



Gene Ziegler

Octogenarian Time Capsule

## Harold's Shock and Awe

While still in my twenties, I worked as an Industrial Engineer at Mack trucks in Allentown, Pennsylvania. My desk lay in a rustic open office space on a factory floor dedicated to engineers, draftsman and designers. If I worked late, I regularly encountered a janitor named Harold. In better times, Harold



installed rear shock-absorbers on the big truck assembly line. A heart-attack in his 50's brought an end to Harold's strenuous line job, but a benevolent company and union found him suitable employment on the less demanding janitorial staff.

A roiling bitterness over his perceived demotion made Harold a vocal complainer, and on those evenings when our paths crossed, I became an audience of one for his tale of injustice and woe. In his view, over twenty years of installing rear shocks on the assembly line, he became the

company's, if not the world's leading expert on rear truck shock installations, and on the shocks themselves. Engineers regularly consulted him on the selection of shocks to be and the configuration of installation. He saw himself as the Barron of Shocks, and his co-workers stood in awe of his knowledge and expertise.

Harold was lucky to have the safety-net of the union and company to keep him employed. But tens of thousands of American industrial workers have found themselves unemployed due to globalization, shifts in technology, and automation. Harold openly expressed his envy of my education, but he failed to embrace the professional cul-de-sac of his own making.

There are no guarantees in the modern industrial world. Mack would eventually move its truck assembly line from Pennsylvania to South Carolina to escape a powerful union. The landscape of Allentown is littered with "Harolds" who's skills are no longer needed or wanted. Tariffs and walls and bluster can't turn back globalization and automation, or the ever-changing world economy. The jobs are not coming back despite the promises of politicians.

*Gene Ziegler, Chandler Arizona October 2018*

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