

Reflections of A. J. M. "Bubba" Oustalet, Jr.

While attending Prep School in New Orleans during my senior year, I knew I wanted to follow the path of my father and my grandfather. A native of Lourdes, France, my grandfather was an extremely well-educated man. He immigrated to America in late 1898 and worked in the field of engineering. At the age of 13, my father formed his own small business building wagons and doing metallurgy. At the young age of 21, he became an expert in automobile mechanics, and subsequently opened one of the largest independent automotive operations in the South. I worked with my father during the summers and because of my knowledge and interest, drifted into the automotive field.

I attended Holy Cross High School in New Orleans and was an average student, at best. However, I received excellent education in math, physics, and chemistry. I had always wanted to go to LSU and my father told me that I would be the first member of the family to go to college. Unfortunately, due to

the depression, he couldn't afford to send me to school, so I knew I would have to work part-time.

It so happened that I inherited my mother's love of music and subsequently took accordion lessons in high school and played in the band. I became what was said to be a "semi-professional musician." I learned that Castro Carazo, a famous band master hired by Huey Long, was having interviews of potential scholarship holders in the band and at LSU. He auditioned me and offered me a scholarship for the marching band and symphony band. He also enrolled me in the United States National Guard band, the first band that went to Fort Polk in 1940. I also did some spot entertainment at the Capital House Conventions. We both knew I would enter the College of Engineering, which was an odd combination.

I was never an outstanding student. I flunked English and subsequently had difficulty getting into the College of Engineering. Then one day, my dear friend, the Dean of the College, Leo Lassalle, called me in and asked me, "What's

wrong with you? Why can't you pass your English courses?" He thought that I was doing a credible job and I was subsequently accepted into the College.

Before the start of my senior year, I was suddenly called to active duty, which disturbed me to no end. However, to my advantage, I received almost a second education in the Naval Air Corp through the various schools I attended. In January 1946, I was honorably discharged after four years and re-entered LSU that same year for summer courses. I then became a very serious student, having been on the GI Bill of Rights. My grades were all excellent. The Mechanical Engineering Department offered me an opportunity to make extra money by being a student instructor. I was very interested and familiar in that activity and graduated after two semesters.

Following graduation, the best opportunity I had in my field came from the International Harvester Company in Chicago. Later, Ford Motor Company recruited me because they had just began a heavy-duty, large truck operation in Detroit in which they invested billions of dollars. However, they had forgotten one thing – they did not have an engineer to sell their product. I took it as my good fortune to be invited to the Dealer Training School. Having only been out of school for four-and-a half years, I became a sales engineer and truck manager and subsequently general sales manager for the largest Ford dealership in the South.

To my advantage, there were very few engineers interested in these fields and activities. I believe that I was one of few transportation engineers in the state of Louisiana. I was nominated by the chief engineer and service manager of the Society of Automotive Engineers. That was 50 years ago. This was a marvelous opportunity. I started my career, and at 28

years old, was offered the opportunity to be a dealer or assistant heavy duty manager. I borrowed funds to start a dealership and moved from Baton Rouge to Jennings, where I bought my first dealership. The next year I bought a Lincoln Mercury Dealership and another in Gulfport, Mississippi a few years later. Overall I ended up with 9 dealerships. I have ten children – seven boys and three girls; five of the boys are either owning or managing a dealership in Gulfport or Jennings.

I was also involved in banking and was on the Board of Directors of Whitney National Bank and the American Bank of Southwest Louisiana. I founded and directed the Finance and Insurance Company of Louisiana Dealer Services, a company that provided services to Louisiana and Mississippi. I then became involved in real estate and companies in Louisiana and Mississippi, both dealing in commercial property.

I believe I owe a great deal of my success to many of the people at LSU and the College of Engineering. Dean Lassalle particularly took a personal interest in my career. When he found that I had gone into automotive field, he was a little bit peeved. He questioned whether the area of marketing would fit into an engineering degree. One day during lunch, he told me, "It's regrettable that I spent almost 5 years educating you and you end up as a used car salesman." I quickly replied, "No, you have it wrong. I'm a marketing man and my specialty is heavy-duty trucks. It takes an engineer to build them and an engineer to sell them."

Another person who I owe gratitude is my close friend Dr. Frank Germano, who is a great author and a great teacher. I was close to Dr. Wayne Wallace, Dean of Engineering at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette. Frank Carroll was also a great companion, and I am thankful to Dr. George F. Mathis

for offering me job as a student instructor. Overall, I felt very comfortable with the LSU family.

If college had not opened the doors to me, none of this would have happened. I might not have ever met my wife, whom I met at LSU and married in the Greek Theatre one month following graduation. We are the proud parents of ten beautiful children and enjoy our time between Pass Christian, Mississippi and Lake Arthur, Louisiana.