

CHAPTER XIII



As the use of solid propellant rockets by the military began to decline we could see the handwriting on the wall and soon received instructions from our parent company, General Tire, to begin looking for commercial products that could be produced in the Pasadena plant. At that point I became a member of a three man task force to seek out a suitable product. We ran big ads in all the west coast papers asking for inventors to bring their ideas to us for evaluation.

We set up an office in the Cheeswright building where we could conduct interviews and look at the various inventions. It was an interesting assignment to say the least. One fellow brought in an electric flushing toilet. Another had an incinerator for burning dog poop. One old man came in with a 1940 Buick sedan that he had modified so that whenever you let up on the gas the brakes were automatically applied. He gave us the keys so we could take it out and see for ourselves. With one of our team driving we started down Colorado Street and at about 35 MPH he let up on the gas and nearly threw us all through the windshield. We immediately ruled that one out. Another fellow came in with a 1939 Ford that he had modified so that the car automatically went into neutral and started coasting whenever you let up on the gas. His reasoning was that it would increase mileage by saving gas. We felt it could create a dangerous situation on mountain roads so scratched that idea.

Small gas engine powered model airplanes were becoming popular at the time so we decided to explore that market and came up with the idea of a rocket powered model. Since Aerojet had been making JATO (jet assisted take off) devices for use in shortening the take off run of military aircraft we gave them the task of designing a miniature JATO bottle.

I then bought a kit for a model airplane with a six foot wing span and gave it to the pattern shop at the NOTS facility out on Foothill Boulevard to build. I had built many model planes as a teenager and figured the job could be done in two weeks at the most. But when it dragged on for over a month I went out to NOTS to see what was holding things up. I could not believe what I found. The pattern makers were all old craftsmen who took pride in their work and had tackled the kit construction as if it were a full sized plane. They had built a 4 ft. X 8 ft. flat top work bench upon which they had built special jigs for assembling the kit that could normally be accomplished on a kitchen table. They were using transits to make sure everything was true. After my visit and a little pep talk they got the thing completed the following week. I must say it was a work of art and probably the finest finished product to ever come out of any model airplane kit. Aerojet came up with the rocket motor we wanted and it was time to test fly the plane.

Dan Kimball, former Secretary of the Navy and now Chairman of the Board of General Tire, happened to be paying us a visit and so we felt it was an opportune time to demonstrate the rocket powered model for him. He was happy as a kid to be invited to see the first test flight. Six of us, plus Dan Kimball, headed out to Azusa and a defunct housing tract that had paved streets and empty lots overgrown with dry weeds as it was the middle of summer.

Someone had thought ahead enough to include a foam fire extinguisher in our assortment of equipment and it was good they did. We set the plane on one of

the empty streets and fired up the rocket engine. The model took off and climbed like a homesick angel and then started to circle spewing forth smoke as it went round and round in ever decreasing circles and increasing speed. On the sixth circle, at about 200 ft. altitude, I noted with concern that the wings were bending up at an alarming angle and on the seventh time around they snapped in the middle and each half of the wing took off in a different direction while the fuselage plunged to the ground under full rocket power. It crashed in the middle of one of the lots full of dry weeds. Dan Kimball grabbed the fire extinguisher and we all headed to the crash site where a small grass fire was already underway.

Kimball got there first but did not know how to operate the extinguisher. I was right behind him and while we were both wrestling with the extinguisher trying to get it to work we triggered the thing into action just as Kimball looked at the open end of the funnel shaped nozzle. When it went off it sprayed his face and business suit with foam and got some on me also. By that time the others had joined us and somehow we managed to get the fire out before an Azusa fire truck arrived on the scene. We had some explaining to do and afterwards decided to abandon that project as being too much of a fire hazard in the hands of kids. Dan Kimball and I had a lot of laughs over that incident later, but it was not funny at the time.

