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C.R.LeSueur

Autobiographical sketch

1957

Librarianship, as a profession, came late and accidentally into my life. My planned career began in January, 1946, following retirement from the Canadian Navy, the peace-time aspects of which deflected me from the Naval career traditional in my Mother's family. Prior to Naval service, I had worked in various casual jobs, such as part-time winter jobs selling, and summer vacation jobs as a deck-hand on Great Lakes grain freighters, and labor and laboratory jobs in the Imperial Oil Refinery (Standard Oil of Canada) in Sarnia, Ontario, which contributed little to specific vocational training, but a great deal to life experience. With the cessation of hostilities in 1945, I was accepted into the Management Training Scheme at the Imperial Oil, a scheme for the development of technical management prospects. It consisted in jobs in unskilled and skilled labor activities, and in office capacities throughout the refinery for short periods of time, to achieve a thorough knowledge of plant operations and management, to be supplemented by University training. The personal and personnel relations aspects of this work interested me far more than the technical aspects, casting doubt on my choice of engineering as a career, but I enrolled in Mechanical Engineering at the School of Practical Science, University of Toronto, in September, 1947.

Part time jobs were necessary during term to supplement the Government's Veterans' Education Allowances, and these I had in profusion and variety in Toronto - bus-boy and waiter in a popular delicatessen, waiter and bar tender in a sophisticated supper-club, mail sorter on the "graveyard shift" at the Central Post Office, and taxi driver on the night shift. During the summer vacations I concentrated on gaining engineering experience: steel and concrete construction labor; land surveying; high-risk engineering maintenance work on the International Bridge at Sarnia; and again, the Engineering Department at the Imperial Oil. The first jobs brought me into first contact with strongly unionised groups (the Imperial Oil was non-union), which sharpened for me the personal aspects of industry, and reinforced the gravitation towards personnel work.

After three terms in Mechanical Engineering, I came to the conclusion that I would never make a happy engineer, so I decided to switch to Liberal Arts to get both sides of the story. But first, a holiday - five months on a solo bicycle tour of Europe, an unforgettable experience costing me just under five hundred dollars in cash and over forty pounds in weight. Then, by taking extra classes and continuing to study during the summer vacations, I obtained my Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1950 and my Bachelor of Social Work Degree in 1951, both from the University of Toronto. My plan was to complement my technological training with training and experience in Social Work, a specialised aspect of human relations and sociological practice, and then to apply the results in industrial personnel work.

During these University years there was little time for sports, although I did manage to make the University tennis and golf teams, and swimming and basketball in the winter. I also was elected representative of University College to the Students Administrative Council, secretary and then President of Delta Upsilon Fraternity, and Toronto delegate to the International Student Council's meetings in Montreal, in various years.

Upon graduation from the School of Social Work in 1951, I secured a position as Social Case Worker with the Toronto Children's Aid Society, one of the finest in the country. I accepted the job after making it clear that I intended to stay only two years before moving on for more advanced, or different experience. This two year period both my employers and I felt to be the minimum time in which the Agency could obtain full return for their investment, and the maximum time which I could spend in any one restricted aspect of this work.

In 1953, after two successful years in Social Work, which, however, had proven to be excessively demanding, emotionally, I obtained a job in Methods, Time and Motion Study with Canadian General Electric in Toronto. Eight months later I was transferred to the Personnel Department as Administrative Assistant to the Supervisor of Wage and Salary Administration. In April, 1954 our section of the plant - the Power Transformer Department - moved to a newly constructed plant, still uncompleted, in the very small town of Guelph, seventy miles north of Toronto. Here we had to set up our own job structure, and labor relations structure, combining the best features of those extant, dealing mainly with new personnel, and with the introduction of a new and very militant union with consequent local problems in the impact of an aggressive industry on a sleepy town. The intensity of this experience, from the first days in an unheated, half-completed factory, to the final days in a humming, unionised establishment of about one thousand employees, was worth several years of less concentrated work elsewhere.

However, once the job had been "licked", I found myself increasingly restless in this exceedingly small - physically and mentally - town. As the job became more and more routine I became increasingly aware of vicious "office politics", both inside and outside the plant, and as I moved closer to management responsibilities, of an intellectual dishonesty in relations with labor which I found unacceptable. A casual week-end visit to New York City - my first - showed me the place where I wanted to be.

Immigration requirements specified guarantee of employment, and this I managed to secure only from the Assistant Director of New York University Libraries. Jobs in my own field were impossible to secure because I was told I was "too old" to start anew - I was then 32! At any rate, my entry into the library field was only a means to obtain the necessary immigration visa, and I had so told the Director, adding that I would stay for two years to repay his confidence. However, my work at NYU soon became totally absorbing, and within two years I had enrolled as a part-time student at the Columbia University School of Library Service to obtain the necessary academic qualifications for pursuit of a library career.