

## **Two Sons of Northfield Remember Malt-O-Meal's Good Ol' Days**

By Ryeon Corsi

“I don’t have anything against partying, but if you can’t party and work in the same day, then maybe you should give up one of them,” said the Glenn Brooks of Bill Stanton’s memory.

That was over thirty years ago. Glenn Brooks, the former president of Malt-O-Meal, has long since passed, but Bill Stanton lives on, as does his comrade, Allen Pleschourt.

Today, Bill and Allen remember the wisdom of Glenn Brooks with affection, as they do the many decades of work they devoted to Malt-O-Meal in Northfield.

Next year, the company will observe its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

“I don’t think anyone grew up thinking they’re going to work at Malt-O-Meal, but somehow we all end up here,” Bill says.

When Allen started working at Malt-O-Meal in 1965, he’d thought his position as a car loader was temporary. But he was making good money -- \$1.75/hour, and working 52 hours a week -- so he stuck around, progressing from a car loader to a line operator to a foreman, and finally to the manager of the hot cereal department at Ames Mill.

### **Polka Dances**

Malt-O-Meal, formerly known as the Campbell Cereal Company, acquired Ames Mill in 1927. The company later opened Campbell Mill in 1965 for its cold cereal products.

“One of the main reasons I stayed with the company is just the people,” Allen says.

Even as a manager, Allen never wanted to prop up his feet in the office. He liked to work in the plant. “You can’t sit at the desk,” he says, if you want to keep a close relationship with your coworkers.

Allen and Audrey have now been married for forty-five years, since 1963. Audrey graduated from Northfield High School, while Allen went to school in Faribault.

“I actually met him through his brother,” Audrey remembers. Allen’s brother is three years his senior.

“Back then, they had polka dances and that was something our parents were interested in,” explains Allen.

### **Learning Quick**

There was a dance hall every ten miles, Audrey says. Allen might not have known how to dance well before meeting his future wife, but he sure learned quickly. “If you’re going to be with me,” Audrey remembers telling him, “you’re gonna learn to dance.”

They now have three adult children and two grandchildren in college.

Allen retired from Malt-O-Meal in 2001, with 36 years under his belt. The son of a farmer, he’s now a custom worker in the spring and fall “for a local farmer, a neighbor of mine.” In the meantime, he keeps his hands busy making wooden napkin and pencil holders and knick-knacks in his workshop. But he’s not finished with Malt-O-Meal. In the winter months he goes to the warehouse to help out.

Four years after Allen started as a car loader, Bill, whom Allen affectionately calls Billy, came onto the scene. Bill started at Malt-O-Meal nearly forty years ago in 1969, a farm boy fresh out of Northfield High School. Allen remembers that he and his fellow shift workers “used to wait ’til Monday morning to see what Bill did” over the weekend. Bill smiles and shrugs at the memories of his younger days, focusing more on what he’s learned about life while working at Malt-O-Meal.

“When I started at Malt-O-Meal, it was like horse and buggy,” he says.

### **Motorcycle Women**

Since then, computers have revolutionized cereal production. Employee numbers have surged from 40 to about 1,400. Despite a national economy fraught with uncertainty, Malt-O-Meal is “well-positioned for the tough economic times, when

consumers are trying to find value without sacrificing quality,” says company spokeswoman Linda Fisher. Two of the company’s main manufacturing facilities -- in Northfield and Tremonton, Utah -- are operating at full capacity, she says.

Inside Northfield’s Campbell Mill, Bill and his team currently oversee the final product before the cereal gets packaged in the plastic bags.

“Never once did I want an office job,” Bill says. But work doesn’t seem to be just about checking the computer gauges that measure the quality of the cereal.

“Everything I really know, Malt-O-Meal taught me,” he says.

Bill’s a robust, good-natured fellow, sizeable in height, with a voice that is disarmingly gentle and easygoing. So when he talks about his younger days -- when motorcycle-riding women challenged Bill’s whole worldview -- it’s hard at first to fit his words to his easygoing image.

Some women workers at Malt-O-Meal started to rumble to work on Harley Davidsons. Bill had the chance to work with some of these free-wheeling gals.

## **Role Models**

“You just get to realize that they all have the same goals -- to raise a family, have a spouse,” he says. “They just have a different means of transportation.”

Bill reflects on the life lesson these women gave him.

“You gotta open your mind a little bit,” he says, and you’ll find that difference is “not only all right, it’s really good.”

In other ways, Malt-O-Meal played a teaching role -- even a paternal role -- in Bill’s life. For example, Bill remembers one of his favorite bosses at Malt-O-Meal, Donovan Pulski, as less a corporate boss than a friend and helpful role model.

He “taught you how to be a good citizen and how to be respectable,” Bill says of Pulski, who was one of the company’s vice presidents.

Glenn Brooks, Malt-O-Meal's former president who died in 1988 from leukemia, had the biggest impact on Bill. According to Allen, "Brooks married a Campbell gal" and inherited the company from Malt-O-Meal founder John Campbell.

Brooks is the one who expanded the business to include cold cereal, when Campbell wanted to stick with hot cereal.

### **'He Sent Us a Card'**

As the little guy on the factory floor, as he considered himself during the 80s, Bill was amazed at the kindness and attention that the company president gave him.

"He'd take me golfing," he says. "When my wife had a baby, he sent us a card." But the momentous event that stays with Bill happened a year before Brooks passed. Too sick to go out, Brooks telephoned Bill, a die-hard Minnesota Twins fan, and asked him to take his place at the 1987 World Series party.

That year, the Twins had won the World Series for the first time since the franchise's move to Minnesota. The only stipulation? "Kind of tone it down a little bit 'cuz you're representing me," Brooks requested.

At the party, Bill and his wife Jan Stanton met Al Michaels, then an ABC sportscaster, and shook hands with Carl Pohlad, the owner of the Twins.

Bill's voice still hums with astonishment and gratitude as he retells this story, two decades later. "He knew I liked baseball, and so he called," he recalls.

With Malt-O-Meal's continuing progress, expanding facilities in North Carolina and increasing workforce, will such close management-employee relationships survive?

### **Carrying On**

"They don't have the closeness that they used to have," Allen says.

Second only to Bill in total years served at Malt-O-Meal, Bob Draves says that the owners, who are now Campbell's grandchildren, "still care about you and vice versa. We care about the owners." He reflects that managers too, like Allen Pleschourt, "always went out of their way to show you how to do something."

Malt-O-Meal trained these men. But it is now the men themselves who have long outlived the company's original management. And it is they who are carrying on the essential values that Malt-O-Meal's original management instilled.

Bill's one dream of fame is to work at Malt-O-Meal long enough to take part in their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019.

By then, "instead of Jesse James Days, we'll have Malt-O-Meal Days, and I'd be the grand Marshall," Bill says.

*Ryeon Corsi is a senior at Carleton College in Northfield, MN.*