

Dad's Work

After reading a chapter in Sam Keen's well-written and insightful book, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man*, I thought about my dad's work career. What a restless warrior he must have been to drop out of high school in his freshman year to go to work. I don't remember him being much of a reader, although in spurts he enjoyed reading Louis L'Amour-type Western novels. He had a good memory for facts and figures and he was facile with numbers, performing most calculations in his head.

When I was very young, perhaps five or six years of age, he worked for the Zumwalt Company, a vendor of agricultural implements and supplies. As a company representative, he traveled throughout Northern California collecting money owed to the company by farmers. This job was followed by a similar one with the Massey-Harris Company, essentially doing the same work, but here he traveled throughout the five Western states. For long stretches at a time, my mother traveled with him, leaving my brother and me to live with my father's parents in Colusa, California.

After the outbreak of World War II, we relocated to Ross, in Marin County, so my dad could work as a ship welder in the Sausalito shipyards. I never knew whether he simply wanted to be part of the war effort or whether he wanted to avoid the draft, but I believe it to be the former. Whatever the reason, this work did not last long, but I do remember attending the christening of a ship on which he had worked. Years later, he told me that the waste of materials at the job site had made him sick to his stomach. Hundreds of barrels of bolts were delivered to the dock for use in building the ship, but they were the wrong size. One of the job managers walked the length of the dock, kicking these barrels into the bay to make way for a new shipment. Apparently, my father did not agree with, or understand, the principles of mass production; he felt those bolts should have been transferred to another job site and used. His war job gave way to some kind of hands-on management position, selling and repairing agricultural machinery in Williams, California, but that too, didn't last very long.

Dad was hired to manage a rice ranch northwest of Williams for an absentee landlord, a man who also owned hotels in San Francisco's Fillmore District. This ranch included a duck-hunting lodge, located just off Highway 99,

midway between Williams and Maxwell, known as the Log Cabin. It had been closed for some time, and while it had running water, it had no electricity. We lived at the Log Cabin during his tenure as ranch superintendent. The workers were Mexican braceros, and somehow my dad knew enough Spanish to communicate with them. These workers lived in bunkhouses near the main ranch, and a Chinese cook provided their meals. Part of my father's responsibility included taking the braceros to Colusa every Saturday night for their night on the town. It also became our weekly family outing.

My father then went into business for himself. He purchased a grain harvester and traveled the length of California harvesting crops by contract, finally ending at the Japanese-American concentration camp in Poston, Arizona, with a government contract to harvest their crops. His next career involved the manufacture of concrete blocks for home construction, a new building technology which he believed would revolutionize the home construction business. He also promoted radiant heating, another recently developed innovation to heat and cool homes. He built at least one home using this technology.

Because of his interest in flying, he purchased an airplane, retrofitted it for crop dusting and seeding, and started his own business. Months later, his flying career came to an abrupt end when his overloaded airplane dropped out of the sky after take-off and plummeted to the ground. He walked away unscathed, but as I remember it, he never flew a plane again.

In his next career, he traveled extensively throughout California and Mexico, frequently with my mother accompanying him, to promote, sell, and install rice dryers. This work gave way to selling crop chemicals for an agricultural pesticide company. Part of his selling program included mixing these chemicals before delivering them to the helicopter aerial spray companies for application. Years later, after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, he confided to me his belief that his contact with pesticides played a significant role in contracting cancer.

The highlight of my father's many careers, and financially his most successful, came after he and my mother moved to Sacramento in 1950. His first job was with an agricultural implement company as a warehouse parts manager. My mother also found work in a pharmacy located next to Taylor's Market on

Freeport Blvd, just around the corner from where they rented a house on 4th Ave.

Through an act of neighborly kindness performed by my parents, my father met a Sacramento real estate broker. He invited my father to join his real estate firm as a salesman. At first, my father tried selling homes, but he found buyers to be fickle and he said they drove him crazy, so he tried to sell commercial property. He was an instant success story. His knowledge of construction, his feel for raw land, his experience in dealing with farmers, his facility with numbers, his confident salesmanship, his vision of growth and technology all came together and gave him an expertise that no other commercial agents possessed. In his real estate career – salesman, builder, developer, and promoter – he made enough money to secure his financial independence, learned to play an aggressive game of golf, and traveled to his heart's content until his untimely death at the age of 56. Never a cavity or sick a day in his life, he once told me.

My father's life was a meteor flash, a bolt of lightning. He was always thinking, always planning, always outspoken, always restless, always opinionated, always honest, and always generous. He was a good man. More than 30 years have passed since his death, and I still miss him.