

CHAPTER XIV



As the time for my departure drew near I told Virginia to put the pool table in storage as I felt there was too much chance for damage if we shipped it along with our other belongings and I did not know what sort of housing would be available in Puerto Rico. There were a lot of emotional good-byes among family, friends and co-workers. Neither I nor any of them knew when we would see each other again. As I packed a couple of suitcases I suddenly realized I would not see my children or Virginia for six months and felt like calling the whole thing off, but the plans were too far along to change anything.

On the day of my departure and with a sizable entourage following us we drove to Los Angeles International Airport, now LAX, where I said my final good-byes, boarded a United DC4 and headed for New York with a \$50,000 cashiers check in my coat pocket. It was the most money I had ever had on my person and I worried about carrying so much money. The check was for use in opening a business bank account when I got to Puerto Rico. The non-stop flight to New York was uneventful and I admit I was a bit excited about the adventure I was undertaking.

It was dark when we landed at La Guardia Field in New York where I had to transfer to a TWA four-engine Lockheed Constellation for the flight to my final destination. What a change. The plane was full of Puerto Ricans and one woman had a large box of baby

cheeps on her lap which kept chirping for most of the trip which was all at night. Since much of the trip was over water and it was dark there was nothing to see out the plane's windows so I took a nap. As daylight broke I could see we were flying over some islands and the water around them was a light blue and green and very clear.

We landed at the Isla Verde Airport in the center of San Juan around 7:00 a.m. and the moment I set foot outside the door of the plane my glasses fogged up due to the humidity. I also noticed a strange smell. It was the regular odor of all tropical islands but very strange to me at the time. As I headed for the Terminal I saw George Ford waving to me. He had flown down a few days before I did. He had a rental car and we drove around San Juan for a bit and then went to the Condado Beach Hotel for breakfast. I was quite impressed by my surroundings which were both strange and fascinating to me at the same time.

George had gone down ahead of me to set things up for my arrival and during breakfast he gave me a briefing during which he told me the factory I would be setting up was in Ponce on the other side of the island. He said there were some empty buildings in Ponce that we would be using for the Joyce de Puerto Rico facility.

After breakfast we went to meet some bankers, attorneys and government officials by way of introducing me to people who I would be having a lot of future dealings with. Joyce had elected to set the plant up in Puerto Rico to take advantage of the tax free holiday on the island which was designed to promote industrial development by inducing state side companies to locate there and provide much needed job opportunities for the poverty stricken natives. Under this plan companies operating in Puerto Rico were exempt from paying any U.S. income taxes and were also exempt from paying any local taxes.

To help finance the Joyce operation, stock in Joyce de Puerto Rico had been sold to a number of

wealthy and influential families on the island. As President of Joyce de Puerto Rico I was a member of the Board of Directors and accountable to the stock holders as well as the parent company in Pasadena. Having completed all my introductions we left San Juan by car to drive to Ponce which was a three hour trip over mountain roads.

That first trip across the island was a real experience as chickens, goats and kids would run off the road as we approached at what I felt was an excessive rate of speed considering the conditions of the narrow road and all the pedestrians and animals walking around. But George just laid on the horn most of way and we managed to get to Ponce without killing any people or livestock. I had noticed there seemed to be an awful lot of horn blowing while we were driving around San Juan, but that was nothing compared to the din of horns in Ponce.

Our first mission in Ponce was to go to the Bank of Ponce where I was introduced to the bank president, Rafael Calderon, and opened an account in the name of Joyce de Puerto Rico using that \$50,000 check I had been carrying in my pocket. I was much relieved once it was safely in the bank and out of my possession. The rest of the day was spent introducing me to a lot of important people including Ted Moscoso who was the head of "Operation Bootstraps," the term used to describe the effort at industrialization described above.

Fortunately for me everyone I met spoke good English and I did not have to resort to what I could remember of my High School Spanish. That first afternoon we went to the Amelia Hotel where I checked in and rented a room for a month. We then toured the area in and around Ponce which included a trip out to the edge of town to see the buildings I would be converting into the Joyce de Puerto Rico shoe factory.

There were two large buildings that formed an "L" with some 50 ft. separating the two buildings. One end of the long leg of the "L" faced the street and had a sec-

ond floor office area. The short leg ran at right angles behind the long building. An alley ran along one side of the front building to the rear one and a turkey grower had a small operation going across the alley from the buildings. By this time I was getting a bit woozy from all the activity of the day so after George and I had a dinner of rice and beans we went to the hotel to bed down.

