

WHY I CHOSE ENGINEERING FOR MY LIFE'S WORK

THESIS FOR

MARYLAND BETA CHAPTER

TAU BETA PI

BY

Vahl E. Underwood

4/4/41

## SUMMARY

I have tried to explain throughout this thesis that my choice of a life's occupation was due to environment and an inherent curiosity to learn what made things work.

THE AUTHOR



## Why I Chose Engineering For My Life's Work.

Engineering as my life's work was not a matter of choice but one of necessity. I have always been possessed with an insatiable desire to know how and why things worked.

At the age of three I was punished for beating out the plaster brains of my sister's doll to find out how it opened and closed its eyes.

While I was in grade school we lived next door to the man who owned the power and light system in our town, and about once a month he would take me to the power plant with him. These periodic visits were the greatest events in my life, and I can still remember how I felt on my first trip. I stood in the door listening to the noise of an old Corliss engine, half afraid to enter, while cold chills of fearful delight raised goose pimples all over me. When he took me by the hand and led me to within three feet of the big flywheel, I was almost overcome with both fright and happiness.

When I was a little older I read that Eli Whitney, while a boy, had taken a watch apart and put it back together, and no one had known the difference until he told them. Not having a watch handy, I took the alarm clock and went to the coal shed. History fails to relate how Eli got the mainspring back. The case of the missing alarm clock was unsolved for years.



When I was twelve, a boy, who was sweet on my sister, taught me to drive a Model T Ford. This was my first experience at actually operating machinery, and I've never gotten over the thrill it gave me, notwithstanding the fact that I tore up the front end of the Ford on a telephone pole.

After I graduated from high school I got a job working for a power company. The old local company had sold out to a bigger company, and the old steam plant had been replaced with oil engines. This plant was operated as an auxiliary plant from May to December. There were only two of us working at the plant, and I received my most rapid promotion on that job. During the two years I worked there I was promoted from oiler, to maintenance man, to operator, and just before the plant was permanently closed the other fellow quit, and I became chief engineer; all of these at the same salary.

The following winter I worked at different odd jobs, but when summer came I went to Kansas City and got a job with a pipe line company laying water mains in a new subdivision. My new job was oiling a ditch machine. The weather was hot, and my operator was lazy, so the only time he didn't set under a tree was while the boss was around.

That fall I got the opportunity to go to school. My choice was obvious. Even with mathematics and drafting I had to study mechanical engineering.

I'm not certain whether I chose engineering or it chose me.