



Larry Siler

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- Larry Siler

LARRY

Larry Siler’s uncle, Ray Martin, owned a drive-in grocery store in Temple the small central Texas town where Larry was born. He hired Larry to scrub shelves clean with Ajax where the tin cans would leave grey rings. When he wasn’t playing baseball and basketball, Larry worked there before and after school and on weekends, restocking, mopping floors, and doing other jobs around the store. This continued through most of Larry’s first year of college. “The one

thing my uncle taught me was ‘that any job worth doing was worth doing well’ because if I didn’t, I had to do it over until I did it right.” This lesson was taken to heart as Larry took on the major roles and challenges of his life.

A fifth generation Texan, with roots dating back to the 1820’s, Larry grew up on a blackland farm. At an early age, he learned that farming is hard work. In fact, when he was 9 years old he picked 100 lbs of cotton the same day he had his appen-



Any Job Worth Doing is Worth Doing Well

SILER

dix removed. The farm also produced corn and grain sorghum and was home to a small head of cattle. Larry and his younger brother Stan raised calves and sold them at auction. Like many farm kids, Larry was driving a tractor at the age of 11 and had a driver's license by the age of 14.

For a small town, Temple was blessed with a fair amount of manufacturing (school desks, farm implements, plastics, etc.). With a desire to learn something technical, Larry eventually

went to work for a small foundry. He worked at the foundry for 2 years before graduating from Temple Junior College where he was a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. At the foundry, he performed chemical and physical testing in the lab, prepared heat sheets for ductile irons and stainless steels, and poured specialty castings and hi-chrome centrifugal cast cylinder resleeves for mud pumps used in the oil industry. His enjoyment of the work led him to selecting the Materials Block for

his study specialty area when he went on to attend the University of Texas at Austin (UT).

The Job of an Athlete

At UT, Larry majored in Mechanical Engineering. He continued to work to pay his way through school. He washed a lot of pots and pans in the dorms and at his fraternity; worked at a bakery baking bread; and did a summer internship for Shell Pipeline Corporation. He received the first T. U. Taylor Scholarship in Engineering, a grant earmarked for an engineering student working to pay much of his own college expenses.

While he worked hard at UT, he played hard as well. A member of the social fraternity Phi Kappa Tau, he served as its Vice President. He represented the fraternity in a large number of intramural sports including eleven different sports¹ one year. He distinctly remembers it was eleven since he was technically limited to only playing ten. As a child he loved baseball and yearned like many boys to play in college or professionally. "I could hit any fast ball thrown at me, but I had trouble with the curve", Larry admits.

Larry was named to the all-star softball team by the UT Intramural Department. His memories of his wrestling career are not quite as fond. "I wrestled even though I had never wrestled competitively before in my life. I was a decent overall athlete, but not knowing any wrestling moves I won my 1st match by points but had to go all 3 rounds straining to the end. The next morning every muscle in my body hurt including my eye lids and I couldn't get out of bed. Needless to say, the next guy knew what he was doing and I was pinned pretty quickly."

In addition to approaching sports with his "any job worth doing is worth doing well" philosophy (ok, maybe we'll give him a pass on wrestling), sports taught Larry that success is achieved when everyone does their job. While individual effort is important, it does not define success as a team.

Larry played softball until he was 36, playing on teams that went to numerous state qualifiers and four national tournaments. His team typically played about 120 games a year. In his last year, he was selected to the All World Men's Church Tournament Softball Team. He served as president to the Austin Softball Association and was able to secure Austin its first national softball tournament that year.



1986 Astros. T - Steve is 2nd player from the left. M - Wesley is 2nd from the right (hands crossed).



Terry McCreery, Sarah Kamm, Larry Siler and Margaret Ruane

The Job of a Family Man

Larry was playing on three ball teams when he met his future wife. Nancy was from Houston and had graduated with a degree in dietetics from the University of Houston. She had completed an internship in Minnesota and had just moved to Temple for a job opening at the Scott & White Hospital. It was lunchtime and Larry wanted to eat at the Sirloin Stockade but his friend Joe wanted to go to the diner across the street. Luckily Larry prevailed because that is where he met Nancy. Their first date was to a softball game of course.

Larry and Nancy were married in 1973 will be celebrating their 40th Anniversary in March. They have two children,

¹ Football, Softball, Basketball, Tennis, Golf, Wrestling, Volleyball, Table Tennis, Track, Bowling, and Badminton

Stacy and Steve who Larry claims “probably ate way too much red baseball field dirt while playing over the years.” The kids ultimately found they were way more at home in the water than on land.

As his own softball career wound down, Larry turned to coaching his son’s little league team. Nineteen eighty-eight, the last year he coached before moving the family to Chicago, was a special one. “That year I had a lot of time on my hands. I had four kids that could hit and catch pretty good and that was about it. At best, I felt there were four teams with talent better than ours. One of my players only wanted to play golf and that was how he swung the bat and could care less whether he played ball or not. Anyway, I took what my uncle taught me that any job worth was worth doing well. So every afternoon of the week, I held practice. It wasn’t mandatory, but the kids showed up and we would practice.” His best player was a boy named Wesley who Larry strategically put at 2nd base since 9/10 year olds tend to hit to right field. After losing three of the first four games including “an utter whipping like a barnyard mule by the Yankees”, the extra work started to pay off.

