



Peep Holes To Mother Nature

This rural scene is no longer a part of the countryside in the North Carolina Piedmont. It now rests under water at the bottom of Jordan Lake. The photo was taken in 1974, before the state began building the lake. Houses had been abandoned in the area in preparation for the construction, and the property became fair game for revelers and target shooters. (Ric Carter photo)

Eastern Echoes

By Gail Roberson



When asked by an anthropologist what the Indians called America before the white man came, an Indian said simply "ours."

In the emotional celebration this week of our freedom and independence, I am caught up in yet another great emotion, of guilt. Too many of us throughout the years, have unfortunately, had the same opinion as John Wayne, who once stated: "I don't feel we did wrong in taking this country away from them. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves."

Selfishly? I wonder what word we would use to describe ourselves today if suddenly the Russians tried to come here to settle and claim our land? I wonder. Selfish? I think not. We would defend, in every possible way, what we have guarded with blood, sweat and tears for all this time. And we would call it honor. And pride. Just like the Indians did. The first Americans. The ones who lost in the battle for freedom and liberty.

I have always been concerned about our role in the destruction of this native heritage. Part of it lies in my strong feelings that, even though I believe destiny helped establish what has become the United States of America, I find it hard to accept what destiny has done to the fate of the Indian.

Another reason is my own Indian heritage. Like Will Rogers once said: "My folks didn't come over on the Mayflower, but they were there to meet the boat." I cannot help but be torn emotionally over what this great land has become, and what this great land once was. As a child, and even now, I root for the Indians against the cavalry in the films about the Old West. It seems so unfair that when the cavalry wins, it's a great victory. Yet, when the Indians win, it's a massacre.

Today we load our soldiers onto planes and ships to go forward in the battle for freedom in other parts of the world. We fight for freedom, yet accumulate laws to take it away from ourselves right here at home. We rattle our chains to show that we are free.

Occasionally, we'll uncover bits and pieces of Indian pottery or an arrowhead in our fields. It makes us remember who was her first, who we stripped of freedom and liberty. Someday, someone will dig up a preserved remnant made of plastic or Corningware, and remember, who they stripped of freedom and liberty. Do you ever think of that? Do you think they will have any guilt as to what they took from us? Did we have guilt as to what we took from the Indians?

Yes, this week we'll watch our colors flying amid bursts of fireworks and strains of the national anthem. And we'll be proud. Like we should be. Of a land that is great and good. And free. But never free of the guilt.

Barringer From Page 1

The real craftsman in the trade constantly monitor their charges, trying to stop problems almost before they start. Many major mechanical disasters can be averted by just some extra care and attention from the oiler, Brehm says. If an oiler spots a growing problem that he or she cannot fix, then they can alert the mechanic before the glitch causes serious damage. "A lubrication man is actually the eyes and ears of the maintenance department," Brehm feels.

Barringer often proves that old saying right, as he quietly pedals among the 40 to 50 pieces of machinery that he will inspect in a shift. If one wrong "ping" reaches his ears or he sights an unexpected pool of oil, then Barringer pulls to a stop. He tracks the factory floor gremlins like a well trained bloodhound, using his senses and his knowledge of the machinery to follow the signs to their source. Brehm and other General officials express amazement that Barringer can differentiate such subtle warnings from the routine noises, odors, and workings that permeate the tire-making process.

But to Barringer, it is all a matter of concentration. "You've got to keep conscious of your machinery at all times," Barringer says, adding that being an oiler is not a job for day dreamers. "It's a job where you can't put off doing something either," he says. In the world of high speed production, when a part needs oiling, it needs it now. Someone who sees that the lubricant level in a tire machine is getting low, but decides to catch it the next time around, may come back to find some busted gears and a crowd of fuming production workers.

His combination of skills and abilities earned Barringer an Outstanding Master Craftsman

award from the North Carolina Department of Labor in 1987. He has received particular recognition for his work with the massive calender machines in the plant. The three-story tall giants coat various fabric sheets with a smooth, thin rubber coating. The rubberized fabric is used to help make the inner layers of radial tires.

Although the machines are big, they require delicate care, particularly from their oiler. Some parts need to be checked and greased about every two hours. Tremendous heat builds in them as the fabric becomes coated, and a neglectful oiler can cause a \$4,000 set of protective dust rings to be destroyed in an afternoon.

Barringer must carry at least seven basic lubricants with him at all times, not counting the more exotic oils and greases that some machines crave. The printouts indicate which machines need their scheduled maintenance that day. All during this routine duty, of course, he keeps his senses sharp as he pedals through the machinery, piping, and conveyor belts.

Expert oilers, like Barringer, earn salaries which reflect the importance of keeping machinery in good running condition. He makes about \$31,000 a year, not counting over-time, which often raises the figure to around \$40,000.

He works during the plant's main shift, concentrating his time on General's power house area and machine repair shop. Several oilers work in other sections of the factory, since it is too big for any one person to cover so much territory. Barringer, like most workers at General, belongs to Local 850 of the United Rubber Workers union.

Although he is now an acknowledged master craftsman in heavy industry, Barringer grew

up on a dairy farm in rural Cabarrus County. While his parents raised cattle, they also gave him his first lessons in working with machinery. "It was very important to maintain our equipment," he recalls, "my parents taught me what to look for and to do the job right."

Those vital early lessons ignited an interest in working with machines that Barringer pursued in high school by taking several vocational education classes. He later attended a community college for a year before beginning his construction job.

Today, Barringer sees himself as a lubrication specialist and a tire maker. He takes pride in General's products and the high quality radial tires that leave the plant. He points out that automobile producers Ford and General Motors have both given the factory their highest grading for a parts supplier. The tires appear as original equipment in both car lines.

The factory normally produces about 24,000 thousand tires a day. But when it set a new production record recently, Barringer's excitement was as great as any manager's in the plant. "I feel like I had a part in making that happen," he says, "because my machines ran."

Working with volatile liquids and powerful motors at the same time, has also made Barringer very conscientious about following, and encouraging others to follow, good industrial safety procedures. He does not hesitate to shut down a machine if he feels there is any chance his oils could be ignited while he works around its motor.

This interest in safety carries over to his personal life. He is actively involved in a volunteer fire department near his home in concord. "I just like helping my fellow man," he says about his

volunteer fire fighting duties. He lives in Concord with his wife, Becky, and they have one daughter.

When he is not at the fire station or spending time with his family, Barringer likes to tinker in his own workshop or get some exercise from cutting firewood, a habit he started many years ago.

For those interested in following his footsteps in the oiler's trade, Barringer recommends just getting some basic familiarity with oils and their properties. As fewer people learn to work on their own cars or even have a chance to work with grease, in an increasingly service economy world, he feels that fewer young people will understand the job's importance.

"People now are not used to dealing with oils and lubricants," he says. Companies will have to turn to more intensive job training programs based in their factories and plants, if they want to have another generation of skilled workers, he feels.

As far as Barringer is concerned, he enjoys both the job and the feeling one gets from making an important contribution to such a large enterprise. "I just get real satisfaction from seeing the equipment running," he says.

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