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WITHOUT WRITER'S CONSENT

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RB-11  
The End of the Yellow Brick Road

846 Broadway-Lot #49  
Saugus, Mass. 01906  
May 27, 1973

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte,

I've finally gotten a job. Starting on Tuesday, May 29th., I'll begin working at Western Electric's Merrimack Valley Works. When I began looking for work in January I never anticipated that it would take nearly five months to make suitable arrangements.

Those of you who have read newsletter #4 (The Search for a Job) will recall my first unsuccessful attempts. I was through with my first round of job hunting early in February and wondering how to procede. Once again I turned to friends for assistance and came up with names of people at both Polaroid and Western Electric. Before leaving for Florida I wrote a letter outlining my ideas for a factory study and sent it with a resume to both companies.

On our return from Florida on Sunday, February 25th, the following letter from Polaroid was waiting:



# POLAROID CORPORATION

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

February 15, 1973

Mr. Richard J. Balzer  
846 Broadway-Lot #49  
Saugus, Massachusetts 01906

Dear Mr. Balzer:

It is with deep regret that I have to say "no" to your thoughtful and interesting request. I have shared your letter here with a number of people, each of whom expressed interest, particularly in the need and uniqueness of your proposal.

Our problems, at this particular point in time, are two-fold:

1. The enormous number of requests for "time" and studies within the company, particularly since the cover story in Time Magazine.
2. The incredible taxing of energies on the part of all of us in preparing for the introduction of the SX-70 Camera.

We just can't do more than we've agreed to do at this point and in the immediate future. I'm sorry. My (our) interest was genuine.

Sincerely yours,

Robert M. Palmer  
Director, Community Relations

RMP:il

The next day I received a call from a Jack Driscoll of Western Electric. He said that he and some other people at Western Electric had seen my proposal and were interested in talking with me about it. We made an appointment for the following morning.

The Western Electric plant is located in North Andover. It is a 21-mile, thirty-minute ride from Saugus. The plant itself is a series of long low buildings which sprawl over the semi-rural landscape, surrounded by giant parking lots.

I parked my car in the visitors area and went into the main lobby. I filled out a card, and after a few minutes was met by Jack Driscoll (Assistant Manager for Personnel). Jack brought me back to his office in which John Connors (Chief of Public Relations and Public Affairs) was already sitting, and where Harry Youngman (Manager of Industrial Relations) would later join us.

There was a little light-hearted talk and then both Jack and John asked me if I would mind talking about my proposed project. I began by explaining how I became interested in this project, and what I wanted to do. The more I said, the more I thought I should add. They both seemed more than willing to let me talk so I ambled on about the Institute, about myself, and about what I expected to accomplish. The fifteen or twenty minutes I had planned to talk stretched to more than forty minutes.

They then began asking me questions such as: what kind of work did I want to do? how long did I plan to work? and would I tell the workers what I intended to do? The thing I kept trying to stress was that I was primarily interested in factory workers' lives, both at home and at work. I told them that no matter how long or how frequently I interviewed workers, if I didn't have a real feeling for what their work was like I couldn't really gauge their responses, and so I saw the need to work in a factory.

Harry Youngman, who had come into the room a few minutes earlier, wanted to know what made me think that in two months or for that matter eight months I would get to know workers well enough that they wouldn't either pull my leg or distrust me. I admitted that that was a real problem. "What can I say other than that I feel I'm pretty good at gauging such things. Also," I added, "I'm not afraid of being wrong. I'm sure I'll make some mistakes."

We talked some more. Both John and Jack talked of their own experiences in the plant. They mentioned their own attempts to get to know workers, and how they felt they had done.

This led John into a more general discussion of the work. "Look," he said, "we aren't ever going to make this place perfect for everyone. This business, and other big businesses, isn't suited for everyone. Unfortunately there are some people who come in here who we can't help or even employ."

"That's right," Jack said, "just last week two fellows came into my office. They had started work only two days earlier. They told

me, 'You got to be kidding, that's what you expect us to do? No way.' And then they left. Well, there probably isn't anything we can do within the realm of real possibilities that will make our place right for them."

"You know," John said, "our real concern is about the large majority of people who work here. How can we make the place better for them? What is it that they want, and what is it that we can do?"

