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# THE M.C. GILL DOORWAY

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*"Here's To Our Customers,  
Suppliers, Employees...  
We Get Better Every Year"*



The only way to fly  
**GILLIFT**  
Go Gill







## ***OH, what a night on Easy Street!***

September 11, 1990, was indeed an evening to remember—the 45th Anniversary of the founding of the M.C. Gill Corporation, nee Peerless Plastics Products, Inc.!

**The Preparation Begins.** On the morning of the day before, the transformation of the party site, Building 2's parking lot, began with the arrival of a crew to construct the bandstands. Work on the parking area continued through the day and really began in earnest the morning of the party. By 4:00 p.m., the area had undergone a transformation that bordered on the miraculous. Cars had been replaced by a reception table, a sea of red and white decorated dinner tables for 300 persons, two buffet stations, three hors d'oeuvres islands, two bars, an area set aside for souvenir photos, and the aforementioned bandstands.

**The Weather was Perfect.** Even the weather cooperated, although in Southern California it usually does. The day dawned hot and dry but by evening the temperature had cooled and a gentle breeze was blowing, making for a most comfortable climate.

**Let the Festivities Begin.** At 5:00 p.m., right on schedule, our guests started arriving. They were greeted by a host of M.C. Gill employees and, of course, M.C. himself. Shortly thereafter, the guests would be entertained by a strolling magician, stopping at each table to mesmerize and amaze; and by Ray Linn and his

Chicago Stompers, performing Chicago-style jazz music as he had done at the 30th, 35th, and 40th Anniversary parties.

**Les Brown and His Band of Renown.** At 6:30 p.m. came the moment many of our guests had been waiting for—the beginning of the first set of musical numbers by none other than Les Brown and his Band of Renown, who would perform throughout the evening for our listening and dancing pleasure. We even had a guest singer—Cathryn "Sis" Burk, a friend of M.C.'s who flew in from Seattle just to attend the party and perform a few numbers with Les Brown and Ray Linn.

**Food, Food, Food.** Dinner was served at 7:00 p.m. and a sumptuous feast it was. We dined on iced Alaskan shrimp; gourmet pizza and pasta; blackened steak; California-style grilled swordfish and chicken; and nouvelle sausage. The meal was topped off with a dessert buffet that featured fudge cakes, fruit tarts, cream puffs, brownies, and hot fudge sundaes—all low calorie, of course!

**Party, Party, Party.** By now the party was in full swing. The dance floor was filled, conversation was lively, and, as he has done at all parties past, M.C. was moving from table to table greeting guests, reminiscing, and just generally making sure everyone was enjoying the party.

**Introductions and Presentations.** During one of Les Brown's intermissions we took the opportunity to introduce a table of M.C.'s long-time hometown friends and schoolmates from Terril, Iowa and two tables of M.C. Gill employees, each of whom has been with the company in excess of seventeen years—more than 150 years of combined experience. Stephen, Phil, and M.C. each took a few minutes to formally welcome and thank the guests for coming; and presentations of gifts to M.C. were made by representatives of USC, Pepperdine University, and the El Monte Chamber of Commerce. The intermission concluded with a surprise presentation to M.C. of a custom made rocking chair for his use in the years to come in which he says he'll be taking it easier—but he's been saying that since the 35th Anniversary party. So far, nobody's seen him use the rocker. We'll probably have it dusted and re-present it to him at the 50th.

**Such an Evening.** We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge the absence of a key member and one of the guiding forces that helped shape and build this company. "Ellen, we wish you could have been here." But, it was a memorable evening and the consensus was that it was the best party yet. We hope it was an evening that will be long remembered by our guests—we know it will be at the M.C. Gill Corporation!