I had never slept under a mosquito net before but it was a common bedroom accessory on the island because none of the buildings or houses had window screens. Before going to bed I made a phone call to Virginia and it took about 10 minutes to get the connection through and there was a bit of static once the connection was made. We did not talk long and I just wanted her and the children to know I had safely arrived.

The next day I began following up on some leads that had been given to me the day before concerning several potential key employees I might consider hiring. I began setting up appointments to meet with these people in the hotel lobby for the purpose of interviewing them. One of the first jobs I wanted to fill was the position of plant superintendent. I needed someone who could serve as my assistant and had a good knowledge of the local people. He turned out to be the third person I interviewed that day and I liked him from the start. His name was Jacobo (Jake) Calder and over the years he became my most valued employee and a close personal friend.

With Jake's help we interviewed a lot of people during the rest of the week and ended up filling most of the key management positions. Jake and I spent the next two weeks rounding up office furniture, getting phones installed and buying basic office supplies. At the same time we were negotiating with the Ponce Iron Works for fabrication of the assembly lines we would be installing in the factory. We also had to have curing ovens built, overhead conveyors, material storage racks, spray booths, and a hundred other plant facilities built

to our specifications.

At this same time we were placing orders with state side companies for delivery of sewing machines, leather cutting machines and special shoe manufacturing equipment from the U.S. Shoe Company. While awaiting the arrival of all this equipment we had a crew laying out and striping all the aisle lines and marking where each piece of equipment was to be located when it arrived. Among our first hires were members of our maintenance crew which consisted of electricians, carpenters, plumbers and machinists. They were the nucleus of the manpower required to prepare the plant for eventual production.

I had to revise my layout on the spot because we had two buildings instead of one so I set it up for all the raw material storage and leather cutting to be handled in the smaller building and all assembly work, final inspection and shipping to be done in the larger building.

It had been prearranged that all raw material purchasing would be performed by the Pasadena plant and then shipped to us as none of the materials such as leather skins, fabrics, thread, adhesives and findings were available on the island. We were then to be billed for all materials shipped to us by the mainland suppliers and they would become a part of our manufacturing costs.

As things progressed in preparing the facility for production the need for training employees became of paramount importance and I asked that Helge Ystrom be sent down from Pasadena to assist in the training. Helge was a long time employee of Joyce and knew the processes inside and out. When Helge arrived a few months later I made him Superintendent of Production and promoted Jake to Works Manager.

During all this time I had kept extending my stay at the Amelia Hotel and had developed a good relationship with the hotel staff. Before the six months were up we had the plant turning out 600 pairs of shoes a day and it was time to make arrangements for the arrival of

my family. I found a small house in La Rambla which was a subdivision on the outskirts of town and rented it on a month to month basis with the idea of getting something larger once Virginia was there to help in the selection. In the meantime I had acquired a car and drove to San Juan the day before their scheduled arrival to pick them up. I had been in San Juan the week before to attend the grand opening of the newly completed Caribe Hilton Hotel and that affair was a real bash.

I was at the airport when their plane arrived and it was sure good to see them. At the end of the first three months I had flown back to California on a business trip to the Pasadena plant and had spent a week with my family who were still in Temple City. The day of their arrival I gave them a short tour of San Juan and then got a room for us at the new Caribe Hilton where we stayed for two nights to allow them time to adjust to their new surroundings before heading for Ponce.

The trip across the island to Ponce on the winding mountain road was a cultural shock for the children. Live stock roamed free on the island and they had never seen pigs, goats and chickens crossing a road in front of them to say nothing of the little native kids who ran around stark naked and peed wherever they happened to be standing at the moment the urge struck them.

By the time we got to the little house in La Rambla our belongings had arrived and were sitting by the house in large wood and metal sea-going shipping containers. I got a couple of the maintenance men from the plant to come out and help us unload all the stuff and get it in the house. I had bought mosquito nets for all the beds and had to explain to the kids what they were for. The floors of the house were all ceramic tile and we put our carpets on the floor without any padding underneath. They all had a hard time getting to sleep that first night due to the strange sounds they had never heard before but which are typical of nights on tropical island.

Virginia got up the next morning and tried to open the back door off the kitchen to take a look outside but could not get the door opened. She called me and I found out why. A big cow was lying up against the door. That kind of shook her up.