"Some companies are going into making self-contained work groups," John continued. "Other businesses are considering other changes. Any of these changes would necessitate major investments. Before we make any changes we want to know what workers want. We have some limits. This is a business and some things are just impractical or too expensive. However, within certain broad boundaries we have a lot of flexibility."

"I'll tell you something else. Our boss, Dave Hilder (General Manager), is really concerned about the worker's well being. Of all the people I've worked for in Western Electric he is the most people-oriented person I've ever met. He's only been here for three years and already he's done quite a lot. For example, he had the entire place repainted to make this a better work environment."

"You know, Dick," John continued, "you couldn't have selected a general manager in the entire Western Electric organization who would be more receptive to the kind of things we've talked about today. But I already know his first concern is going to be for the worker. He's going to ask me if you are going to intrude on any of the workers' rights to privacy."

The conversation went on until Harry Youngman looked down at his watch and said he had to be going. This somehow marked the end of the meeting. John said he had to go to another meeting, and so did Jack. John made arrangements for someone on his staff to take me around the plant. After the tour Jack was going to take me out to lunch.

It took nearly an hour to walk around the plant. It contains everything from its own shops to crystal growing areas. There isn't the heavy machinery and standing up as there is in an auto plant. Most of the work is done amidst long rows of chairs and tables.

By the time I got back to Jack's office it was past 2:00 PM. Over lunch Jack told me about his background. Both his mother and father had worked in factories, and he was, as his mother liked to brag, their first executive son.

We took our time with lunch. Jack said he liked my proposal. He felt it was something the company should do. He told me he felt the company was pretty good at taking a hard look at itself. "We don't always make the best decisions," he said, "but I think we try. Maybe we can learn something from your research."

"What I want to know," he continued, "is how serious are you

about trying to work something out with Western Electric?" I told him that I liked what I had seen and that I was very interested in trying to work something out. We left it at that. Jack said he would be in touch with me within the week.

Ten days later he called me and asked if they could have some of my photographs, the introduction from my soon to be published book, Next Door, Down the Road and Around the Corner, a copy of Street Time, and information about the Institute. Jack said that Dave Hilder liked my proposal but wanted to discuss it with some people in the New York national office as well as his immediate boss Morry Tanenbaum (Vice President Transmission Division).

I asked if Jack wanted me to bring the material up to North Andover. "No," he said, "I'll send a man down this afternoon to pick it up."

Another week passed before John Connors called me. He had gone down to New York and had shown my proposal to Don Conover (Director of Corporate Planning), and Don had been enthusiastic. John said that that would help, but that Dave didn't want to make a move until talking to Morry. John felt that the best way to handle things from here was to set up a meeting at which Dave Hilder, Morry Tanenbaum, Don Conover, Jack Driscoll and himself would be present. He said that he would try to set the meeting up for the following week and would get back to me.

He called me early the following week and said that he had some bad news. "I'm sorry to tell you this, Dick, but I can't get the meeting set up for this week. Dave's going away at the end of the week and Morry is going out of town for two weeks after that. It turns out that the first time everyone can get together is April 26th (more than a month away)."

By now both Jack and John were sounding somewhat less definite about the project. They both continued saying that they felt in the end everything would work out. However, they began warning me it might not, and gave me the option to back out.

I thought about it; I thought about contacting some other companies or getting back to Polaroid. I decided it would take me at least a month, and probably longer, to work things out with any other company so I told them to go ahead.

Both Jack and John suggested that I spend some time in the following weeks "nailing down solid support" both at Morry's office and in the national headquarters before the meeting on the 26th.

With that in mind a luncheon meeting with Joe Serio (Manager of Personnel and Industrial Relations, Transmission Division), a top member of Morry Tanenbaum's staff, was set up. We met at Western Electric's regional office in downtown Boston, where we stayed for only a very brief time before going over to the Federal Club for lunch.

On our way to lunch Joe told me about his daughter and son-in-law, both of whom teach English at the University of Indiana. I talked

about the Institute and my own background. After cocktails we got into a serious discussion about my project.

Once again I described what it was I wanted to do, and why I wanted to work in the plant for several months. I answered several questions that I had been asked before and then Joe asked me, "What if people say unflattering things about the company?"

