

*Thanks to Roy Sparks for the following Dundalk nostalgia...*

In many ways as we have all aged "gracefully" and our "story to tell" brings many of us together more than we might expect. As I viewed the old photos of the Sparrows Point and Bethlehem Steel Mill, I thought about my own personal working experience one summer between college semesters at the age of 20.

Jon Valentine from our class (he passed about 20 years ago) and I were employed at the steel plant during the summer when we were looking for a job to earn some money for college. We were hired as a team of two, by the Fuel Department. We tested the efficiency of electrostatic precipitators, which were the size of a large 2-story house. The discharged combustible gas from each operating blast furnace was sent by huge pipes to these metal monsters. It was the hottest and most physically demanded job I ever had. Jon & I received two-weeks of training daily with exotic instruments, hoses, lab operations and a heavy tool belt.

Ceramic "thimbles" were dried in an oven overnight inside an open glass container and weighed on a gram scale and then sealed with a glass top. We used these thimbles to measure the volume of "dirty" gas coming into the precipitator versus the amount of "clean" gas leaving the opposite end of each unit. A formula was used that included the cubic feet of air in versus the air out, the amount of particulate collected after an overnight oven drying, the barometric pressure at the time of testing, and another half a dozen numeric values of an equation. So, in this red-dusted clinging air, while the sun beat down on us standing next to a 140 degree steel box shaking and making noise like a rocket bolted to a launch pad, we used a slide ruler (remember them) calculating what was to be a number of 85% or higher, for the "clean" gas to refuel the blast furnace once it was running.

Our last and most dreaded job that summer in August was to climb the six round sintering red brick stacks that towered hundreds of feet in the air. These were the babies that sent out the fine red dust that covered cars and homes. When the wind direction was angry, most parts of the nearby communities of Sparrow Point, East Point Shopping Center, Essex and Dundalk were covered with a red dust on all horizontal surfaces. Internal temperatures of the stacks were 240-260 degrees. The outside steel platform where we worked, was only 30 inches wide and usually about 130 degrees when the day time temperature reached above 90 degree mark.

Each day I took two showers after work. One at the plant after stripping off the work clothes and another when I reached home at Ranch Lane. I would blow red dust from my nose throughout the evening. OSHA what was that? I used an entire box of Q-Tips that summer for 3 months of work.

This experience was one of my most valuable lessons to learn about life and hard work. I was never so happy to see the month of September arrive and resume college classes. Thirty years later, as I taught college photography classes at CCBC-Dundalk and

eventually became the department chairperson, students would ask me, "What was the motivation in your life to go to college?" I would simply say, "Bethlehem Steel."

After an AA in electronics at the Community College of Baltimore City, a BS at U of MD at College Park, 30 graduate credits and then a 36 credit MA degree in "Publication Design" from the University of Baltimore with classes at the MD Institute of Art and John Hopkins, I accomplished more in academia than I really needed in life.

Which brings me back to the starting point when I was attending the new Dundalk High School. My immediate family was my mother and father who both worked at Bethlehem Steel. "Kitty" worked as a clerical secretary in the Metallurgy Department at the Main Office. Dad worked most of his life in the galvanizing sheet mill. Later, he walked on top of hot steel ingots inspecting them as a quality control specialist. My aunt Ginny, my Dad's older sister and her husband, my uncle Gus lived with us in the city until I was 12 years of age. It was at this time, my grandmother raised me and provided the meals daily for the six of us in a row house on Cornwall Street near the former Baltimore City Hospital, now called Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. Both my aunt Ginny and uncle Gus worked at Bethlehem Steel. Ginny was a secretary at the Main Office, while Gus was a carpenter in the mill. My Dad passed at the early age of 60 from a brain aneurism. My mother remarried a friend of the family, John Meyers after his wife had passed. John was an electrician at the steel plant. Five family members of mine worked a total of 163 years at the Sparrow Point Bethlehem Steel Plant. They are all are now just a memory to hold onto much like equipment today, rusting like a ghost from the past.

The East Baltimore community, our parents and neighbors, were all hard working individuals. They knew how important education was to them and their children. As members of the '62 DHS Scholarship Committee, we need to remind ourselves what an important task we have helping others achieve the goal of a college education and the rewards that are a direct result of this effort. This, I most certainly believe is true. This is why I enjoy working with each of you.

Roy Sparks