I then hired two local girls to serve as housekeeper and baby sitters for which I paid them each one dollar a day. One Sunday we were invited out to dinner at the home of some new friends we had made and took the children with us. When we returned home the carpets were all soaking wet. The girls had decided to wet mop the floors and not knowing any better had poured buckets of water on the floors as they were used to doing when mopping tile floors. It took a long time for those carpets to dry out in the humid weather and the place began to smell of mold.

That house proved to be too small for the five of us and we began looking for a larger place which we soon found in a neighborhood right in town called Alhambra. The place we found was two stories with the bedrooms and a bath on the second floor and a large living room, dining room, kitchen and bath on the ground floor. There was a large covered balcony facing the street on the second floor and along with a large rear yard it also had a "Casita," a small house in the rear for live-in maids that had one bedroom and one bath.

It was at this time that we began acquiring a domestic staff which included a cook, baby sitter and gardener. We hired a young woman named Maria as our cook and a teenage girl named Priscilla as a baby sitter. We also hired a gardener named Manuel to take care of the yard. Maria and Manuel each lived in their own homes and Priscilla stayed in the Casita. All of this for the total cost of \$50 per month!

The two older children, Richey and Harriet, were already beginning to pick up some Spanish from other children in the neighborhood and from Maria and Priscilla. We got them both enrolled in private elementary schools because the public schools were not all

that good. Richy was enrolled in the Colegio de Varones, an all boys Catholic school, run by a group of Jesuit Monks. Harriet was enrolled in the Colegio de Lucenio and both of them had to wear uniforms to school.

Richy wore tan pants and shirt with a black tie and Harriet wore a green skirt with white blouse and green bow tie. Harriet's blouses had a little bee insignia sewn on them as the name of her school was bee in Spanish. They both did well in school and began speaking pretty good Spanish.

We were Protestants but that made no difference to the school administrators and no attempts were made in either school to convert our children to Catholicism. By mutual understanding our children were exempt from attending the weekly Mass held at both schools.

I would take each of them to their school on my way to work and then pick them up for lunch which ended their school day. Due to the practice of "Siesta" observed by the natives the lunch period was two hours long.

One day when I picked Richy up he was white as a sheet and looked like he was sick. When I asked what was wrong he said he had attended a magic show at school and that a magician had come out in a fancy costume saying "Abra Cadabra", while a little boy ran around the stage ringing a bell and then the magician sprinkled water all around out of a stick with a ball on the end of it. After some further questioning I finely figured out what had happened.

When the kids in his class went to Mass he would stay in the room studying and on this particular day he got curious and decided to find out where the other kids were going so he tagged along. What he witnessed was the ritual of a Catholic Mass but did not understand what it was all about and thought the Latin spoken by the Priest, was magic talk. To my best memory Harriet never had a similar kind of experience.

It was while living in the house in Alhambra that we went through our first hurricane, one that hit the island in 1949. We watched the storm from the second floor of the house as sheet metal, palm fronds and pieces of wood and other debris went flying down the street like so many pieces of paper. The noise was horrible and the rain was coming down horizontally like out of a fire hose. The power was out for two days and we had to resort to the use of hurricane lamps, several of which I had purchased before the beginning of the hurricane season.

Every time there was a hurricane alert we had to board up all the windows in the factory and send the employees home until the danger was over. We did not suffer any serious damage at either the factory or our home but many buildings were destroyed and some of the seaside roads were washed away.

There were a number of mainland families living in Ponce whose fathers and husbands were operating factories and business there. This group formed a solid fraternity and we all became fast friends, holding our own social affairs that consisted of parties, trips to the beaches, and special events at the Club de Portivo which was the equivalent of a Country Club in the states. The Club de Portivo had a bar which was heavily used and where we all developed a liking for Don Q Rum which was produced at a distillery in Mercedita, a suburb of Ponce. The Club also had a swimming pool, dining area and play area. The entire building was open on all sides but very comfortable all year around due the temperate climate on the island, Puerto Rico being the same latitude as the Hawaiian Islands.

I will never forget the day we all went to the club for a swim and Jimmy, who was just a toddler and had not yet learned to swim, got excited and jumped in the deep end of the pool before I could get his life jacket on. He sunk to the bottom and we had to jump in and rescue him. After that experience he would never go near the edge of the pool without his life jacket. He learned

to swim shortly after that incident.