

Eastern Echoes

By Gail Roberson



The bonded love between mother and child is the strongest of any in the universe. Nothing competes with the strength that exists between these two. Again and again it has been proven. It's not unusual to read of a mother who returned to a burning house to retrieve her baby, or a 90-pound woman who, caught up in the terror of the moment, lifts a heavy object that is crushing her child. We've all heard or read of this bond, but many stories never made the printed page. These, you see, are engraved upon the heart.

The following are stories, or accounts, if you will, of children who died but later returned to change the course of their mother's life. I have altered the names for the protection of those who volunteered their stories. But that is all. The rest remains a remarkable account of the love between a mother and her child.

"Twelve years ago, when they closed my baby in that box, they may as well have nailed the lid over me at the same time," she said to me. "She'd never gone near the road before. Never. And there was absolutely no reason for her to go then. She simply walked across the yard, onto the highway, and into the side of a passing car."

For Jane, it was the beginning of a long nightmare. She refused to consider having another child, and hardly took care of her own needs. She never went to market or church. She simply became a prisoner in her home... a virtual mental mess. Her beautiful daughter was dead. And so was she... except they just hadn't buried her yet.

But one morning, as she sat rocking the doll her child had loved, she felt a tug on the sleeve of her robe. When she looked down, she was staring into the eyes of her daughter. There is not room enough to tell it all here, but the child explained that she had been allowed an afternoon to spend with her again... a few hours of life the way it used to be, for the both of them. She told her mother that she liked her new home, that she had love and happiness, and that she had returned to help her move on with her own life. She wore a satin robe and slippers, and in her brown hair were woven delicate flowers and ribbons. Mother and daughter spent that afternoon together, and when it was time to part once again, the transition, though not easy, was finally an accepted one.

Since then, Jane has a new life and another child. Though she will never stop loving her first born, she has finally let go of the pain.

For Julie, it was easier. Her two year old child returned on the day after she drowned... before her own funeral.

"I was numb with disbelief," she admitted, "but I was not crazy with grief or having weeping visions. I held my child. I talked to her, and I know that she has gone home. The knowledge that she still lived gave my husband and me the courage to actually smile and hug one another at her gravesite. You can't imagine the power something like this can give you... and the peace."

June's five year old son, dead for nearly six months, woke his mother one night and alerted her to a stove fire that saved her life and that of his older brother. His father was working late shift. The house was filling with smoke. All she knows is that her son was tugging on her clothing and calling out her name, and then disappeared right in front of her when she reached out for him.

And these are only a few of such cases. None of these mothers have reason to lie about such a thing. They have all come to terms with the deaths of their children and the glorious experience they've encountered in doing so. They are only three of the hundreds whose pain has turned to peace through these return visits. They have no idea how or why... just that it happened. But somehow, in the deepest part of their souls, where instinct and a mother's love grow, they recognize that nothing really matters... but that the little children know.

ASCS Notes

PROGRAMS

There will be a 10 percent acreage reduction requirement for the wheat and feed grain program and a five percent acreage reduction requirement for the oat program. The 1989 projected and advance payment rates will be: for corn, a projected payment of 89 cents and an advance payment of 35.6 cents per bushel; for grain sorghum, projected 90 cents and advance 36 cents; for wheat, projected 58 cents, advance 20 cents; barley, projected 23 cents, advance 9.3 cents. All advance payments will be in cash.

0/92 PROGRAM

The 0/92 program will be offered again this year for wheat and feed grains. Guaranteed payments will be made to those bases left idle according to the above projected rates per applicable program. If any land is planted under 0/92, only the land left idle will be eligible for the guaranteed payment amounts. Any corn planted will be figured and paid as projected payments.

CCC-502

Beginning with the 1989 crop year, producers will be required to complete form CCC-502 which will be used by the county office and county committee to determine if a producer is eligible to

receive payments through participation in the programs. These forms must be completed and approved by the County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee before any payments will be made. Producers who cash rent must have a written lease.

SPECIAL SIGNUP

A special signup will be conducted for producers who want to plant soybeans or sunflowers on a portion of each participating crop's permitted acreage. Producers can through Dec. 19 to Feb. 4 to plant 10 to 25 percent of their wheat and feed grain permitted acres to soybeans or sunflowers and still protect their program crop acreage base history. No deficiency payments will be available for the planted soybeans or sunflowers, only base history credit will apply.