In photos above: 1. From left: Candi Burdick, Linda Kellett, Cindy Walker, Maribel Gonzalez, Hester Bester (M.C. Gill Corp.)... 2. Jim Page (M.C. Gill), Shirley Cadaret (E.T. Horn), Carlos Restrepo (Dow Chemical)... 3. Catherine "Sis" Burke, guest vocalist... 4. John Leland of McDD (retired), Peggy Quinn (McDD)... 5. Jack Phillips (Owens-Corning), M.C. Gill... 6. Joanna and Mike Stewart (McDD), Liz and Bob Poet of Simar (retired), Gene and Trudy Heiman (Lockheed)... 7. Dick Ecklund and June Walkington (McDD)... 8. Don and Catherine Huffsmith (Lee, Sperling), Bob and Linda Browne (M.C. Gill), Pat Knox (Carroon and Black), Annette and Howard Williams (Williams Pension Service), Veronica Fields (Citizens Bank)... 9. From lower left: Jim Page, Wanda and Dick Sanger (Clark-Schwebel), Jim and Jenilyn Domenico (Eureka Metals)... 10. M.C. flanked by Leonard and Francine Silverman (USC)... 11. M.C. and Les Brown.





In photos above: 1. Stephen Gill... 2. Larry Russell (M.C. Gill), Sabena Friedrich and Richard Lamas (McDD)... 3. Bill Simmons, Lily Telles (El Monte Convalescent Hospital)... 4. Fran and Carl Stockdale (BGF Industries)... 5. Joann Russo (Eureka Metals), Bruce Jacobson, magician... 6. Mike DeStafano and Sabena Friedrich (McDD), George Shufelt and Michele Smith (Alcoa), Todd Padgett, Evan and Cathy Smith (McDD), Judy Weber (McDD)... 7. Moto and Hiroko Ashizawa (McDD)... 8. Reenie and Dick Zickhur, and Tom Bettencourt (JPS Glass Fabrics)... 9. Debaney Gil/Lefort... 10. Ray Linn and the Chicago Stompers... 11. Party time.

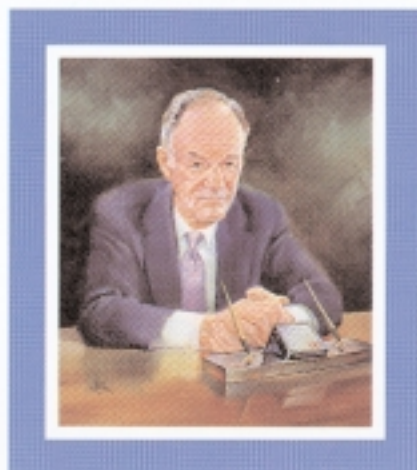




In photos above: 1. From left: Avis Martin Shoemaker, Trudy Heiman, Mabel Terveen Finch, Gene Heiman, Donald Finch, Eva Hewitt Braman and Kathryn Nilson Miller all from Terril, Iowa... 2. Ivan and Sue McClanahan (M.C. Gill), Jack Hoagland (USC), M.C., David Paluska of Pepperdine (formerly USC)... 3. Hester Bestler, M.C., Catherine Burke, Bruce Stanford (M.C. Gill)... 4. Phil Gill... 5. Standing from left: Ralph Navarro, Kevin Olafson, Javier Amiola, Pete and Evelyn Ortega (M.C. Gill), seated from left: Cleotilde Navarro, Carmen Herrera, Maribel Gonzalez, Rudy and Gracie Rodriguez, and Lucia Amiola (M.C. Gill)... 6. Larry Russell (M.C. Gill), Steve Cole, Tish Mullen, Michael Bernal (Ancra)... 7. Standing from left: Lloyd Monthly (Royal Plastic), Grady Toney (M.C. Gill), Faith Johnson (Hughes), Jim Johnson, Dan Severe, Bill Gardner (M.C. Gill); seated from left: John Burdick, Candi Burdick, Cindy Walker, Bruce Keeler, and Todd Duncan (M.C. Gill)... 8. Linda Kellett and Heinrich Fuhr (Lufthansa)... 9. Linda and Stephen Gill, Jim and Marilyn Zumberge (USC)... 10. Les Brown and His Band of Renown.