Before I could say anything Jack Driscoll said that maybe that wasn't a fair question. As soon as I said that I thought it was a fair question John Connors said that he felt that if most people had negative things to say, the company ought to know about them.

I said that if the company really believed that the majority of people would say negative things then I was pretty sure that they wouldn't let me in the plant. But I thought that wasn't the situation. I said that from everything Jack and John say the company tries very hard to be responsive to the worker's needs. That doesn't mean that there won't be any people with negative things to say. I'm sure there will be. I said that all that one can hope for is to present a balanced view, one which reflects what people feel.

We talked about this a little more and then Joe asked me how I would pick the people I planned to study. I told him I wasn't sure, but I would hope to meet and get to know enough people during my work to make some selection possible.

After the main course Joe continued his questioning. He asked me what if any prerogatives the company would have over photographs shot in the plant. I told him that I had run into this problem before, with other companies, and that I was willing to do the following: I would let them look at any photographs prior to publication. If a photograph showed a safety violation which was an isolated incident, I wouldn't use it. Second, pictures of machinery in which they had a proprietary interest I wouldn't use. Furthermore, if they felt a picture didn't reflect the reality of work I was willing to discuss that.

He then asked me about the writing. I said that they could look over my newsletters prior to publication, and that I would be more than willing to discuss anything. If they could convince me that I had misinterpreted something, then I would change it. If I missed facts, I would be willing to change them.

He asked me what if a worker didn't want to participate? I said that that would be a worker's prerogative, that I wouldn't force anyone to participate. He also asked me if the union had been contacted. I said that I had suggested that a union representative should be included in the meeting on April 26th.

John said that they had talked about the idea but decided against it. "I've talked with our labor relations people," John said, "and they don't think the union will have any objections. If we decide to go ahead with this project we will contact the union before starting."

Joe Serio's last formal question was what if the company didn't want to have its name involved? I thought about it for a minute, and said, "Well, I can't see why not, but the company doesn't matter to me, so if the company doesn't want its name involved I guess that's ok with me."

We made the windblown walk back to the Boston Plaza office. On the way Joe talked to me about the company's involvement in community affairs, especially a program it was operating in Chinatown. He gave me a company magazine with an article on the operation.

I thanked him for sparing me some time, and thanked Jack and John for coming. I called Jack later in the week. He said that he thought the meeting had gone well, but that there was some concern on Joe's part with some of the language in Street Time. I was a little concerned myself about how the Western Electric executives would react to the hard, often profane language, in the text. I had tried to balance the view of my work with the photographs and the introduction of my upcoming book, along with a newsletter (#6 on Florida mobile homes).

John, whom I also talked to later in the week, felt the meeting had gone well. Neither he nor Jack would say why but they both thought that before the luncheon meeting Joe might have taken a more guarded stand on the proposal. Now if nothing else they felt I had probably neutralized Joe's reaction and he might even be favorably inclined. I kept mulling the lunch over, trying to reconstruct it, to see what I might have done differently. I did that for four or five days and then let it slip away.

In the meantime I made an appointment to go and see Don Conover the following Friday morning (8:30 AM) in his New York office. I had to get a pass from the security force downstairs before going up to Don's office. I again went through the presentation of my project. He listened very attentively to my talk and then looked at my photographs. He surprised me by asking almost immediately what he could do to help me.

"I guess I'd like your support," I said.

"You already have it," he told me. "But I won't be very important in the April 26th meeting; Dave and Morry will be."

We sat and talked about the meeting for about twenty minutes. Don said that Dave would probably not make a decision without some sort of consent on Morry's part, but that it was Dave who ultimately would decide. He said there were three possible reactions on each of Dave's and Morry's part. They could like it, feel neutral about it or dislike it.

Don said the most important thing was for Dave to like it. If he did, then unless Morry really disliked it it would probably be approved. Don suggested that I make a short concise statement about what I was going to do, and then leave the rest of the meeting open for questions.

I worried for the next couple of weeks about the meeting set for the 26th. I thought of writing out what I was going to say, something I haven't done since I had run for vice-president of my high school GO (student government organization). I actually sat down at the typewriter and wrote out an outline before I gave up the idea.

