

## Stumpings and My debut!



This was my life during early seventies. Probably many paper makers will vouch for me. The text is intended to tickle. But mind you, it was true!

Everybody knows how great wicket keepers stump batsmen. But I must admit there are several ways which some of us may not be aware of.

After becoming a bachelor's in chemical engineering, I wanted to start my life as a bachelor. Interview with stalwarts in industry, at Hindustan polymers, in November 1969. Almost 25% of our Andhra university batch was there, reporting at around 9 am. The interview took place till 7 pm! Nothing to eat, not even tea. We could just get some water. The batch completes a round; and second round starts. After bouncers, Third round. Ball leaving dangerously away from off stump. Fourth round. Fifth round. Ball spinning awkwardly. Next round. There was a serious test to the subject I learned; evaporation, distillation.... Design of columns was discussed. All sincerely and seriously answered. And then it happened. A googly.

The interviewer asked me "What is Blackwood system?" ("What?") (I asked myself, not the interviewer). I did not answer. He asked again. I was confident of my learning, I said there is nothing like Blackwood system in evaporation or distillation. You say you are a bridge player and you do not know what is Blackwood? He referred to my application in which I wrote that I play Contract Bridge! I am stumped!

That was a googly. A wonderful googly. It taught me to be more attentive, not callous in an interview.

I was seeking one more, at the then Andhra Pradesh Paper Mills Ltd., in Rajahmundry. My phone call was duly taken by the Personnel manager; and I was asked to attend an interview. When I reached the mill, they wanted certified copies of papers- they got them typed and one of their officers duly certified as true copies. Late sri Ravindranathan, a doyen of paper industry and then the production superintendent, took my interview, a long one. I was asked to report next day for another interview, with the General Manager.

He was no more than Dr Roshanlal Bhargava, who was instrumental in bringing qualified technical personnel into paper industry. During 1963, seventeen fresh engineers were appointed. I duly reported in his office. Well, interview began in good earnest. He had a profoundly serious look at my papers. My mark- lists in particular. The final year marks, to be specific. And he asked me, "You say you are first in the class and what is this mark?" He was referring to the 32 marks out of possible 70 awarded to me in the paper "Unit processes in organic synthesis", my favourite theory paper. I answered 100%; there can be no mistakes. Even the external examiner was very kind in awarding this mark. This could not be explained....

I weighed 39 kg; and was short. (I grew up later to 46kg and 5'5.5"). In spite of all this, I received orders and I reported to the mill for duty on 12-12-1969. Sri Ravindranathan either retired or left for another job next day.

I was asked to report to ASHA Machine (?) This time I was clean bowled. What is this lady doing in Industry? I dared not ask the person. I managed to grab my papers; and to mumble the name outside the office. Some workers pointed out to a building.

Carefully I moved in. Pandemonium all round. I came to know that a paper machine is named ASHA. That machine was shut for a wire change. I joined the workmen carrying small table rolls. I was lucky, I could have easily fallen under one. Problem is lack of introduction. That was my debut.

Life as a paper maker

A few workers came to know about this new silly recruit and offered to help in introducing. There was only one introduction. About the CPM. CPM? Don't you know? Chief paper maker. How serious he is, how angry he would be to see new engineers, how terrible his tongue was ....and so on. I was duly prepared, (It means I was shivering in my shoes.)

Terror struck. The CPM was there! Better I leave it at that. When the CPM is on rounds, we learnt to hose fourdrinier wire on return indiscriminately. Else, invite the wrath. I still do not understand the merit of hosing.

One day during 1970, I was summoned to his chambers. A Babu called me to inform. IAS officers are referred to as Babus in several quarters. He used this word for his office staff. Meaning, clerks. Usual routine and rigmarole. Then there was an enquiry as to what I was learning. He asked, "What is head?" ....and after a few seconds, followed up with the sequel, "My head?" This was how paper making was duly introduced. Go and stand at the head box for two weeks! Later at wire for two weeks and so on... This is training.

For a few years, there were weekly shifts. After a week of night shifts, I used to lose a kg in weight. During subsequent two weeks, slowly pick up.

The problem is acute during shift change from night shift to afternoon shift. It was a nightmare. After reporting night shift results, leave for home at 6-30am; and report for duty to afternoon shift close to 2pm, same day. The weekly offs were not necessarily planned during shift change.

The production planning and product planning do not merit any mention. Shift in-charges were never informed of the market requirement. I still remember, when poster paper was made for the first time, it was like manufacturing Tetra pack and mill attempted Tetra pack several times with bamboo fibre only!

The greatness of a shift in charge was determined by the privilege of patching a wire (Bronze wires those days). If he was allowed to, that is it.

One day Yours truly was summoned to office again. After a few ....., he informed. "During our shift days, we used to work under the British. There were only two lines—you son of a bitch and you, son of a gun! These days you start complaining about simple things!" Then he informed of a get together. And a participation fee. He asked me" Will you take whiskey or beer? Then he paused...Oh !! you are a vegetarian like me!" He added, as an afterthought.

Well, all was not ill or bad. We used to have a mess, in which beautiful Marwadi food used to be served. For Diwali, if you attend puja at mid night, get a day's salary as puja purse.

Carrier in a paper mill can be truly compared with the game of cricket. When anybody comes to bat entire field turns hostile and man in middle is tested with bouncers and googlies. How well you apply your skills decides whether you are player of T20 or ODI or test cricket.

That is life and that is how it moves on -----



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