

AN IDEAL EXPERIENCE

By James W. Russell, August 7, 2024

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I was early in 1956 when after the daily announcements I received a note that Holten High School Principal, Cornelius Dunn, wanted to see me in his office after lunch. I wondered why he called me, a member of the senior class, to his office so near to the end of the school day. You can just wonder, as I did, what were the recent behavioral “sins” I had committed that would demand such a meeting? I wasn’t aware of anything since my sophomore year when I could imagine several infractions. Indeed, most kids had never seen the inside of his office or cared to. It was a long school day, and it was about to get a lot longer. When I saw him after lunch (who could enjoy lunch?) Mr. Dunn told me to go home, put on a suit and tie and go see Mrs. McCutcheon at Ideal Baby Shoe.

At the appointed time, I was properly attired but apprehensive as I entered the office of the owner of Ideal Baby Shoe. Mrs. McCutcheon told me she knew my mother worked in the office of the company, then put me at ease by asking about my family, and hobbies. I told her about a bull calf I had raised in 1954, and this introduced an extended conversation as her father had once imported bulls from Scotland. Next came a discussion about school and aspirations for further schooling. I mentioned an interest in college and possibly becoming a teacher.

As the conversation was coming to an end, Mrs. McCutcheon said she was offering me a scholarship which would cover tuition, books and other education expenses to any college, anywhere in the world, to study in any field of interest. I later learned that since 1956 was the fifth year of the Foundation’s Scholarship, and she awarded a similar scholarship to another boy in my class who had the same freedom of choice, and to three girls; however, since she was a Trustee of the Hunt Hospital, the girls had to study nursing. She then introduced me to her nephews who ran the Baby Shoe Co.

Jim and Bob McGinnity gave me a job that over the next four years provided work for whenever I was available: days off, weekends, vacation periods, etc. and exposed me to every aspect of the company from cutting room to packing shoes for shipment to preparing cartons for shipping by national freight carriers, including a several-week, solo sales trip through the state of South Carolina. An interesting note was that I was assigned to paint the “10-Footer”, then located on Butler Ave and is now behind the Society’s Page House.

Though I did not accept the offer of full-time employment after college, some twenty years later the company assisted me in analyzing a large amount of data needed to complete a graduate degree. The work involved keypunching input on thousands of pre- and post- responses to training undertaken by officer candidates at the Massachusetts Military Academy during an initial period of study. Then the cards were run through a processing machine that produced volumes of pages which I then used to do the required analyses. Over the next two years, the analyses led to the completion of the final project and the receipt of my Doctorate.

Thus, for a period of over twenty-four years, I indeed had an IDEAL Experience.