PHOTOS BY FUNAKOSHI/KULESH





# Hometown Perspective

## PART II

BY LAURIE RAHN

*INTRODUCTION: The following pages chronicle Part II of M.C. Gill—A Hometown Perspective. Part I in the Summer 1990 edition of the Doorway told of M.C.'s early years in his hometown of Terril, Iowa, and his pursuit of higher education, culminating with his graduation from the University of Southern California. Part II picks up the story right after World War II, when M.C. went into business for himself and founded Peerless Plastic Products, Inc.*



**A**t the end of World War II, M.C. Gill was a pioneer in the field of thermoset plastics. As Gill's son, Phil, once said, he was also a man without a job.

In the minds of many people, the end of the war eliminated the need for airplanes, and therefore those industries that served aviation industry requirements. M.C.'s employer closed its doors soon after the peace treaties were signed.

Unemployed, M.C. decided it was time to put his vision on the line, and in 1945, one month after V-J Day, Peerless Plastic Products was born.

The hand-laid laminate business went into operation with little fanfare, located in a Montebello, California garage. The company developed and marketed products ranging from placemats, laminated lampshades and wall coverings, to a cork ball and a balsa wood bat intended to defend the windows of the world from misdirected baseballs.

Gill even managed to solicit the endorsement of baseball legend Rogers Hornsby for his new game. Unfortunately, the \$2.50 ball and bat never made it to first base in the marketplace.

Wallfab, M.C.'s revolutionary wall covering, was simply developed a few years before its time.

The product involved a process which laminated patterned cloth and paper with synthetic resins. The resulting product formed a very flexible, washable, and almost indestructible wall covering that could be installed by the homeowner.

Dick Bean recalls demonstration he and M.C. conducted in a model home in 1945. The house was billed as the "Post War House," with all of the latest innovations and designs of the day.



"We'd have the people write on the Wallfab with lipstick, then we'd scrub it off with a cleanser. I think we used the same panel for every demonstration. It was a marvelous product, but perhaps it was just too expensive at the time," recalled Bean.

According to M.C., he suffered two crushing disappointments during the early years and Wallfab's lack of success was the first. He honestly believed he had built a better mousetrap. By his own admission, he was new to the realities of the business world and "green as grass." That the wall covering industry didn't beat a path to his doorstep was a real blow to his hopes and dreams. To this day, a wistful look comes over him and he just shakes his head when he recounts the Wallfab saga.



*A post-war do-it-yourself project*

To keep food on the table and a roof over their heads for wife Ellen and their three children, M.C. accepted a day job with Aerojet General. He even took a late afternoon job at a liquor store at one dollar per hour to help support his clan.

No, M.C. Gill has not always been on Easy Street, the address his company letterhead now carries.

In 1951, M.C. discovered from a glass cloth supplier that Douglas Aircraft needed reinforced polyester laminates wider than existing suppliers could produce. Always ready to accept a challenge, M.C. decided it was time to outdo the competition and he landed the contract.

Contracts completed and sitting with his initial investment money in hand, what was the next step? Take the money and run? No. With the decision in his hands, M.C. decided to put his profits back into the company. One central philosophy has formed the foundation for all of M.C. Gill's success: If you're willing to give 110 percent effort, just 10 percent more than your competitors, it's simple—you'll come out a winner.

This was the beginning of M.C.'s second major disappointment. He felt secure in his ability to produce a wider laminate than his competitors. But it didn't occur to him that they might soon develop that capability too. So,



with the \$70,000 order from Douglas he thought he was on his way. When the next opportunity came, on a \$350,000 Douglas contract, he bid it using the same methodology he employed for his initial success. However, the competitor by now had mastered the wide sheet technology, underbid M.C. and won the contract award. It was a bitter pill for the still green M.C. But he was learning and learning well.

