

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RJB-#30  
Jerry Doyle

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Jerry Doyle is a big man<sup>1</sup>. His six foot two inch frame has filled out, and much of the hair which once crowned his head has disappeared. He has large, work-worn hands. His knowledge of his job and of Western Electric constantly overwhelmed me. There seemed to be little that he did not see or understand. He had stories about everybody, stories of how this one got ahead and how this one was a secret drinker.

Jerry Doyle is a bawdy man. He is one of the very few men who can get away with telling most women off-color jokes. Some may feign embarrassment, some may even be embarrassed. Yet Doyle can get a laugh from remarks which, if made by other men, would bring looks of horror.

On any given work day Jerry Doyle's mood can make very wide swings. At one moment he can be coaxing production from you, promising to get parts that other layouts would not or could not get. He disappears, off to the storeroom, and returns, only for a moment, with the news that there are no parts in stock. He disappears again only to reappear; that large hand opens and inside are cupped some little capacitors. As I took them he'd explain that he had gotten them from a pal in another section and he'd take care of him.

On that same day he might come by and tell you "don't work so hard kid, they aren't going to pay you for it. Just pace yourself, mark up your bogey. Those bastards don't care about us." That was Jerry Doyle's bitter side. He has not gotten the rewards he feels are justly his. He is a man who understands the rules for getting ahead, refuses to play by them, and is angry that he hasn't gotten ahead anyway.

"It burns them up," Jerry says. "They hate it that I don't do any extra here. I'll work my forty hours a week, but no more than that. You know I used to moonlight rather than spend any extra time in here. I told my boss many times, 'I can only stand you five days a week.' And I don't mean because he's vicious. It's because of carrying other people."

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Richard Balzer is an Institute Fellow exploring the effects of social and economic change on lower-middle-class America

1. All names in this piece have been changed on "Jerry Doyle's" request.

"That's what gets you, carrying people, not the work. Hell, work never killed anybody, but what they got going down in the shops is bad. This is what makes the dissension in the shop. It isn't the physical labor or because you come home tired; it's how many people you have to carry. Oh, does that get to you.

"It's happened to me so many times. There used to be this 211 grade I knew. He'd make out the shop order forms. The job would come to the floor and I'd tell him they were wrong. He'd ask me if I was sure and after a while he just told me to do them my way. He should be the one telling me, he's the higher grade but I'm telling him, see, doing part of his job, and they keep moving him up.

"Hell, there are all kinds of stories about people around here carrying other people. And it's happening more now with this women's lib. They keep promoting women who aren't qualified, to satisfy the government. I don't mean there aren't any qualified women, there are. There are some crackerjacks, but they got some of these dames over their heads. The only way they'll keep them going is to put some guy like me around to carry them till they really learn the job.

"Guys like me in here, we're like mustangs, that's something from my Navy days. In the Navy, a mustang was a guy who really knew what was happening but wasn't a commissioned officer. A mustang would bring the new wet-behind-the-ear Annapolis graduates and show them what a boat was about. Not in the classroom, but out in the water. And it's the same in here. The guys who know everything, they can't promote them because they don't think they're smart enough. But they know all the ropes. It's the mustangs here who are helping the guys who have all the titles. Without the mustangs, people can't do nothing in here. This place is losing its mustangs, they're all getting old and soon they'll be gone.

"You know," Jerry continues, "your layout is really your key person. The layout operator can make your supervisor smell like a bunch of roses or a basket of shit. There's so much we can do to either screw them up or make them look good. I'm not bragging, but I can get the people behind me to work. I can either make them go like crazy or I can walk in back of them and have them all agreeing with me, how they're getting taken and everything, and I'll have them all bent out of shape where none of them are working.

"Most good layouts can do that, they can have quite an effect on a group. Do you think they give you credit for working hard, for getting extra work out of your group? No, they run this place just like Hitler's Germany. They play on your fear, one against the other. They keep telling you keep your nose clean. Then they dangle the carrot, and they keep you on the string as long as possible. Jeez, I can give you all kinds of examples of that. When they're thinking of promoting a layout to supervisor, they call several of you and tell you individually you got a real good chance. Well, you find out they told that same stuff to a half dozen other guys, and they think you'll kill yourself to look better than the other guy.