It took much longer than I had thought for the 26th to come. Finally April 26th arrived and I went back up to North Andover. John Connors met me in the reception room and took me back to Jack Driscoll's office. The three of us talked for a while and then we headed upstairs to Dave Hilder's office.

John introduced me to Dave Hilder and Morry Tanenbaum and Don Conover, who were already there. We all sat down and Dave Hilder said that he had had a chance to look over my proposal and wondered if I would talk about it for a while.

I began talking and very quickly I realized that I was incredibly nervous. My palms were sweating and even though words and sentences were coming out of my mouth they weren't making much sense to me. I heard a voice from deep within me saying slow down and take it easy. By the time I slowed down and felt in control I was finished talking.

Both Dave and Morry started asking me questions. Morry's questions seemed to be directed at my own objectivity. In fact, at one point he said that he believed that, given a balanced view of what Western Electric was like, the view would necessarily have to be positive. But he explained that he wasn't sure I would make such a balanced view. I tried to show from my past experiences that although I had an independent view it was fairly objective.

I wasn't totally satisfied with my answers to this and later that week I even called Joe Serio and said that I had forgotten to mention certain work experiences which might help indicate my objectivity. I asked Joe to pass the information along to Morry.

Dave's questions tended to deal more with worker's rights. He wanted to know how I would approach the workers and what if they didn't want to participate? What did I plan to tell the workers about my project?

The questions and answers took up maybe twenty minutes. Both Dave and Morry looked at some of my photographs and then the meeting was over.

On the way out Dave Hilder showed me a photograph of his grandfather and his 1887 union dues card. John, Jack and I walked back to Jack's office. Walking down the stairs I felt some letdown about the meeting. I had waited for more than a month for this meeting. Somehow, I had expected some sort of decision to be made right there.

That was probably very unrealistic and I guess I realized that



what was bothering me was something else. It was the lack of any real feedback during the meeting. I am very accustomed when talking to look for either verbal or non-verbal responses to my comments, whether they are positive or negative. I usually judge my delivery against those responses. Both Dave and Morry had sat and listened to my presentation and listened as I answered their questions. Not once, however, had either of them revealed any facial expression which gave any indication as to how they felt about what I was saying. So I left the meeting with no real feeling of how well or badly I had done.

I was anxious to know how Jack and John felt the meeting had gone. They both thought it had gone well. They agreed that both Morry and Dave had asked difficult questions. Neither could tell how Morry felt. John said that he felt that Dave was pleased with the meeting.

I finally asked them when they thought a decision might be made. John said that with the company having open house for the rest of the week he thought the earliest a decision could be made would be the next Monday or Tuesday.

I was thinking of driving home when I heard Jack pick up the phone and make arrangements for a company driver to take Don Conover back to the airport. I said that I would take him. Don hadn't said a word during the meeting so I was curious to know how he felt it had gone.

Soon after we got in the car he told me he felt the meeting had gone quite well. I told him how nervous I had been. He said he couldn't tell and that he thought I had handled myself very well. "Frankly," he said, "it was because you did so well that I kept quiet. Both Dave and Morry already know I am well disposed to the idea, and I felt that unless you seemed to be floundering I would keep quiet."

For the rest of the ride we talked about bullfights, something Don is very interested in. He told me of his days as a Princeton student when he first became interested in bullfights. He said that for a while he tried to get the feel of being a matador by making passes at trailer trucks, using his coat as a cape.

When I left Don off at the airport he gave me his card and said that if he could be of any further assistance I should feel free to call him.

The rest of the week went slowly. Early one evening I went back up to North Andover to go to Western Electric's open house. For three nights WE was opening up for its employees to take their families and friends through the plant. Like everyone else I walked through the plant and into the cafeteria for some free food. Eventually I went upstairs and took my place at the end of a reception line at Dave Hilder's office.

I was surprised when I shook Dave's hand and he said, "Well,

Dick, what are you doing here?" I said something and then he said, "Why don't you sit down, maybe I'll get a break in a while and we'll have a chance to talk." I waited for fifteen minutes, but the line never shortened and so finally I left.

