

People business

In the final issue of our 20th anniversary year we look back at some of the industry's characters – a personal reflection by **David Wall**, Senior Project Engineer of Sea Box, Inc

ONE OF THE DISADVANTAGES OF GROWING

Old is that memory becomes selective. In trying to remember the last 20 years in any kind of detail I keep wishing that I had kept a diary. I can, of course, see vividly those life-altering events that impacted my personal life, but it is much harder to remember those that occurred in a business area that I chose some three decades ago. Fortunately, Patrick Hicks did keep a diary and faithfully recorded the monthly news in the container business.

Container Management has, if nothing else, displayed a tenacity and focus seldom seen in the area of the trade magazines. Patrick, on behalf of all your readers, let me send congratulations to you, Jackie, Julian, and all the CM team, on a great two-decade anniversary. We all look forward to the next twenty years, though I fear that I will be reading most of these future issues from the comfort of my rocking chair.

The early years

Any "retrospective" is, by its very nature, intensely personal. I entered the container industry in 1975 in South Africa, working for a company called "Steelmobil". I had traveled to Rosslyn, Pretoria, in the latter part of 1974 to help build an automobile plant when - in an unexpected career changing moment - got transferred onto a completely new project for the Company: freight containers! I had never heard of them and certainly did not feel at the time that there were any real prospects in building boxes!

Well, I suspect that like many of the people who read *Container Management*, I got hooked on these boxes and have stayed captive until today - some three years or so from retirement. It has been an interesting thirty years!

In those early days there was a thirst for knowledge about the pressing "technical" aspects of containerization and I remember well the Brighton Container Technology Conference in, I believe, 1978, when over 400 people packed the conference sessions to learn about the importance of a metal cleaning standard known as "Swedish Standard Sa2.5", and a "wonder steel" made by US Steel, called "Corten A", and all sorts of other "vital" issues! Quite a change from today (I am writing this while attending the 2004 ITL event in Copenhagen) where one of today's sessions is titled "Capacity reserves in Europe's infrastructure network in 2015". I wonder if I would have signed up for that in 1978!

It was at that Brighton conference that I first met Dennis DiSalvo, a real influence in the development of this industry and a fine man. Dennis and I became friends, and one-time partners, when Itel and I built our own US manufacturing plant, AmeriContainer, in 1990. It was at Brighton too that I think I first met Julian King, working at the time for the conference organizers, "Cargo Systems".

The Sea Containers legacy

By the time of that Brighton conference, I was working for Sea Containers and Jim Sherwood. Sherwood, at that time, was already something of a "legend" and those early years at Sea Containers were certainly exciting. I got to work for both David Tingle and Martin Clive-Smith and feel that I truly learned from the best. Both of these gentlemen gave freely of their time and experience and were really the people that represented the company at the highest level. Naturally both went on to successful ventures of their own. Martin's company still dominates the world of "flatracks"!

I can't recall my time at Sea Containers without remembering John Foster. John was an exceptional human being and a great container engineer. When I had to face a very difficult personal tragedy in my own life, John gave me incredible support and comfort. Sadly John, himself, succumbed to cancer not that long afterwards.

Perhaps it's the people that stand out after all. Many readers will remember Jacques Guillerman (SNAV), the inevitable cigarette dangling from his lower lip; Jesus Azon, who once left me for four hours in the blazing sun of Zaragoza; K.S. Kim (Hung Myung), with his "private nurse"; Don Monroe, who really made ABS the force it became; Ingo Hocke, with his "unique" business card; Ito, a fine engineer at Tokyo Car who led the way to many design improvements in the industry; Guiseppe Tossetto (CoBra), a charming man with a very big heart; and who will ever forget Harold & Kathy Bence?

In the "heyday" of the industry these and other "characters" shared many an encounter in the to and fro of buying/selling containers.

Some of the companies represented by these men and women are no more, while others hang on in an industry that, over this last twenty years has moved inexorably to China. Being in Copenhagen reminds me again of how China International Marine Containers, and indeed, the whole Chinese

industry started! In a very bold step, Sea Containers, East Asiatic Company, and China Merchants got together in a venture to start a factory in Shekou in the late 70's. Together with David Tingle, I was involved in the early technical preparations, and spend many late nights in Copenhagen working on the project. CIMC now ranks as the largest container manufacturer in the world!

Innovation – and the future

The technical interest of the seventies and eighties has given way to weightier matters. Another topic on this year's ITL agenda covers an "Update on US homeland security measures", highlighting once again the very real changes that the world, and this industry, has seen since September 11th, 2001. Containers are now both strategic and threatening. The spectre of a nuclear weapon sailing into a large port within a container is now more than science fiction. The container engineers of today have a lot more to deal with than a "cross-hatch" test!

Perhaps the most interesting development of the last twenty years has seen the recognition of the container as something more than a box to bring "Barbie" from China to Chicago. The New Jersey based company, Sea Box, Inc., (for which I presently work) is now producing innovative containers for a wide range of "very special" containers for military applications, never dreamed of when Patrick began penning his first issue of *Container Management*. We are even signing secrecy agreements with some of our customers!

Without doubt, this industry has grown in a whole lot of different, sometimes unexpected, directions over the last twenty years. What might be more amazing, however, is that nobody has yet come up with a better system of moving cargo! I remember meeting Keith Tantlinger in San Diego in the early eighties. Keith told me of his involvement in the industry as it emerged. He and some colleagues were charged with designing a universal "handling fitting" so that some continuity could be established and the entire "intermodal" concept launched worldwide. It is quite fitting I think that this ubiquitous corner casting should be just that, a cornerstone of an industry that is truly universal.

No doubt *Container Management* will be there as this industry - which has meant so much to so many of us - starts its next twenty years. We can only wish it well.