"I'm telling you all kinds of stuff like that happens in here. Everybody is watching to get ahead and not step on anybody's toes. Well, once they know that, they've got you. If you've got any gray matter, I'm not talking about being a real brain, just if you've got anything upstairs, it's got to get to you.

"It got to me so that I went and had a physical done down at the Lahey clinic. The doctor told me I was in great shape. I told him I didn't feel like it. He asked me where I worked and what I did. When I told him, he said, "that's a real pressure cooker, isn't it?" He hit it right on the head.

"They're just constantly doing things that tick you off. Once, years ago, they came to a department where I was working to take pictures. There was one terrific looking broad in that department and another plain looking one who was a terrific worker. Naturally they started taking pictures of the good looking one. It got me mad, so I really embarrassed them. I asked the photographer, right in front of everybody, 'Why are you taking pictures of her? Why don't you take pictures of this woman, she's a damn good worker?' They couldn't get out of it so he had to take pictures of her and they printed it in the WE Newsletter.

"See, if you get me started I can think of more and more things they do, how they turn people against each other. You know I can go on all day. I'll give you one last example and then let's talk about something else.

"You know the company suggestion program? What they don't tell you is that they don't give you much for what you suggest, not considering what it means in saving for them. Most of the time they just write you a thank you note. I was suckered on a tool that I designed. I did the whole thing and my supervisor said, "Don't give them that. You can break the rates if you use that tool. Look, you can get all the work done in the morning and have the rest of the time to sit around.' Like an idiot I listened to him, and I found out later he went to some national meeting and took my tool design with him. He got a pat on the back, for my design and credit for a tool that was in every bay assembler's tool box. Now he's got a good position out in San Ramon.

"But that's the way it is around here, everyone looks out for themself. I've helped a lot of guys get ahead. You'd think they'd try to help you out. You go to the top management and you say how about a break--I'm at this dead end right now, how about going out on a limb for me? They always tell you the same thing: we'll keep our eyes open, but at the same time they're pushing people up over you with less experience.

"So you stay in the same place. See, everyone in here has a label. I don't care what it is, you're a trouble maker, you're a company man, you're not a company man, you're a union man, a strong union member. I wouldn't put it past them to have a 3 by 5 card on you up in the personnel office. The label stays with you as long as you stay here. I'm known as starting new jobs, I was only asked two weeks ago to go on a new job, no more money, nothing, just glory, and this is what I don't buy anymore.

"You know, I see it all, and that's the problem. Some of them don't know what's going on in here, but I do. But I can't walk out, I have too much invested. They've got me by the balls. I got time in here. I got security in here. I've got all kinds of benefits. That's how they entice you in here, with social welfare.

"They get these women in here on loans. You know they're in here for the second car, or they owe for a swimming pool; they owe for this or that. Before they know it, they're all tangled up. That's how you get stuck. You talk to people in here, they'll tell you they came for a year or two. But they're still here. They still owe money.

"Maybe when I first came in here I could have left, but I didn't. I guess it was because even though I wasn't old during the Depression, I remember it. I remember my father putting rubber in our soles and I remember being heated by the stove. I wanted more than that. I've taken a lot to get that security. I've given up on getting ahead, because I'm not willing to play their game.

"The only thing I do is limit my time in here. Jack said to me tonight when I was leaving with you, 'What do you say, Jerry, coming in in the morning?' I said, 'You got to be kidding'. See, I'd rather do moonlighting and get less because it doesn't take so much out of you.

I haven't worked a second job for almost five years now. I used to moonlight nearly thirty hours a week. I'd work a couple of nights a week and then work on Saturdays from 8 in the morning to 11 at night with a couple of hours off. But the hours didn't bother me. It's completely different from the factory, working behind the counter.

"I liked the word. You're on the other side of the counter and you're meeting all kinds of people. I can tell you story after story about people. Some of the funniest are about people who work at Western Electric. I've had a couple of department chiefs come in to pick up a couple of bottles and then, when they see me, they never come back because they're not going to let me, working in the shop, know how much booze they drink.

