

Arditi At The Construction Site



This is a photograph taken at the Hirfanli Baraj(dam). One of the most important amongst my later projects has been the construction of the Hirfanli Dam [this dam is one of the most important river dams built in Turkey. It is situated along the Kizilirmak River. Kizilirmak rises from Middle Anatolia, and flows into the Black Sea. It is the longest river within Turkey]. I had seen an ad in the newspaper by the George Wilton Company, which was looking for a civil engineer. I applied for the job, and was called in for an interview shortly. During the interview, they asked me what I did for a living. I responded "I am an engineer." The company executive asked me "What does that mean?" When I said "What do you mean what does that mean?" he began counting to me all of the subgroups under engineering such as mechanical engineering, mathematical engineering, etc... He wanted to know which one I was. I told him that I could do them all. I was accepted to work on the project for a trial period of one month. They wanted to see what I could do first. My first assignment there was to build the wooden model and maquette of a tunnel that was 9 meters in diameter. After a few prototypes, I realized that some of the calculations for the maquette were not entirely accurate. I had the prototype model remade a few days before the groundbreaking ceremony. We were able to keep our noses clean; we presented an accurately made model there. Two days after the ceremony, the executive officer gave me the keys to one of the buildings, and told me that I was officially hired as a chief construction engineer. Since I had to relocate for my work on the dam, I took my wife and daughter with me. Those were difficult days. We were living in an area of lower socio-economic status that also lacked a strong infrastructure. The engineers' first responsibility was to construct the dam, and then work on the implementation of a stronger, environmental infrastructure. I remember my daughter getting very sick with a high temperature. I remember being extremely worried. Another one of my strongest memories from those days is celebrating Passover [Pesach] across from the beautiful Kizilirmak view. We prepared the Seder,

and celebrated Passover with another Jewish family residing on the construction site. Suleyman Demirel [one of the most important politicians in Turkish history. He held many political offices; the most important being the President of the Turkish Republic] and Necmeddin Erbakan [also an important politician, he held the office of Prime Minister] were my classmates from college. When Suleyman Demirel was an executive in the Water and Sanitation Ministry, he came to visit the Hirfanli construction site. When my company's executive director introduced us, Demirel said "How are you Arditi?" He used to always say that to me when we were going to school together. The executive director was shocked. He asked me why I never told him I knew Demirel. I responded "You never asked." I had the opportunity to meet with Demirel on a number of different occasions after that. When he was elected President, he threw an elegant dinner party in honor of his university classmates from ITU. We all wanted to go to Ankara to congratulate him anyway. He invited us and our wives to a beautiful reception at the Presidential Palace. I had taken my annual leave in Istanbul that year. When I returned back to Ankara, a big surprise was waiting for me. The Company had hired a new foreman [a graduate of an engineering lysee. Foremans did not have engineering degrees from universities], and I was to work under him. I told my superiors I could not do that. When I submitted them my resignation, I was told "We realize you are the one with the degree, but this is how it works around here." In the meantime, the Turkish Executive Director of the Company had called me in and told me he gave me a raise. I told him "I did not resign because of money. If I had, you would have known." I asked him to kindly accept my resignation, and provide me with a letter of recommendation. I unfortunately had to send the letter back once it arrived. I instead contacted the Company's arm in London to provide me with the kind of recommendation that I was looking for. The Board of Directors there gave me a very strong letter. When I was packing my belongings, the Executive Director told me "This Company has never provided an employee with as strong a recommendation as you were given. This document will take you far anywhere you want to go in Europe."