It was evident we were wasting our time with all these crackpot ideas so decided to do some market research on our own and narrowed the field down to household accessories as the post war housing boom was really getting under way. From there we further narrowed things down to the plumbing and electric systems in new homes. We found there was a lot of room for improvement in kitchen plumbing swing spouts. The only things available at that time were made of cast brass and while functional did not have much eye appeal and were hard to keep clean and bright so we set-

tled on kitchen swing spout fixtures.

We engaged an industrial designer who came up with some very modern looking ledge mounted and wall mounted fixtures from which we picked the design with the greatest appeal. It contained internal plumbing that was all fabricated of brass and copper silver soldered together. This internal assembly was housed in a stamped brass casing that had all flat angular surfaces and would be easy to keep clean. With the OK from our parent company we set about converting the plant for production of the new product line which required plating, buffing, and other special equipment and facilities. We also had to develop a lot of new tooling and special silver soldering equipment that could handle large volumes of parts. Finally everything was ready and we began production.

About this time Trevor Gardner asked me to put his dad to work to keep him out of the local watering holes. His father was a typical tweed-suited Englishman with limited manufacturing skills so I put him to work hand deburring the stamped parts before plating.

We set up a national distribution system where the product could be sold through hardware stores, plumbing supply houses, etc., and the orders began coming in by droves. We had set the suggested retail price at \$10.50 and the swing spouts sold like hotcakes at that price. We had hit upon a veritable gold mine. And then Sears Roebuck came into the picture. Sears wanted to carry the line and gave us an initial order for 10,000 units. We had no sooner delivered those when Sears came back with an order for 20,000 more. By this time we were running two full shifts and had some 200 employees in the plant.

The bubble burst one morning when I was reading through the LA Times and came across a full page Sears ad offering the swing spouts for \$8.97 each. By the time I got to the office there were stacks of telegrams from our regular customers canceling their orders. They could not compete against the Sears price and we

could not offer them a better price because our cost of manufacturing was \$8.50 per unit.

While we were all sitting around trying to figure out what to do next I got a call from George Ford who had worked at Vultee in Downey and was the person who had arranged for Virginia's trip to Allentown via Santa Fe. He wanted me to join him at Joyce Shoes in Pasadena. I told him I knew nothing about shoe manufacturing and he said that would make no difference as he really wanted my help in converting the shoe making operations into a conveyORIZED system, something unheard of in the shoe industry. The challenge was something I could not turn down so I left General Tire of California and went to work at Joyce Shoe Company. The first thing George Ford did was introduce me to Bill Joyce and his wife Fye Joyce who was to become a nationally known footwear designer.

I was given a tour of the plant and was amazed at how antiquated, at least so I thought, the methods of making shoes were. A week after I arrived the plant was shut down for two weeks and everyone was given a vacation with pay. During that two weeks, using their regular maintenance people and some temporary outside help, we completely changed the plant over to a fully conveyORIZED system, not realizing at the time that we were revolutionizing the shoe industry. When the employees returned to work after their forced two week vacation they were totally traumatized by what they saw.

Because of the radical changes made in the various operations we had to establish all new production standards for the work force and I found myself back taking time and motion studies and setting piece rates. The affects of the changes were dramatic and resulted in a large reduction in manufacturing costs and better working conditions for the employees. I was also learning how to make shoes and actually hand made several pairs for myself and Virginia. Virginia really lucked out later because she wore a size 4-1/2 shoe, which happens to be the size of all model shoes used in women's

shoe shows. After the seasonal shows were over Virginia ended up with a lot of sample shoes for fall, spring and summer wear.

On the morning of June 24, 1947 I was listening to the news on my car radio as I was driving to work and heard the announcement that a private pilot and business man from Boise, Idaho, named Kenneth Arnold, had seen a bunch of disk shaped objects flying at high speed near Mount Rainier. It was that report that set off the Flying Saucer craze that is known today as the UFO phenomenon. Thus I got in on the ground floor of that and whatever they are. It was quite a subject of discussion that has never ended to this day.

