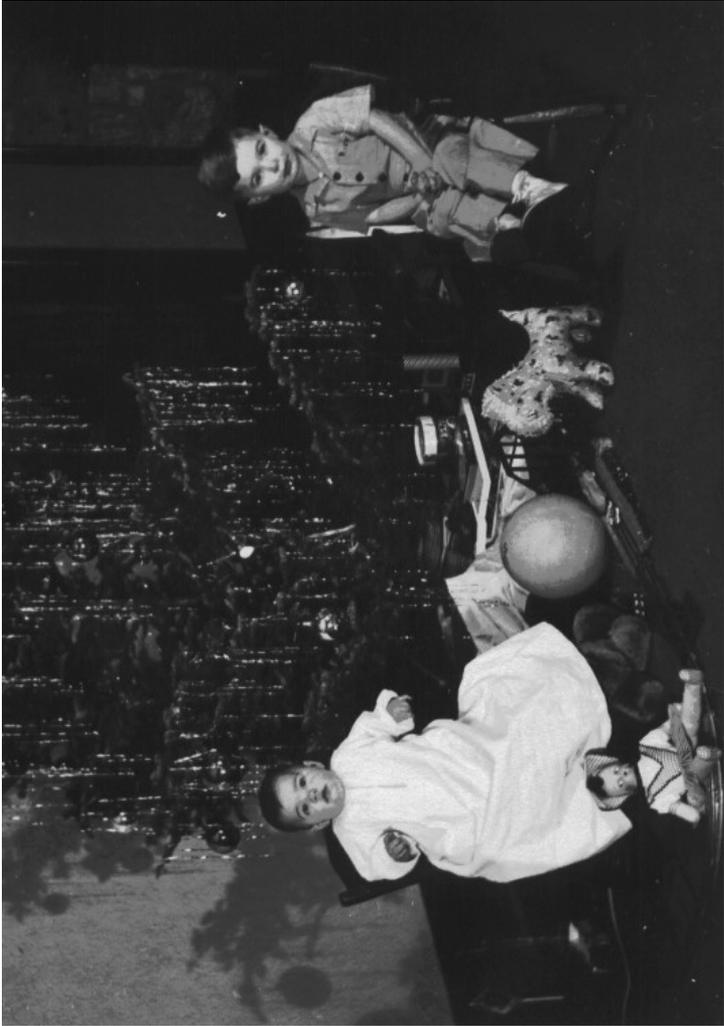
Bones O'Brien was a truly great piano player and entertained us at a lot of our parties. I think he knew every musical score that was ever written and played everything by memory. One of the fellows that worked in my department was Aaron Weiss a little Jewish guy that for some reason took a liking to Virginia and me. He and his wife would frequently stop by our house for an unannounced visit and always bearing gifts of some kind. He would bring nylon stockings for Virginia and toys for our children. I never could figure him out or what his motivation was but put up with it because he was a good hard working individual who came up with many suggestions on improving top management com-

munications with employees.

There was an elderly couple, Harry and Elsie Floyd, who were childhood friends of my mother and living in Allentown. We became fast friends and visited them in their row house quite often where we would spend the evening playing pinochle and eating Elsie's scrumptious apple pies. I learned a lot about my mother's childhood from them.

By early 1945 things were winding down in Europe and that part of the war was over. I had become quite discouraged over the lack of progress being made at the Allentown Vultee plant and began wondering what I would be doing next when I received a phone call from Trevor Gardner out in Pasadena. He wanted to know if I would consider coming back to California and going to work on a very important project at Cal Tech. The pay he offered was good and it did not take me long to make up my mind. I gave two weeks notice to Vultee and began planning for the trip back home. We notified our real estate broker in Rosemead of our plans and asked her to serve notice on the couple renting our house there. We then made arrangements with a moving company in Allentown to cart our belongings to California.

I came up with a brilliant idea on how to save labor in preparing for the move. I told the people in my department that I needed some volunteers and would provide all the beer they could drink. Within five minutes I had all the people I could use. The night before the movers were to arrive we all went up to the house and started the process. The girls packed dishes and breakables while the guys brought all the heavy furniture down to the ground floor. They got the bed mattresses down by sliding down the stairs on them like they were toboggans. That was so much fun that they started hauling them back up stairs for another ride and the girls took part in this. We were all done by midnight and just as we ran out of beer. It was the easiest move I ever made.



Baby Harriet and Richy with Christmas tree in Allentown.