In fact, when Ted Thall, pioneer founder of Thalco (fiberglass cloth distributor) was asked who among the early pioneers in plastics would succeed, he answered without hesitation, "M.C. Gill. He makes the same dumb mistakes everyone else does, but he learns from them and doesn't make them twice."

During my trip, I had the pleasure of talking to a long list of people who have known M.C. Gill from his childhood days to several who have known him only a few months.

Pete Ortega went to work for M.C. more than 36 years ago. "I've been here, in production, ever since," says Ortega. "Working for" is the wrong phrase, it was more like "working with" M.C. Gill. M.C. has always been right there with his employees, working every bit as hard as they do," he continued.

Ortega remembers the days when all of the lamination work was done by hand. "We used to make 19 sheets a day. Then we'd cut them up, paint them, load them in a station wagon and take them to Douglas. They used them for cargo liner in DC6-C's."

In 1955, when the first press was put into action, Ortega said M.C. set a goal for their production. "He said, 'If you can make 25 sheets a day out of that press, I'll be happy!'"

They did that and more. Reflecting upon their success, Ortega said, "I never thought it would be this big." When he started, the company was housed in a 3,500 square foot sheet metal building and the lamination was done in a 2,000 square foot quonset hut; there were 8 to 10 employees; and annual sales were roughly \$100,000. Today, there are six buildings with about 175,000 square feet under roof on seven-and-a-half acres; more than 220 employees, and annual sales of approximately \$28,000,000.



Joe Valdez has been a part of the M.C. Gill Corporation even longer than Ortega, having joined the ranks six months earlier in 1954.

"We used to warm our lunches on top of the curing ovens," Valdez said of the early days.

Even in those days Valdez remembers the teamwork between M.C., Ellen, and the small group of tireless employees. "You almost felt like family."

Today's philosophy at the M.C. Gill Corporation is built upon the same foundation...hard work in a family-like atmosphere.

"We were always, and still are, trying to improve," said Valdez. And improved they are. More than 15,000 square feet and almost 20 employees are devoted to a research and development laboratory. The lab's equipment is so extensive that they can simulate all manufacturing processes, albeit on a smaller scale. The Quality Assurance Department has a staff of nine and their testing equipment is such that they can conduct virtually every test for every specification (in the product line) that every airline and airframe manufacturer specification require.

"If you're trying to develop a product and it's not working out, you'd sometimes just want to quit. But not Mr. Gill. He'd keep on trying and, eventually, he'd make it work," Valdez continued. In the mid-60's, M.C. began sharing the wonder of his company with his sons, Stephen and Phillip; "Steve" a business major and "Phil" a chemical engineer.

#### ***Is it hard to work in a family-owned business?***

"It's a tremendous opportunity," said Stephen. "You can trust the loyalty of your family, but you have to work even harder to overcome the 'boss's-son' attitude."

M.C., Stephen and Phillip each work basically in different areas of the company. As president of the business, Stephen spends much of his time in managerial activities. Phillip has been an important cog in the laboratory; developing, expanding and improving upon the company's wide range of products.

Has it always been easy being the sons of M.C. Gill?



*The lot of a "pioneer"*

Not necessarily.

Phillip remembers the period from 1945 to 1953 being the toughest. "There was no money. He put it all back into the business."

It became evident to M.C. several years ago that because of his company's growth, and in order to maintain that growth, it was necessary to bring in some key individuals to help in all phases of the company's operation.

M.C. has assembled the following very competent and talented management team. He nevertheless maintains an active role, plays an integral part in the day-to-day operation of the company, and insists on remaining in the decision-making loop.

Larry Russell was one of the first in the new generation at the M.C. Gill Corporation, joining the staff as a salesman nearly five-and-a-half years ago. Things really started to happen when Bob Browne joined the staff as controller, in September 1988. A month before, Hester Bester came from South Africa via Canada to work alongside Ellen Gill in the accounting department.

Larry Tomlinson heads a new materials, storage, handling and control group, as well as an expanded purchasing department.

