



From Humble Beginnings

The history of Perfection from April 1, 1955

The following is a retrospective with the founder of Perfection Spring & Stamping, Louis Kahn. Turning 83 in 2010, in his own words he recalls the story of the Company.

I can't believe it has been almost fifty-five years already. Time goes so quickly! Prior to starting the company I was in the U.S. Navy during WWII. I went to Loyola University to major in History from 1947-1951 and worked in my fathers clothing store at night. I decided that the men's clothing business was not for me. I was in the U.S. Army at the beginning of the Korean conflict, but did not serve overseas. I got married in 1952 and we were off to Bermuda with no job or plans for the future. Eventually, we "Ran out of money", and since we were hungry decided to return to Chicago to go back to work. In 1953-1954 I sold canned food, and signed up for a trade school at night to learn a skilled trade as a tool & die maker. I became a tool & die apprentice and graduated one year later. During that year my aunt retired from what is now a competitor of Perfection. With her help, and from humble beginnings, we started "Perfection Spring Manufacturing Co." with two employees; me and "Aunt Fannie". With \$5,000 in capital, I purchased one coiling machine and a very used four-slide machine, along with some old tool room equipment. We put it in my garage and I went to work.

It was just the beginning! I would try to sell during the day and make it at night. My wife Barbara would assist in running the machines during the day, and I would go on the road trying to drum up business. Fannie worked on the office responsibilities; bills, invoices, mail, book keeping, things like that. There wasn't any payroll to deal with because we did not make any money for the first six months, and received no pay. seven-day weeks were the norm, but I would always try and take Sunday afternoon off.

Our first customer out of the "Pulaski Avenue Garage" was A.B. Dick Co. I remember before shipping them their product I would go over to their plant, sneak in the back door, and use their comparator to check parts to make sure they were to print. We did not have, nor could we afford, our own testing equipment. If the parts checked good, I would then back my car up to the receiving dock and deliver them out of my truck. Our first slide job was for Admiral Corporation, a company which produced televisions and appliances. I remember tooling the job with what little equipment we had. I would, on occasion, run over to that side door at A.B. Dick and use their comparator to check the tooling I was making for Admiral. If they only knew...

After six months, we hired two additional people, a tool maker and a coiling setup man. At that time the minimum wage was \$0.50/hr., which wasn't so bad. A phone call was only \$0.05. Right around that time we landed our first big customer, Webster Chicago Corporation. With WebCor, as they called it, we reached \$300,000 in sales after being in business for one year. We were so happy we went out and finally purchased our very own comparator!

Our next large customer came to us when we started doing business with Voice of Music, also known as "VM", in Benton Harbor, MI. They also produced phonographs, but they are also long gone. Interstate 94 wasn't built yet, so to get around the lower half of Lake Michigan at that time, we had to get there on a small two lane highway now called Blue Star Highway. It was an all-day event to visit VM back then, but we did it every couple of weeks. I am convinced that face-to-face business is the only way to do business. We had some rapid growth with VM over the years which turned out to be a great customer over the years! Back then, we did not work on contracts or purchase orders. Business was done with a "Handshake deal", and both companies always lived up to the agreements. It was a great way to do business and I am sad to see that business is not conducted that way anymore today.

After five years in business we do relocate to a larger factory. We hit the one million dollar mark in 1959 and I thought that we had reached the summit. We moved into a 15,000 square foot building on Elston Ave. in Chicago.

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It was back to seven day work weeks for a while. I wired the building for our electrical needs because I could not afford to hire an electrician, built the tool room benches, built the offices and did all the other construction needed to increase our sales. It was about this time that I realized that my college degree in "History" from Loyola was really helpful! We added our first punch press and changed the company name to what it is today, Perfection Spring & Stamping Corp. The move and expansion allowed us to build our customer base. Bell & Howell, Warwick Television and RCA were some of our new customers. RCA turned into our largest account until the early 1980's.

In 1966 we moved to our current location in unincorporated Cook County. We built a 30,000 square foot building on a two lane county road named Algonquin. Except for the Soybean farms surrounding us, the only other sign of life was the Waterfall Restaurant (Which is now Mr. Beef & Pizza) and the executive building of United Airlines. When I say lonely, I mean LONELY! I remember United inviting us over for lunch just to get to "know the neighbors". Everyone thought we were nuts. There was nothing out here! No vendors, no customers, nothing. But they had just finished Interstate 90 a few years before and we had a vision that the business would be moving out of the city in this direction. I guess we were correct. Two years later in 1968 we added an additional 40,000 square feet on to the building, which is currently our Punch Press Department and raw material storage area.

Over the years we have had sustained growth. We have had our share of the good times and bad. We survived the recessions of '58, '73, '81-'82, and '91, and are still fighting off the effects of the current economic downturn from 2002. We struggled through the double digit inflation of the 70's. We managed through the worst years, that being 1981 and 1982. It was then that we were forced to sell our extra land adjacent to current plant. This is now the fire department and strip mall just to our west. Many of our current employees still remember the "Flood of '87" prior to the deep water tunnel project being build. The plant and offices were under 3 feet of water! We rose above the flood waters rebuilding every motor and controller in the building without missing customer deliveries.

It's amazing to think what we went through! We made it because we never altered our business philosophy; Integrity, honesty, hard work, persistence. You can't go wrong with that. We had a vision and were always a step ahead of our competition. We had SPC in place when most of our competitors didn't know what SPC was. We had computers in place when most of our competitors did not even have fax machines. We had CNC Coiling equipment in place when most of our competitors were still doing their looping and trimming manually. To continue in the future Perfection needs to adapt, change, reinvent itself and never believe that "Good enough is good enough." Be aware of the foreign competition, the changes of business climate, and the way relationships are playing out in a world market.

I retired in the early 1991 with great pride as I handed the company off to my sons, David and Joshua, for a second generation to set the new direction. I stepped back from the day-to-day operations and continue to watch the company change and grow, emerging to even higher level of achievements then I had ever imagined. As Chairman of the Board, I owe a debt of gratitude to all those that helped Perfection become what it is today. I am proud of every person that has worked for me, and thank them with all of my heart for their efforts and passion. As we crossed over into a new millennium, I realize that this is the beginning and we have only just started! There is so much more to come as David and Joshua share my vision to adapt, change and reinvent the Company as we drive forward into the twenty-first century.

Louis S. Kahn, Founder



First Business Card of our Founder -