"All kinds come in. I remember this one guy came in looking glum. You can tell he wants to talk so you ask, how's it going? He says, 'I'm having a party down at the house, and there are two other guys and my wife, and they sent me to get some more beer.' That's not bad, I say, trying to act dumb. His face gets a mean look and he whips out some panties from a pocket and says, 'They ain't kidding me. I know what they're doing with my wife while I'm gone.'

"Well, he's one type. Then there's the kind of guy that I get a kick out of. He comes in and says I don't use this stuff myself. I'm buying it for the old man down the hall, but give me a dollar bottle of that wine. Then I get the housewife who comes in in the morning and says give me a bottle of Schenley, a quart, and then she comes back at 7 in the evening. Well, she's surprised to see you still working, she gets another quart and tells you the one she got in the morning wasn't for her. You get all types in the liquor store.

"The beauty of a liquor store over a bartender is that they're not there that long. The bartender has them crying at the bar all night long, in the liquor store, they're in and out because the law says you can't open the top of the bottle inside the store.

"There's something going on all the time, and that fascinates me. I never liked the stuff that much. Hell, I think we still got a half gallon bottle of vodka around that's been in the mountains, been to the beach three times. I never worked the liquor thing to be near the stuff.

"I quit when I got on top of the pile, paid off the mortgage and put a little away. When I stopped about five years ago, I figured I wasn't getting any younger. I didn't need the money and well, I didn't want to work until 10:00 at night any more. "

At this moment the kitchen door opens and Mary Beth, Jerry's wife, walks in.

"When we got married," Jerry says, "we both were working full time. We didn't have a big bank account but we had a couple of thousand bucks. We saw this place and we bought it. You should have seen the place. There was no furnace in here and the squirrels were running through the house. There was no heat, no bathtub. I put a shower right there, right behind you. I added this kitchen on. The house kept ~~me~~ awful busy weekends, doing most of it myself and then hiring a few here and there to do tough work.

"While a lot of our friends were snowed under by mortgages and a couple of kids, we both worked for five years after we got married before Elizabeth came. we had enough money to go away, go out for dinners, fix up the house and put a little away. "

"Did you quit working when your first child was born?"

"No," Mary Beth says, "I took off for a couple of months and then I started working evenings. I worked from 7 at night to 1 in the morning. Jerry came seven years after Elizabeth and I didn't go on days again until two years ago. For a while I used to work 5pm to 11 pm which was better than 7 to 1, which was kind of tough."

"Why did you go back to work?"

"At first to just get the vacation, but really we needed it, you couldn't really live on one income."

"Not and have a little extras," says Jerry. "We always had enough to take a nice vacation. I always had a boat, maybe not brand new. We bought an old boat and repaired it, and we've bought land down by the water."

"See," Mary Beth says, "we didn't want to have a babysitter, that's why we worked the different shifts."

"We didn't go along with what they do today," Jerry says. "Maybe it's old fashioned, but we figured we had them, we'll bring them up. I'm the one that put them to bed and gave them the bath. They went in the sink and the tub."

Jerry finds some pictures of how the house used to look in a scrapbook. "It's changed a lot hasn't it?" he asks.

"It sure has," I say.

"I'd still like a new house though," Mary Beth says.

"I can tell this has been a long standing discussion," I jokingly remark.

"Oh yeah," Jerry says, "every woman wants a better house. But you can see the house. What I'm paying for taxes and everything, we're living in a very good neighborhood, and living cheaply. Really we've got no business living in this neighborhood. The lots around us are selling 8 to 10 thousand and up. Everyone else has a big expensive house, not us. We've got everything modern in this house, but Mary Beth says she doesn't have enough closet space. I'm the only working stiff in the neighborhood, everybody else is a businessman or executive."

The door opens again and Elizabeth walks in. She and her mother soon leave to do some shopping and Jerry takes me for a tour of the house and I meet Mary Beth's father, who has lived with the Doyles for the past two years.

