

Rome wasn't built in a day

On my ninth birthday, I am sure I received several great gifts from my parents, but there is only one that stands out to me, and I can still remember it very clearly. It may have even changed the course of my entire life. What gift given to a little boy could possibly have such an impact? A simple hatchet. I felt like Ralphie in a Christmas story being gifted the Red Ryder BB gun.

I remember heading straight out into the woods on the family farm with strict instructions to keep both hands on the handle (so I couldn't cut a hand off), and not to cut down any of the hardwoods or the trees my mom had planted. It didn't take long till I had felled so many of the densely growing poplar trees in a low spot (and nearly all the tag alder brush in the area too) that it would have made a troop of beavers mighty proud. I loved watching the chips fly, the exhilaration of seeing a towering poplar come down with a loud crash, and the pungent smell of the sap that was released from the trees as they were slaughtered.

Mom, while encouraging in my newfound love for chopping, surveyed the damage done to the woods and had a very strong suggestion: "Some of those trees took a long time to grow, and if you are going to cut them down in such short order you had better plan to use them for a purpose." She was right of course. The wanton destruction without regard for the decades it took for them to grow was a sad thing to do, as well as irresponsible. So, I stopped cutting trees and started building with the wood that was now on the ground. I built a fort. I made crude tools. I even learned how to split the straight grained pieces into some very rough lumber and built a bridge across the creek in the woods. I thrived in the woods playing at being Richard Proenneke one day, and an Ewok the next day. A few years later from my dad I was gifted my very own 1/4 inch drive ratchet and socket set off the Snap-On truck. Very high-quality tools for a youngster, but the ones that haven't been lost over the years. I still have the tools and use them to this day.

While those beginnings were certainly humble, they set the groundwork for a career in engineering, problem solving, creating, and repairing anything and everything you can imagine in the family business of auto recycling and beyond. The importance of quality tools and workmanship were learned. I started by building wobbly structures in the woods and ended up engineering everything from welding machines to a tire shredding machine.

Very often in our industry we are faced with some problem or challenge that doesn't necessarily have a boxed-up solution you can just purchase and forget about. We often find ourselves coming up with a creative or inventive solution to a problem, and sometimes the results end up being something we hadn't even planned on. At our recycling facility, we are small by most standards. We don't have ten thousand cars on the grounds, and we don't have twenty acres of storage under a roof - yet. But at this point in the growth of our business, when we look back to the beginnings there is such a big leap forward in production and sales that we can hardly believe it. It certainly did not happen overnight; it has been slow steady growth.

Going forward, we have big plans. Dreams of facility improvements, sales goals, and community impact. I fully believe that if I am blessed with another twenty-five years in the business those things will be realized by the team we have assembled - and I will witness it happening. I tend to get impatient, and want to see the goals reached right now, but slow steady progress is best and is what we hope to continue to do.

Wherever your business is at, I hope that you also are doing what it takes to be a long-term success. I hope you have the same enthusiasm you started out with and are working at building your business every day. If you feel a little bogged down, uninspired, or just plain burned out; I highly encourage you to attend industry conferences at the state and national level. Call a neighboring yard and ask if you can come visit or invite them to come see you. Or just ring up Rocki Top Auto and ask for Jake. I would love to spend a few moments talking with anyone in our industry for mutual encouragement and inspiration. I love visiting yards. Send me an invite, and as always there is a standing invitation at our facility to come check it out. We are all working to build our little empires, and just as Rome wasn't built in a day, neither is our business. Keep putting one foot in front of the other every day, and I promise good things will happen. Just don't give up and keep on building!