

Life in High Gear

Most books related to the gear industry are more about the business side or the technical aspects of what we do. Rarely are they about the people in it. But the industry is made up of people, and sometimes those people have an impact that extends beyond their own company or their own time. James J. Cervinka, founder of Arrow Gear, was one of those people. And now his story is available for everyone to enjoy and learn from. If you haven't already done so, I highly recommend that you pick up a copy of *A Gear Man's Journey—A Memoir*. It's Jim's story, told in his own words, as related to his biographer, Scott A. Newton. Jim passed away in 2012 at the age of 92, and this book is a fitting tribute to his remarkable life.

The book is lighthearted and folksy, but apart from being entertaining, I found I could relate to it on a number of levels. Throughout my career, I've had a very close association with Jim and Arrow Gear. After the war, Jim and my father both started their own businesses—my father as a used machinery dealer specializing in gear equipment, and Jim as a gear manufacturer. When I started working for my dad, Arrow Gear was already a good customer, and so I was often over there to work out a deal or assist with delivery. On these occasions, I'd often sit in Jim's office, and we'd just talk.

On top of the direct personal connection, I found some valuable and instructive themes in Jim's story that are reflective of a whole generation of men who came out of World War II, founded companies—often from very humble beginnings—and whose perseverance and dedication represent the American Success Story. These men built things, and their can-do attitude is what made America strong. My father was one of those men, and I recognize in Jim's story many of the

traits I grew up with. I suspect that many of you had similar experiences. My father, Jim, and those like them built America and instilled qualities in their offspring that failure was not an option, hard work was normal, and curiosity was encouraged.

I believe most of you will appreciate the stories about a man who tasted every aspect of life and whose many passions revolved around all things mechanical. Maybe you'll recognize a bit of yourself in the young boy with mechanical aptitude who fixed his mother's washing machine, or the teenager who attached a motorized propeller to a sled and drove it around town.

If it had a motor or an engine, Jim probably, drove it, flew it, tinkered with it or repaired it. He was a pilot, who owned and flew more than half a dozen airplanes. He raced snowmobiles. He owned fishing boats and motor homes and automobiles. He souped up golf carts. And many of his stories involve clever and creative ways he used his mechanical ability to keep those machines working, like the time he was forced to make an emergency landing in a farmer's field. He scrounged up parts from the farmer's barn to make a replacement push rod. He repaired his engine, then flew the rest of the way home without incident. I'm not sure most of us would trust our own abilities in a situation like that, but that's the kind of man Jim was. When faced with a challenge, he didn't wait for someone to come and help him. He figured out a way—whether making gears, running a company or living his life.

Many of you will also find interest in the history of Arrow Gear itself. Founded in 1947, the company has grown to become one of the world's premiere manufacturers of spiral bevel gears for aircraft applications, with customers around the world. But reading this book you'll get the inside story about all the good decisions, bad decisions, lucky breaks and hard work it took to build this company.

A Gear Man's Journey is available from www.lulu.com. Just search for James Cervinka or *A Gear Man's Journey*. The price is \$19.95 plus shipping, but all profits will be donated to the AGMA Foundation, according to the author. So by reading Jim's story, you'll also be doing your part for the industry.

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