Bruce Keeler's responsibilities mean leading the marketing department in new and exciting directions.

These are just a few of the key individuals M.C., Ellen, Stephen, and Phillip have chosen to lead the corporation into the 21st century.

How do they see the Gill family? With unquestionable respect and admiration.

"If I ever had to choose a role model, it would be Ellen. She was such a dynamic person," said Bester of her mentor, Ellen Gill. "They used to come at eight—they were never late—they'd stay until 6:30 and then take work home."

Maribel Gonzalez, who started in 1981, also worked closely with Ellen Gill. "Mrs. Gill was in charge of everything. I think she was one of the smartest people I've ever known."

Gonzalez related another story she had been told about Ellen's entrance into the company. "She went into Mr. Gill's office and found \$40,000 worth of unpaid bills in his desk drawer. The checks had been written, but M.C. couldn't mail them because Douglas was withholding a payment until M.C. reworked some parts that had been rejected. Needless to say, M.C. had some unhappy creditors on his hands.

Bruce Stanford is the plant's chief engineer. He is also an admitted fan of M.C. Gill. "He has the knack to challenge you to work harder than anyone else and not mind it. Like any good leader," said Stanford, "he makes you want to do things without even knowing why. And he never asks you to do something he wouldn't or hasn't done himself."

Gill also has a special vision according to Stanford, "M.C.'s always thinking about 10 years down the road."

Stanford feels very positive about the future of the M.C. Gill Corporation. Bruce Keeler agrees, "He's trying to put



a team together to help it grow to the next plateau. He's looking to the future but doesn't lose sight of today."

As my visit came to an end and the plane headed skyward toward Iowa that May afternoon, I was tired, but exhilarated. I'd talked to and met more people in a week than I've ever talked to before. I'd been to USC dinner parties with graduate students and entrepreneurs. I'd even gone to dinner with a college dean, University of Southern California faculty and school benefactors. But primarily, I'd discovered a marvelous man.

M.C. Gill, through no fault of his own, found himself "stuck" with this midwesterner. He entertained me at restaurants, sidewalk Mexican eateries, hauled me to university bookstores, toured college campuses, and even took me to a downtown shopping mall and capped the day off with my first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. And he was comfortable in every situation.

M.C. Gill has that uncanny ability to make everyone, old friends and strangers alike, to feel completely at home. We looked through photo albums for hours, listened to jazz, and even had a few beers. And while I can't speak for M.C., I had fun. He still retains a spirit of adventure, openness and sensitivity.



On the plane home, my thoughts returned to my initial doubts about M.C. Gill. What kind of a person could he really be? Sometimes, first impressions can be correct. He actually did remember all of those hometown friends huddled around him last fall in Terril, Iowa. He truly did enjoy reminiscing and sharing a part of his wealth with the community that helped to give him roots. And he's still a little mischievous. Yes, that twinkle in his eye and marvelous grin are for real too. He was everything I had initially believed, and more.

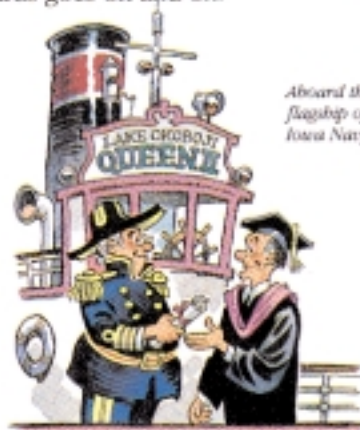
In fact, his smile really says it all.

When M.C. Gill left Terril, Iowa in the 30's, he was just another young man with a dream.