When no one had called me by Tuesday, May 1, I called Jack and asked him what was happening. He said he hadn't heard anything and that I should check with John. I called John on Wednesday, but he was out of town and wouldn't be back till Friday. He called on Friday and said there was no news, but he would call me as soon as he knew anything. He called again the next Tuesday and said that Dave had liked the project and had been reviewing the idea with some key staff personnel for their opinion. He said, "To be quite honest with you most of them really aren't terribly supportive about the project. Basically they are taking the attitude of why get involved when you have all the problems you've got now with business pressures. Dave wants to pursue it further and is planning to take it up with some of the company officials when he goes out to the company's meeting in Colorado Springs the week of May 14th. Dave has asked me to get some material to bring to the meeting."

The material John asked me for included seven copies of Street Time, seven copies of the Institute brochure, and seven copies of newsletter #6. The hardest thing to find was seven copies of Street Time. Only after calling several bookstores in the Boston area were we able to locate enough copies of the book. That day Street Time enjoyed its single best day of sales.

Again a man was sent down to pick up the material I had. Again I had to wait for a decision to be made. Finally on Tuesday, May 22, a call came to the house from John Connors. I wasn't there but Eileen took the call and John said that I had been given a job, the decision was yes. Eileen called me and told me the news. The next morning I called John. He said that they planned for me to start work on the 29th. I would have to take a physical on Thursday the 24th.

John asked if I could come in early on Thursday morning. "Sure," I said, "how's 8:30?"

He said, "You know, when you start working you'll have to be here at 6:30."

"I know," I said, "but that isn't till next week so how about 8:30?"

I ended up getting to John's office a little after eight. He extended his hand and with a smile on his face said, "Congratulations."

I thanked him and we sat down and talked about it. It seems that Dave had made his decision prior to going out to the Colorado Springs meeting, but he didn't want to announce the decision to the rest of his staff until he had touched bases with all the people out in Colorado. Once he felt satisfied that he had done that, he had called his usual Monday morning staff meeting and announced his decision.

He told the staff to take care of placing me.

"We've talked about it," John said, "and right now we're thinking about starting you out as a material handler so that you'll be able to get around the area somewhat and meet more people. We won't be sure where you're going to go till tomorrow. We'll tell your supervisor about you and he will inform your work group about your project."

I told John that I thought I should now go and talk to the union officials. He said he didn't think it was such a good idea. He said that the labor relations people had talked to the union officials and they didn't have any objections. John felt that the less bother made about my project the better.

John then showed me a rough draft of the following document. We talked about it and I agreed that it stated our arrangement fairly well.

**Western Electric**

**D. L. Hilder**  
General Manager,  
Merrimack Valley Works

1600 Osgood Street  
N. Andover, Mass. 01845  
617 686-0600

MR. RICHARD J. BALZER  
846 Broadway, Lot No. 49  
Saugus, Massachusetts 01906

Dear Richard,

I am pleased to inform you that arrangements have been made for you to begin work at the Merrimack Valley Works on May 29, 1973, for a period not to exceed four months. Your specific duties will be explained to you by your immediate supervisor.

I felt it would be of benefit to both of us to restate the understanding we have in regard to this project.

1. An employee's privacy and individual wishes will be of foremost concern at all times.
2. Written and photographic material obtained as a result of this job will be used by no one other than yourself and only for the purpose of writing your monthly foundation newsletter and for possible use in book form.
3. We reserve the right to review and reject both proposed and actual photographs taken on the property, our primary concern being items of a proprietary nature.
4. Any material which we consider to be of a proprietary nature will be excluded from the book.
5. We will have the opportunity to review the manuscript prior to printing and suggest corrections resulting from misunderstandings and also, if deemed necessary, the right to withhold the use of the company name.

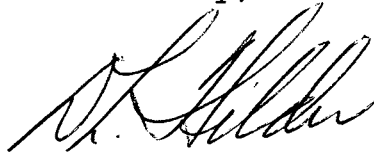
MR. RICHARD J. BALZER

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6. The project may be terminated by either party at any time.

I hope that your assignment will provide the assistance you need to gather material for your ICWA newsletters and possible book. I look forward to a very interesting experience, and hope it proves beneficial to both of us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. L. Hildner", written in a cursive style.

General Manager

We talked a little more and then John said, "Once you leave this door you'll be treated like everyone else."

Richard J. Bogen

Received in New York on June 13, 1973.