Island Street is only a five minute drive from Western Electric. It is a solidly middle class neighborhood. Jerry Doyle is proud to live on this block. It is not far away from where he grew up in Haverhill, but a lot has changed. When he was growing up on Terrance Street, Western Electric hadn't been built. The whole area was dominated by the shoe factories. Jerry Doyle's father came as a young man to work in those factories. "My father came from Ireland and went into the shoe factories. He made box toes, and the counters for the back of the heel. He stayed with it for a while but he got sick. I imagine it was the same thing that's wrong with me, he just got sick of being inside. He went out and became a licensed rigger and a painting contractor. He did that 'til he got too old and then he went to work for a public utility company as a janitor.

"My mother took care of the house, and even in the worst of times we ate well, because she was a good cook. The Irish aren't famous for their cooking. When my mother came to this country she didn't know how to cook very much. She took a job doing housework for some wealthy family. My mother started off doing housework, making beds and then chambermaid work, and she finally got into the kitchen. There was a German lady that was doing the cooking and she learned to cook from her. My mother is Irish but there'll be a German background to her breads. My mother doesn't make a streudel but it's almost--an Irish streudel.

"It was a different kind of living back then. We lived in a tenement district. You know how it was years ago, a row of tenement houses and everybody on the block related, your aunts and uncles and everybody across the street. We never traveled very much. My father never had a driver's license and he still doesn't. I think my father's been to Washington a couple of times. I don't think my mother's been on the other side of Boston.

"To us the big thing was to get out to Salisbury Beach which was only 16 or 20 miles away. Or on weekends the big thing was Hibernian Hall. It was an ethnic club, every ethnic group had its club and that was a big thing. The women would cook and they'd have their dances. They've all disappeared now. I've got happy memories but there were hard times. Hell, most people had hard times then.

"But I lived better than most. Like I told you, we had food and everything and I never went without clothes. I had a lot of hand-me-downs. See my mother had a sister that lived in Holyoke. She worked for very wealthy people; the kid had all his clothes from Saks Fifth Avenue. And I used to wait for that Railway mail truck to show up with a bundle of what the kid didn't want. My aunt used to send it to me. And this was my wardrobe. A lot of it didn't fit but I had spats and patent leather shoes when nobody in town could afford them or even afford to look at them. So I always had clothes and of course my confirmation was the first suit of clothes my parents ever bought me. That was a big occasion. They went for \$16 for a suit and two pair of pants and a vest.

"Another big treat for me, as a child, was to go to my aunt's in Holyoke. Every summer I'd take over this paper route of a boy from up there who went to summer camp. I'd get put on the bus and then on the other end of the line they'd be waiting for me. And then I'd spend the summer there. I think that was my biggest treat.

"It may be hard for you to understand growing up with cars all around, but just to go away was a big thing. Like I said, we had no automobile. A streetcar was a big thing, so to make the trip on the Trailways bus, to go what seemed to me was a thousand miles away, was unbelievable.

"I stopped going when I got to be fifteen. That summer I got a job down at the beach. My father's sister, another aunt, got me a job, and I stayed at her rooming house down by the water. She used to give me a cot in the corner with one of these curtains that fold and that's where I slept.

"To me it was great to be working on the beach because I got to meet all kinds of people. The war had started and I can remember French sailors coming in off a submarine. All the big bands used to play down there. I met all those big guys: Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, and Gene Krupa. When Artie Shaw came down with the big 43 piece orchestra, they had to make the stage bigger. I got his autograph. This was great as a kid.

"This aunt that let me stay with her down at the beach, well she had no children of her own. She used to give me and my sister a special Christmas present. She'd come over Christmas and put two \$20 bills on the Christmas tree, one for me and one for my sister. The next morning, Christmas morning, she'd come over, take the bills off the tree and give them to my mother. They were always used for the coal. Coal was \$15 a ton and the Christmas money took care of it. We never got to touch it, just look.

"You didn't need much money in those days, so I didn't mind. I think the thing I did mind was we never traveled. I wanted to travel, and I quit school when I was sixteen to go in the Navy.