Larry describes himself as an observational engineer. He studied each one of his players’ strengths and weaknesses as well as each team they came up against. He was determined to do his best to give them the tools to be successful and feel good about themselves. One of the things he observed here, as well as when his kids swam competitively, was the kids’ energy levels throughout the competition. Consulting with Nancy about the nuances of blood sugar levels, Larry began giving the kids half an apple before the game and a half during the third inning to make sure that they had the energy to play. This was long before it was vogue for soccer moms to routinely tote containers full of orange wedges in their SUVs. Well, to make a long story short, the team won the rest of its games including a playoff with those darn Yankees and won the league championship. The player with the golf swing learned how to swing properly and hit an inside-the-park home run in the playoff game. “It was truly rewarding to me to see the love and excitement for the game of baseball that each one of the kids had by the end of the season.”

On a sad note, four years ago Larry learned that Wesley who made the final unassisted double play to beat the Yankees had been killed by an IED bomb blast during his third tour of duty in Afghanistan. Larry’s passion for the kids he bonded with over baseball is never more evident than when he recalls this little guy rarely seen without a bat and ball who reminded him so much of himself.

Larry was similarly deeply involved in his son and daughter’s swimming careers. Stacy began swimming in Texas and the quality of the local swim club was one of the considerations

when choosing to live in Westmont just outside Chicago. At age 11 she was competing against 14 year olds and breaking their records. At age 12 she was a Illinois state freestyle champion. Busy with a variety of other things, she hung up her goggles after her junior year in high school. Like his older sister, Steve also turned out to excel in the backstroke. By the age of 16, Steve was a Junior National Champion. At 17, he was ranked the #6 backstroker in the United States. He went on to swim for the University of Pittsburgh. In November of 2000 he set the school record for the 200 yard backstroke, a record that still stands today. With kids this talented, you know how many hours Larry and Nancy must have spent at the pool.



Larry and Steve: You can do it!

The Job of a Fuel Manager

After UT and working two more years at the foundry, Larry did a brief stint as a banker at the City National Bank in Austin before joining the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) and launching what would be a lifelong career in the utility industry.

After six months of construction inspection at LCRA for a new gas plant, Larry was asked to lead an exploration to determine whether there was sufficient Texas lignite to fuel a new coal fired plant to be built in La Grange, Texas. He told his superiors, “Hey, I’m a mechanical engineer not a geologist, but I’m willing to do my best.” But this was not to be “wrestling, the sequel”. Using extensive study, hard work, and preparation and by using and helping others to learn (because you

can’t do it all yourself) the project got off the ground.

Larry was there as the plant construction began, and when railcars were needed, he took over that effort from the person that kicked it off. This was just the beginning. Over his career he ultimately managed the construction of over 7,000 railcars that were used to deliver over 389 million tons of coal in almost 24,000 trains that generated an estimated 628 million megawatt hours of electricity.

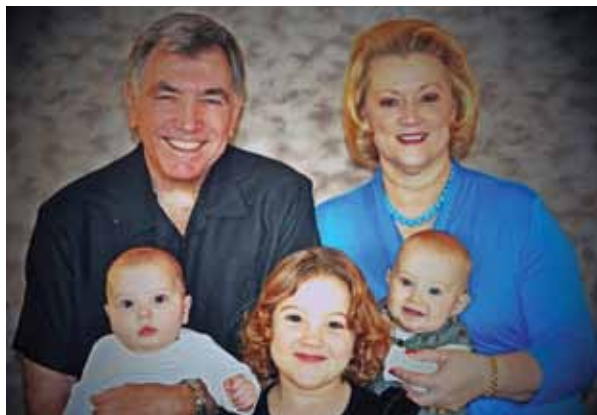
He was asked to explore, to develop, acquire leases and purchase mining equipment for second lignite reserve.. By 1986, increased competition in the PRB spurred by the access to the joint line by the C&NW, led to the decision to purchase sub-bituminous coal in place of mining the lignite. The mining equipment was sold with the bucket wheel excavator going to Caballo and the dragline ending up at Caballo Rojo.

It was during his time at LCRA that Larry became involved with the Western Coal Transportation Association (WCTA), the successor organization to the NCTA. The WCTA was then in its infancy. Utilities were building railcar fleets but some were a bit lost on how to keep them properly maintained. Larry and like minded utility fleet managers began getting together to discuss common issues. LCRA ultimately built its own railcar maintenance facility at Smithville. It is still operating today and

is now managed by Mike Kahanek, an active NCTA member and one of Larry's hires during his time at LCRA.