***This year, the tangible result of his dream, the M.C. Gill Corporation celebrated its 45th anniversary. The company is now the largest manufacturer of its kind of composite materials in the world. In addition to its commanding lead in market share for the commercial aircraft industry, the company provides materials for science laboratories, law enforcement agencies,***

***and a myriad of industries in aeronautics and defense industries. The M.C. Gill Corporation and its Space-Flex and Royal Divisions are leaders in their field.***

The name M.C. Gill isn't a household word, but M.C. has become a legend in his industry. He's endowed a chair in composite materials at the University of Southern California's School of Engineering; in 1988, he was selected as that University's Engineering Alumnus of the Year; he and his wife Ellen were awarded the prestigious Western Plastics "Man of the Year" award by the Society of Plastics Industries in 1983...the list of his accomplishments and awards goes on and on.



Even I got to present M.C. with an award during my visit. Because of his lasting concern for his hometown, and his contributions to the economic future of the area, M.C. was awarded an honorary doctorate in engineering from the University of Okoboji, after the lake of the same name.

The University is a fictional institution of higher learning, once featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, built upon the spirit of community, respect for the land, and good old American fun in the Iowa Great Lakes Region. Anyone can be an alumnus, "But we don't solicit candidates for honorary doctorates," said Dean of Admissions Herman Richter.

You know, it's heartening to know that the American dream can still happen. A Midwestern boy can grow up in the country, work hard to get an education, become successful and still retain his hometown roots. And that's promising not only for Gill's hometown of Terril, but for the country as a whole.

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#### ***About the Author***

*When M.C. visited his hometown of Terril, Iowa, in November 1989, he was interviewed by Laurie Rahn, staff writer for the Spirit Lake (Iowa) Beacon. He was quite taken with her writing style because it focused on the personal side of his life, omitting for the most part, his role as a pioneer/founder/entrepreneur—an approach seldom taken. As a result, the decision was made to invite Mrs. Rahn to Los Angeles for a few days to collect background material for this article on the anniversary of the M.C. Gill Corporation's 45th year in business.*

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# Trivia

Self-confident people stand with toes turned outward. Timid, unsure people stand with toes turned inward.

★ ★ ★

The most widely used word in the world is "okay," spelled in various ways.

★ ★ ★

Catalogs indicate models in dresses are photographed smiling, but models in lingerie are not.

★ ★ ★

One out of 20 Americans is arrested and charged each year.

★ ★ ★

The average American eats 12 pounds of potato chips and 3 pounds of broccoli.

A Korean woman is not permitted to hold the hand of a dying man.

★ ★ ★

Turtles cry to get the sand out of their eyes.

★ ★ ★

In a poker game, out of every 10 opening hands, five will be busts, four each will contain a pair, and one will beat a pair.

★ ★ ★

Suntan lotion was first used in Egypt in 7500 B.C.

★ ★ ★

About six percent of the U.S. population never watch TV.

★ ★ ★

The average brain of an elephant weighs 11 pounds; a human's, three.

# THE FUNNY SIDE

A smile is one medium of exchange that is always worth more than its face value.

★ ★ ★

Three men sat on a park bench. The one in the middle sat quietly but the other two were going through the motions of fishing. They would cast, jerk the line gently, then wind imaginary reels. A policeman walked over and said to the man in the middle, "Are these two loonies friends of yours?" "Yes sir." "Then get 'em out of here." "Right away, officer," said the man as he began rowing vigorously.

★ ★ ★

Teacher: "What is the principle export of the United States?"

Student: "Money?"

★ ★ ★

While dressing for a party, the woman pirouetted for her husband and asked, "Is my neckline too low?"

"Either that," he replied, "or you're not in it far enough."

In the old days, the hero didn't kiss the girl until the last page. Nowadays, he does it on the cover.

★ ★ ★

A young lady went to the bank to apply for a car loan and as the banker was preparing the final papers for her signature, she said, "You have been so kind, how can I ever repay you?" "Monthly," replied the banker, "Monthly."

★ ★ ★

Telling the boss what you really think can be called honesty and self-assertiveness, also, instant unemployment.

★ ★ ★

A husband had just stepped out of the shower when his wife walked into the bathroom. "What do you think the neighbors would say if I mowed the yard looking like this?" Deadpanned, the wife replied. "They would say I married you for your money."