REMINDERS

The signup for wheat and feed grains program ends April 14.

Form CCC-502 must be completed prior to enrolling in the program.

Disaster program benefits are offered through March 31, 1988. Advance Deficiency Forgiveness Payments due to crop disaster in 1988 may be applied for during this period for those who had a loss of 35 percent or less in any crop.

Different As Night From Day

GASTONIA — Few first-time visitors to Day Tool & Mold, Inc., would be impressed after coming through the front door.

After all, the small front office is easily filled by a well-used couch, a wooden receptionist's desk, and a manual typewriter where virtually all the paperwork gets done. If the visitor arrives around lunch, then company president, owner, principal designer, and mold maker David M. Day may even be found on the couch eating a fast food salad.

But lest the astute visitor dismiss the shop as some place where the local cotton mill gets its replacement parts, he or she should notice a few oddities stuck here and there. For example, the framed fan letter to Day from Joseph R. Gerber, Jr., chairman of the Gerber knife company. He just wrote to say how much he personally admired the knife handle and sheath molds that Day has made for his company. Or the computer cable plugs sitting on a display case with big IBM logos on them. Not to mention the assorted plastic parts that any real lumberjack would recognize to be Homelite chain saw triggers. But didn't Homelite once buy its injection plastic molds from Japan? Stealing business from the Japanese? What's going on here?

It is all part of the story about a remarkably unassuming man and the day 14 years ago that he decided that he was tired of making just one part of things and then passing them on down the line to the next guy.

Day was trained as a tool and die maker, and he specialized in building molds that manufactured plastic parts. Although he loved the work, his employer, Impact Plastics in Gastonia, seemed too intent upon meeting schedules to give him the artistic freedom he craved.

So Day did what most industrial craftsmen only dream about doing. He saved his money, bought a used milling machine which he installed in the back room at his home, and went into business. "I was lucky," he recalls, that the machine could be run on household electrical current.

He made ends meet by teaching mold making at a local community college and depending heavily on a few early customers. One of the first companies to award him projects was none other than Impact Plastics, whose officials preferred the mass production end of the plastic parts industry anyway.

"The computer cable plug has been pretty big for me in the last three years," says Day, who carefully shows the stamp bearing the IBM logo that he carved by hand from steel alloy.

He makes the plug mold for an IBM supplier who attaches them to plastic injecting machines and makes whole cable assemblies. So far at least, Day's company only makes the molds for plastic items, leaving others to actually attach them to production machines and make the parts.

Today, the company thrives in a rambling one-story stone building that Day's wife's grandfather built long ago. The company's reputation for making precisely built, tough molds has spread to the point where Day and his eight person crew cannot accept all the new potential clients.

It takes several hundred exacting work hours to produce just one mold good enough to make most commercially used plastic parts. To his credit, Day



Day displays Moravian star frame he invented

declines to accept an order unless he knows he can provide one of his craftsmen the machine time to do it right. By carefully reinvesting his profits in the company, he now owns five milling machines, with another custom one on the way, and two electro-discharge machines, called EDMs. The milling machines give mold makers the ability to do the basic cutting and carving that turns a block of steel into a delicately shaped mold. The EDMs apply a final finish to the molds and that will, produce the "frosty" textures that are so popular on plastic parts these days.

Even more important to the operation though is Day's staff. Quality training is the key ingredient to Day Tool & Mold's continued success. Every single mold maker at Day Tool & Mold either served a voluntary apprenticeship at the company before reaching full journeyman status, or is still an apprentice there. He uses the apprenticeship program administered by the North Carolina Department of Labor to train all his employees because it is the only way he has found to guarantee he gets a skilled work force.

"There's a tremendous amount of business," he says, "but there's not enough good tool makers around. I can't find a man in this area that's already qualified to make molds."

It takes several years of on the job training and classroom instruction for most people to pass the apprenticeship program's rigorous graduation standards. But Day insists that his apprentices get the state certification, and then help new apprentices. "As fast as I can graduate one," Day says, "I am going to start another one."