Larry has been active in the NCTA over the years, attending conferences, participating in committee work (most recently as Spraying Effectiveness Chairman during the ballast fouling investigation), and was always a coup for any foursome in the annual Spring golf event. Larry brought his son Steve, who was then working on his MBA, to the Spring event in Williamsburg in 2007. Following his father's footsteps in rail transportation, Steve now serves as a Process Development Specialist at NCTA member company, *Flagship Rail Services*. Larry has seen a lot of changes in the industry over four decades and thinks it may have seen its heyday. He believes the industry should have stayed engaged with the schools and educators concerning the benefits of low cost coal generation.

After LCRA, Larry spent over 24 years at Commonwealth Edison (ComEd) and Midwest Generation working exclusively in the fuel department to manage the coal supply for eight generating stations in northern Illinois and Indiana. His first day at ComEd was 8/8/88. That was the same day the first ever



Larry and Nancy Siler with Reid, Siler and Winnie circa 2010

Chicago Cubs night game was played. Coal supplies came from Illinois, the Power River Basin and the Green River Basin. Initially his responsibilities covered coal procurement, rail transportation, and contract administration as Fuel Agent and Senior Buyer. ComEd's electric base load was supplied from its nuclear generation with intermediate and peaking load provided by coal generation and other sources. Much like today where coal competes with gas and renewable generation and capital expenditures to comply with

increased environmental regulatory requirements, in the late 1980's ComEd's coal generation was suppressed by high fuel costs that drove a unit's variable dispatch cost. As a result, units frequently ran at minimum loads and cycled off over weekends. By working with coal suppliers and the railroads to resource coal supplies to the PRB, a lower variable dispatch cost was achieved. By working with power plant operations, challenges related to the different coal quality specifications required between pulverized and cyclone units were analyzed and addressed. The impact was immediate. Coal units became competitive resulting in increased coal consumption.

By 1994, ComEd's fuel staff grew and his responsibilities



Kiewit

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Kiewit Mining Group Inc. (KMG) is recognized as one of the top 10 coal producers in the U.S. Specializing in mine management, production, maintenance and contract mining ventures, KMG remains a technological leader in mine design and production. Currently, KMG owns and/or manages four surface coal mines nationwide and manages a phosphate operation in Southeast Idaho. KMG has also expanded mining ventures into Australia as well as into the Oil Sands region of Alberta, Canada.

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Inset: Larry and Nancy's two grandsons Reid and Blake (2012)



Larry with daughter Stacy and granddaughters Siler, Winnie & Zoe

changed to focus on rail and barging transportation challenges. In the early 1970's, ComEd was instrumental in helping to develop the rotary coupler used in coal unit trains, but over time ComEd had divested of its rail equipment with trains supplied by the railroads. With the change to PRB coal, ComEd became responsible for supplying trains. An initial 1453 new aluminum railcar fleet in 1993 grew to about 4500 cars by '98-99 (about 7 MMT in 1992 to nearly 20 mmtms of coal annually). Obviously to meet this demand, there were significant challenges related to car management, leasing, maintenance and related logistics. More system transitions and productivity improvements were made to increase use of short haul river barging and provide rail delivery capability with car dumpers at Kincaid and Will County stations in the mid 1990's.

ComEd began selling its coal generating assets initially with the sale of State Line and Kincaid generating stations in 1998. ComEd's remaining coal assets were sold to Edison Mission Energy in late 1999 and operated as Midwest Generation. As change and adaptability in the electric industry is a "constant", over time some older smaller units were retired and productivity enhancements were added. As Director - Fuel Transportation, Midwest became an early adopter in increasing train size from 115 to 126 to 135 cars which required plant track modifications and more operational changes. In 2003, track additions and a direct connection to UP for Joliet station were built. In 2009, Powerton station added an award winning loop track and made other rail unloading improvements. Responsibilities for management of combustion by-products reuse and disposal were also added tasks.

Larry has been blessed with the opportunity to work with

and mentor to many talented people over his 39 year career in the power, coal and rail industries. However, there are none more hardworking and capable and that he was proud to work with before his retirement from Midwest Generation than his most recent staff of Terry McCreery (Manager, Fuels), Margaret Ruane (Senior Fuel Specialist), Sarah Kamm (Fuel Specialist) and Sally Judycki (Logistics Coordinator).

The Job of a Retiree

Now retired, Larry is golfing more. He is also able to spend more time with his two grandsons in Illinois and his three granddaughters in Texas. Although only two and a half, his oldest grandson already owns a set of golf clubs and a train set!

Larry and Nancy recently bought a second home in Round Rock, Texas so they could spend more time with Stacy's growing family. Although they have loved their life in Chicago, you have to know that when a couple names their son Steven Austin (Siler), that Texas is in their blood. Chicago is still home though, as Nancy continues working as the Vice President of Consumer Affairs and Public Relations for Wilton Industries. Her job includes a TV show, "*Bake Decorate Celebrate!*", which has been seen in 47 countries and has won several Telly Awards. Episodes of Nancy's show are available to watch online.

With a busy wife and winter too cold for much golf in Chicago, Larry has some time to take on some consulting work. He approaches that task as he did throughout his life. His uncle Ray visited the family while on a business trip in 1989 a few months before he passed away. Larry feels fortunate that he was able to tell his uncle then how much what he taught him impacted his life. His uncle was very proud. ▲