"Let's see, when did I go in? I was born in 1925 so it must have been 1942 when I went in because I was 17. I signed all the preliminary paperwork before I went in. I went through my induction on my 17th birthday in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

"I was big for my age, so I was able to get away with stuff because I always seemed older. When I was 17 I was 6'1". I was sent to school to be a bos'n mate. I got two stripes right away because of the school. I went in as the top petty officer on the ship. It didn't have a chief, it didn't call for a chief; there were three officers and two petty officers and an acting chief. I was doing the duty of the chief; making liberties, putting guys to bed, waking them up. I had to bluff it a lot because some of these guys were on the Merchant Marine run before we got into the war. There were some tough ones and most of them were older than me. One incident--here I am 17, 18 years old, I'm telling some guy to rise and shine and he pulls a knife on me. I flip him out of the bunk and then the crew jumped him. They were going to do a job on him, but I told them to leave him alone. He had a tough time, and it was enough.

"War makes you do funny things. I'll tell you I think of Calley sometimes. He was only a young kid and all of a sudden they put a big command under him. And the easiest thing is to follow orders, that could have been me. Luckily I didn't have the chance. I spent most of my three and a half years in Europe.

"We went into Omaha Beach that morning and I carried the first division in. And the first division was all tough, ready, seasoned soldiers. They all carried German lugers. They were all cool cats; we were just young and nervous and we hit the beach with them and they were great. Their experiences and our inexperience the first time on a beachhead--they were real cool.

"I learned a lot out on that ship. One thing I never liked was the way that if you were a Bos'n mate you were supposed to go out with the other Bos'n mates and not with the seamen. I wouldn't go along with that. When I felt like going ashore, I used to go with this one steward--Alfred Lafayette Kitrell, from Washington D.C. He was a terrific boxer. I used to box with him; he'd knock the shit out of me. He was a terrific athlete--a colored boy. Played basketball and the two of us used to take a ball and go anywhere we could find a hoop when we were in port. I'd rather do that than go out with all those layouts, not layouts, I mean bos'n mates.

"You know the way the bos'n mates were reminds me of how things around here are at lunch. You'll see all the layouts sitting together, and the supervisors, with their ties, all sitting at tables by themselves. One won't sit with the other. Go up to the cafeteria, take a look at it, it'll amuse you.

"Anyway, I was glad when I got out of the service. I had seen some places but none of them impressed me. I was ready to come home.



"It wasn't too long after I came home that Western Electric moved up here. Funny, I could have had an early job in Western, been one of the first. See a lot of the guys who came up from Kearney didn't have a bankroll, they weren't getting the pay they're getting today. And they were looking for a place to crawl in. There were two hotels and my aunt ran a boarding house. Charlie Lemm stayed with her. He liked it and told the next guy coming up and soon she was full of Western Electric people. She wanted me to go over to Western. She'd come in our house and say we're going to get Jerry in Western.

"I was working in the shoe shops then, making good money; I was making \$125, \$150 a week. We worked in pairs, doing piecework. I had a partner and we split the tickets which you got paid by. I'd be all done by two in the afternoon with no dinner hour. You'd take a coffee break but it was five minutes, or you stayed by your work because you know you'd be through by two. You only got paid 10¢ on the clock or maybe it was 9¢, so the 9¢ you were losing by leaving early didn't make any difference.

"I couldn't see going over to Western where they were making 40-50 cents an hour."

The door once again opens and Mary Beth and Elizabeth, laden with shopping bags, return.

"Are you two still at it?" Mary Beth asks.

"We're almost done," I say. "I was just going to ask Jerry how he finally decided to move over to Western."

"I think," Jerry says, "that Mary Beth was instrumental in getting me to go to work for Western, weren't you?"

"You were laid off in the shoe shop, Jerry", she says.

"Yeah," he says, "all of a sudden things got bad in the shoe shops. Mary Beth and I talked it over and she convinced me to go over to Western and make an application. That was 18 years ago."

"Are you both looking forward to retiring?" I ask.

"Well," Mary Beth says, "I'm going to go to 55 if I live to that."

Jerry says, "We'd both like to retire when we're 55. What we want to do is get a piece of land in Florida for the three months that we're not up here. We'll sell this property but for nine months we'll live in the beach house I'm converting. It will have electric heat, a cellar, two car garage underneath it and 200 amp service coming in. This summer we're going for a couple of thousand dollars for wall to wall carpeting."

The door opens again and Jerry Jr. walks in tossing a ball. He looks at his father and asks if he wants to have a catch. We walk out in the backyard and throw the ball around.

*Richard J. Baze*