"The only way for me to expand is to home grow the talent," he adds. "It is the only way for someone to learn this special skill." He scours local community colleges and keeps lists of applicants to find his next apprentice.

As a former apprentice himself, Day knows that the modern version of the ancient job training idea not only gives a new worker needed skills, but also shows them exactly what their particular employer will want them to do when they become full-fledged craftsmen. The labor Department carefully monitors all apprenticeship programs to make sure that employer and apprentice follow the agreed to terms.

Although the training is difficult, Day keeps the atmosphere informal and is far more comfortable in a company work shirt that

reads "David" on the front, than a coat and tie.

"His enthusiasm toward this kind of work," mold maker Danny Murdoch says, is the magic ingredient that keeps the company flourishing. "We don't really play the games that a lot of companies do, I guess," he says. "We stay loose but we all know what needs to be done."

"I am a craftsman-businessman," Day says pointedly. "I put myself as a craftsman first." In fact, the labor Department recognized Day as an Outstanding Master Craftsman in 1987 in honor of his great skill as a tool and die maker.

He knew little about running a business before buying his first machine, but he did research the situation enough to know there were at least 10 factories making plastic products in his immediate area, and not a single independent mold making company within sight.

"You can get help as far as the business part from your CPA — and by having a really good secretary," he jokes, glancing toward Day Tool & Mold's single clerical worker, his wife Starlean.

Maintaining control over the company's growth and its start-to-finish design work has been difficult for Day. "I'm losing out on a lot of work because I can't add machines and personnel quickly enough," he says. But he refuses to change the system by letting barely trained workers or cheap machinery in his work area. "A big secret in this business is that if you get a reputation for professional quality, you'll never be lacking work," he believes. No matter how much he decides to expand the operation, he will always have customers to meet that growth, unless his quality goes down, Day says.

He holds up the plastic chain saw triggers being designed for Homelite. "They always used to use Japanese molds," he says, because the price was so good. Yet, he thinks, the company has found that the steel used for the molds was too soft for prolonged use, thus causing delays when they had to be removed from the production line.

"I'll give them a good, hardened steel mold," Day says, which he will carve from the best metal he can find to meet Homelite's demands. "You're constantly learning in this business," Day feels, since one has to be part metallurgist, part designer, a bit salesman, and all craftsman, to make it.

"I'm constantly reinvesting," he nods at his machines, "it would be hard to do this again, I

mostly bought them one at a time."

Even while reflecting about his business roots, Day's thoughts rarely stray from the project at hand. His eyes keep returning to the blueprints spread across the drafting table and tacked onto a nearby wall. They show the dimensions for a large plastic Moravian star. A client wants the molds for it in time to begin producing the ornaments for the spring Christmas trade shows.

"I pride myself on my design work," he says, obviously not ready to return to the task. The finished parts for a prototype star are already scattered around the table, but Day is confident his design will be sturdier and able to take a lot of use when finished.

"I was excited about this," he says showing the rigid frame he designed to firmly hold the star points. The client plans to make the first test batch of stars for testing purposes soon, called sampling. "I'm going to be right there when they sample it," Day grins.

Obituary

James H. Tripp

GREENVILLE — James Harold Tripp, 63, of Greenville, died last Thursday.

Services were held Saturday at Wilkerson Funeral Home, Greenville, with the Revs. Bruce Jones and Ray Williamson officiating. Burial was in Pinewood Memorial Park.

Tripp is survived by his wife, Mrs. Faye Mobley Tripp; his stepmother, Mrs. Celia Tripp of Greenville; six daughters, Ms. Linda Tripp of Simpson, Ms. Brenda Tripp of Grimesland, Mrs. Libby Vincent of Rt. 3, Greenville, Mrs. Geneva Morris of Vanceboro, Mrs. Debbie Taylor of Belhaven, Mrs. Betty Pierce of Rt. 2, Greenville; two sisters, Mrs. Joyce Spencer and Mrs. Nell Bland, both of Black Jack; five brothers, Brownie Tripp of Winterville, Earl Tripp of Ham's Crossroads, Pete Tripp of Havelock, John Tripp of Belvoir, Jarvis Tripp of Greenville, and nine grandchildren.

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