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AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

General Motors: Life Inside the Factory
Richard Thomas Gall
AuthorHouse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Richard Thomas Gall's memoir, *General Motors: Life Inside The Factory*, is about an hourly employee working at the Flint, Michigan, General Motors plant in the 1970s. As the author says in his introduction, it is "the story of a typical factory worker in a typical factory town."

The tale is indeed typical—it centers around Gall's experiences at a variety of jobs on the production assembly line. The reader gets a glimpse of daily life in an automotive manufacturing plant. For the most part, it is what one might expect. But Gall is an observant worker who notices safety violations, supervisor errors, and waste. This turns an ordinary recounting of his mundane job life into an interesting commentary on American manufacturing practices.

Gall uses flashbacks to tell us about his childhood growing up in Flint, Michigan , and his experiences in the Marine Corps. In one segment about the Marine Corps, the author discusses several of the principles he learned in leadership training. They include: "set the example; be technically and tactically proficient; train your Marines as a team; make sound and timely decisions; keep your Marines informed; and, ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished." The principles presented are a stark contrast to the management and operation of the GM plant where Gall is employed. The author makes the point that GM would be a lot better off if it followed Marine Corps discipline.

As Gall comes to the end of his story, he makes the observation that "there are three parties directly responsible for the demise of General Motors" —management, the UAW, and the hourly employees. However, Gall feels that "the executive class at General Motors is a full 80 percent accountable for the problems with the company."

Gall closes with perhaps the most provocative section of his book, entitled “Lessons Learned: If Provided the Opportunity, What Would I Say to the Chairman of GM?” Among other things, he suggests that GM “address quality and reliability issues” and that the company “adopt the leadership principles” of the Marine Corps.

While *General Motors: Life Inside The Factory* is not a particularly compelling read, it is honest, pointed, and very well-written. In addition, the author does have a keen eye for detail and the ability to describe events, and he does a good job of painting a vivid picture of the people working in the plant.

One can see how the GM of the 1970s may have taken its business for granted, focusing on maximum output but not necessarily on the best quality. In the context of GM’s recent meltdown and bankruptcy, Richard Thomas Gall’s book takes on all the more meaning.

Barry Silverstein