

MOVE OR DIVORCE.

By James Collins.

In the late 1950s, I worked at Airborne Instrument Labs in Long Island. Most of the engineers were relatively young and had come from all over the country to the new jobs for the Defense Department. The industry was vibrant, there were many opportunities, and moves were quite common. Some people went from coast-to-coast, while others moved from university to university.

I worked with a young engineer named Hal, who originally came from West Texas and had that peculiar drawl associated with that part of the country. He was very nice, quite competent and worked hard. During the previous year, three of our senior engineers had traveled out to the West Coast where companies now had opportunities for engineers with his qualifications. They approached him to offer him a job with a nice promotion and more money. Now he was in a quandary, and came to meet with me to ask for advice.

"Jim, Harry and Doug out in the West Coast have got a great job opportunity which they called me about and they want me to join them out there. We worked together for three years and, apparently, they enjoyed working with me and need my experience to assist them in their new program. Unfortunately, I have a problem and I wanted to run it by you to see what you might recommend. Sally, my wife, loves it here and does not want to move. I told her about the opportunity and that we would have to pick up and move out to the West Coast to take the job. She was emphatic. She does not want to move and she says if I attempt to move, she will divorce me. What should I do?"

"Hal, from my perspective, it's a no-brainer. You are doing fine here. Management respects you. Promotions will come, more money will come and you will prosper here, but it will take a little time. You love your wife, you have been married for two years and you have a lovely home here. My recommendation is to turn the offer down, stay here, stay married, stay happy."

Hal's face fell. "Jim, to tell you the truth that was not the answer I was hoping to get from you. In my experience, there are loads of girls around, but very few good jobs and limited job opportunities. I really believe it is in my best interest to take this job and move and, if Sally wants to divorce me, so be it. I think I'm going to talk to a few more people just to get some more thoughts on the matter." With that, he left and I figured it was the end of the discussion.

A week later Hal submitted his resignation and moved to the new job on the West Coast. We later learned that his wife Sally had instituted divorce proceedings and their

marriage terminated. I could never understand the decision path that Hal took. In my experience and upbringing, a good wife was a lot more important than any job. Marriage was for life and jobs were a dime a dozen.

Several years later, in my working career, I had to spend a couple of weeks in West Texas. That experience changed my feeling about Hal's decision. I still did not agree with his decision, but now I understood why he thought the way he did. West Texas is a barren desert area similar to Oklahoma. There are vast stretches of poor farmland with houses scattered across the prairie. Each farmhouse has a family with a number of children, half of whom were girls. If you grew up in this part of the world, you learn that there were many girls available in the area. However, because of the poverty there were almost no jobs. Anyone who grew up in this vast emptiness had a different family experience than those of us who grew up in the cities. The city-raised engineer would have kept his wife and stayed in place while Hal took a very different path.

The old saying states, *you can't really know a man until you walk a mile in his shoes.*

When I travelled into the area he grew up in, I finally understood how he viewed the world so differently than I did. In his case, the environment shaped his life and his thinking.

THE END