On February 6, 1948 Virginia gave birth to our third child, a boy who we named James Allen Harker, Jimmy for short. When asked why we wanted another child we would tell people that we already had one of each, a boy and a girl and just had to have another to see which it would be. Jimmy was a perfect little baby, except for the time he got his diapers off in his crib, while we were out in the back yard, and smeared all the bedroom wall he could reach from the crib with his fresh poop. What a mess that was to clean up. He had a smile that resembled Ike Eisenhower's and everyone remarked to that effect.

In the spring of 1948 we sold our home in Rosemead for \$9,000 and bought a new house in Temple City for \$13,400. It had been constructed by a private builder and had never been lived in. It had three bedrooms, and one bathroom, a large living room with end dining area and a large kitchen. It was on a deep lot with a big back yard and separate unattached two-car garage. It was located on the south side of Broadway just three doors from Baldwin Avenue. We later added a fourth bedroom and second bathroom along with a large patio and carport.

That winter Southern California experienced an unusual snow storm that blanketed the area with three to six inches of snow. It changed the appearance of eve-

rything and kids were making snow men all over the place. The schools closed for the day and there were many fender benders because so many motorists did not know how to drive in the snow and ice. Nothing looked familiar and later in the day as the sun came out it all turned to slush and really caused problems

One evening as I was driving along Huntington Drive on my way home from the Joyce plant I saw several fire trucks and a crowd of people in a vacant lot in San Marino. I had no idea what was going on until I got home and learned on the radio that a little girl named Kathy Fiscus had fallen down an uncapped well and rescue efforts were underway. The event received national attention while the rescue efforts went on around the clock for three days. We watched some of it on a black and white TV set that Dad Bosch had bought. It was the first TV in either of our families and had a small screen the size of a postcard but the cabinet was as large as a jukebox.

Two newscaster gave the first, on the spot, remote TV coverage of the rescue. They were Bill Walsh and Stan Chambers and both became famous as a result of the coverage they provided. Unfortunately by the time rescuers reached Kathy she was already dead.

Before long I was appointed Superintendent of the experimental shop at Joyce which was a separate facility devoted to making all the sample shoes for the fashion shows and special shoes for people with foot deformities. That was where I developed a good working relationship with Fye Joyce. Since some of the shoe designs were a bit radical we decided it would be good to "road test" them so I hired two women to wear sample shoes all day while walking the streets of Pasadena. We called them our "street walkers" and had to administer to a lot of blisters at the end of each day.

One afternoon Bill Joyce called me into his office and said he wanted me to layout a factory capable of producing 2,000 pairs of shoes a day. I asked him where the building was and he said it did not yet exist

and for me to start from scratch which I did and within two weeks had the plans on his desk for a 2,000 pair a day factory.

Joyce looked the plans over carefully and seemed pleased with my efforts and then asked, "Bill, do you really think this plant will be capable of putting out 2,000 pairs a day?" I told him I was sure of it and he said, "I'm glad you feel that way because you're going to run it." I then asked where the plant would be and he replied, "In Puerto Rico." I was not even sure at the time where Puerto Rico was and was taken aback at his sudden response and his attitude that reflected his feelings it was a done deal. For the rest of the day I was in a state of shock at the thought of having to move my family and our belongings to some place outside the continental U.S. I dropped the bomb shell on Virginia when I got home that night and we dug out a geography book to find out where Puerto Rico was and learned it was located in the Caribbean not far from Cuba. We also learned it was a Commonwealth of the U.S. and that the native language was Spanish. We then told our folks which put them in a state of consternation, throwing hundreds of questions at us, most of which we could not answer.

Plans were made for me to leave in two weeks with Virginia and the children to follow me in six months. Once again our family would be separated and Virginia would be left with making all the arrangements for moving our things which would go by ship this time. I suggested she start learning some Spanish and we got a set of Berlitz records for her to listen to. I promised to keep her informed by mail and would send her photos of the place she would soon be calling home for who knew how long.