

Daily Journal

"Be just and fear not."



RILEY MANNING: The summer of 2008 was a much simpler time

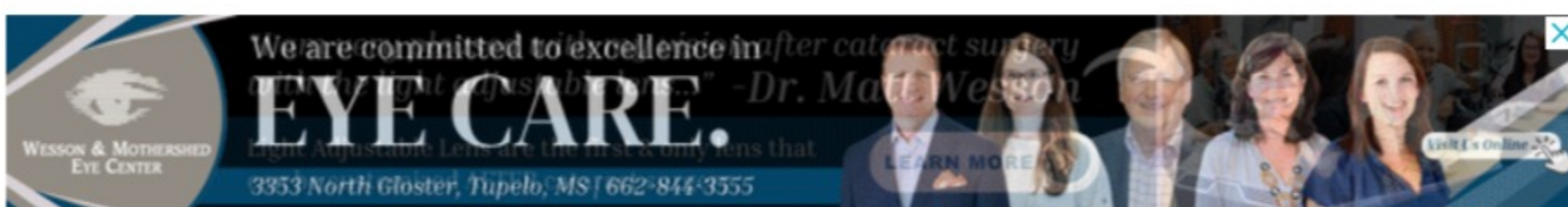
Jun 14, 2020

f X in e p u b

The summer I turned 19, I took a job with Sanderson Construction Co. Four months isn't a long time, but I find myself thinking about that experience every year when the sun really starts to bake.

Each morning, I left the house around 6 to hit the job site in Tupelo before we started work at 7. Each evening, I returned home in a different state of filth and fell asleep before full dark.

Early in the summer, in order to get to a water pipe under a parking lot, we dug a 6-foot hole with a shovel and a pair of post hole diggers. Covered from head to toe in mud, I drove straight to the barber shop after work to buzz cut my thick mop of hair.



I learned to work with concrete, the methodical art of constructing forms with chalk lines, stakes, string. When working with wood, measure twice and cut once. When working with concrete, measure a hundred times before you pour. Pour days themselves were mini occasions, raking and smoothing to perfection. Even a small project – a pad for an air conditioning unit, for instance – yielded great satisfaction.

When we built a new addition onto Rankin Elementary, I got my introduction to roofing.

"The trick to being on a roof is not thinking about being on a roof. The less you think about it, the easier it'll be," someone told me the first day of the project. "And watch out for cords."

Up just high enough to get a view of the neighborhood, we decked the roof with big pieces of plywood, the sun bouncing off the aluminum and cooking us. It was even hotter after laying the black roofing paper. You could see a swimming pool in a back yard a few houses down.

The Rankin project was a small one. Once it was wrapped up, I was assigned to the site of a large commercial building. When I got there, we were prepping the footings – digging trenches and building frames of rebar that would eventually support and reinforce the concrete foundation. It was a massive project, weeks spent bent over, cutting and tying rebar.

A few of my relatives had worked for Sanderson before, and I remember talking about the project with them.

"When they pour a slab that big, it's gotta break somewhere," my cousin Patrick told me. "So they plan for it to break in a certain spot that won't cause any problems and so the break will be clean."

← Ads by Google

Stop seeing this ad Why this ad? ▷

There's a metaphor in there somewhere.

On the day we finally poured the foundation, it rained cats and dogs. But they'd scheduled it for that day so it could dry over the weekend. If we put it off, it would put the project way behind. So we got out there in the rain and poured it. My supervisor got down in there with us, and together, we all made it happen. That always stuck with me as an example of true leadership.

Bill, Bubblegum, Barry, David, Mitch, Joe and the rest of them probably don't remember me, but I'll never forget them. They were patient and kind and knew how to work hard.

I've been thinking about that summer even more lately, as I plot out home improvement projects of my own. Wherever y'all are, I hope you're well.

