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## “When I was a boy, I wanted to be a racing driver.”

**Switzerland, as it was when I was young, was the wrong country for my dream job, so I became a machine mechanic. And that only happened by chance because they weren't actually expecting me at Muller Martini, but my best friend Urs. Now, 47 years later at 63, I am more than happy and satisfied in early retirement.**

Fortunately, I have the two most valuable goods that a pensioner can have: time and health. Boredom shouldn't be a problem. I want to create photo books from thousands of digital pictures I took, regularly cycling up the Schwägalp by mountain bike or going on motorcycle tours through South Tyrol. And as my wife won't be retiring for another four years, I'll, of course, be taking on the role of househusband.

In 47 years, I never had any desire to leave the company. Many colleagues did and came back. “You don't even need to think about it, Fredy, it doesn't get any better than here,” they said. It worked for me. I liked what I was doing, the pay and benefits were good, and the company was generous in several ways to boot. If, for example, the owner Hans Müller was celebrating a milestone birthday, we were paid double the salary sometime in May as a token of his gratitude. We, the employees, were the reason for the company's success, he said. The overall package was perfect for me, I am grateful to Muller Martini for everything.

When I was a boy, I wanted to be a racing driver. Or a test driver. Clay Regazzoni became my idol, and even today I still collect Formula 1 models from Ferrari and Sauber. I now own about 150 of them. Just recently, I got a model of the car that Charles Leclerc drove with Sauber in



2018. At the very latest, when Leclerc wins the world championship title, it will be worth a lot. And he will definitely become world champion, he has so much talent.

### **“Unsolicited application” provides a training place**

Unfortunately, you couldn’t become a racing driver in Switzerland when I was young. We didn’t even have a race track. And so I opted for at least becoming a car mechanic. But, I found the trial apprenticeship boring, not challenging – I simply expected it to be different. My best friend, Urs, then told me about his trial apprenticeship as a machine mechanic at Muller Martini; he had already written an application for the apprenticeship.

One day, as we sat philosophizing in our tree hut, he was suddenly no longer sure about it. So I took his application and crossed out his name, put mine down and sent off the documents. All I knew was that machine mechanics „tinker“ with metal. I got the apprenticeship. The instructor at Muller Martini only realized on my first day at work that it wasn’t Urs who was starting, but Haessig. And Urs? He did an apprenticeship as a bricklayer and later built up a landscaping business. We are still good friends.



*A toast to staying connected! Fredy Haessig wishes the customers and employees of Muller Martini all the best for the future.*

### **“If the customer was satisfied afterwards, I was happy.”**

At the time when I was doing my training, the apprentices rotated to the various departments every three months. I particularly liked the testing department, and it was no coincidence that I stayed there longer, because my supervisors also thought that it was the right place for me. Instead of cars, as I had once dreamed, I was now working with bookbinding machines. The global economic situation was tense, which is why I was able to do my basic military training while still an apprentice. I was eager to be ready for the world of work at the end of my training. That was certainly one of the reasons why I was able to stay at Muller Martini.

The years that followed were extremely interesting in assembling perfect binders. As there was no service department yet, we were responsible for everything from A to Z. We assembled the machines in Felben until everything worked. We naturally wanted to avoid any embarrassment during the assembly on site, so everything had to be perfect beforehand. Only then was it delivered, and I boarded the plane. Assembly took four to ten weeks, depending on the type of machine and the dimensions of the equipment. Assembling the “thing” and putting it into operation was always appealing to me. If the customer was satisfied afterwards, I was happy.



### **Gold rush atmosphere around the globe**

At that time, we service engineers enjoyed a high reputation among our customers. It was common for the company owner or production manager to be picked up at the hotel, receive extensive support and be taken out to dinner. The first time I assembled a machine abroad was in Amman, the capital of Jordan, in 1977. As I was leaving after finishing the job, the boss gave me an envelope with a generous tip. Then I realized why all Muller Martini employees wanted to join the assembly department.

I have traveled to so many countries! It was exciting everywhere because you had no idea what to expect. One job in Algeria was odd. At first, they didn't want to book me into the hotel I wanted – the El Aurassi. "Fully booked." Instead, I was to take a room elsewhere, which was infested with beetles. When I took things into my own hands and inquired at the El Aurassi hotel, I was told: „Mais oui, monsieur! Would you like a room with sea view?" Later, at the construction site, the weird events continued. I was taken to a remote hall without any windows, no flooring and no electricity, and I refused to put the equipment in the mud.

Back home at Muller Martini, they soon heard that their mechanic was obviously "too lazy to work" – the Algerians had sent a cable to Switzerland before I could do it myself. In the end, the customer signed a waiver for any warranty services. During the installation, I supported the system at least on metal plates to ensure a minimum degree of stability. A year later, when electricity was finally available, a colleague came back for the commissioning. Damage to the machine was already visible, but at least a floor had been installed or the machine had been "cast in". Later we learned that the equipment was realized with foreign subsidies. It is said that it was never operated.

I have a wonderful memory of Montreal, which I first visited in 1983 for an assembly assignment in the Canadian province of Quebec. I learned that the Formula 1 circuit on the Île de Notre Dame was open at certain times for test drives at a more leisurely pace by private car. But it was only 20 years later, in 2003, exactly to the day, that I had the luck. It was great to do a lap on the track of the Grand Prix of Canada.

### **Flight home because of the Olympic Games...**

In 1980, an assembly in Kyiv, which was part of the Soviet Union at the time, ended on a weird note. One lovely day and in the middle of our work, we were told to down tools and prepare for our journey home. On the plane, we saw engineers from other Swiss companies who also had to leave the country. The reason was that the Russian capital was hosting the Summer Olympics at that time, so the Communist leadership withdrew a lot of food from other regions of the country to give a semblance of abundant wealth in Moscow.

In 1986, I slowly but surely considered reducing my travel and settling down. Projects lasting several months in China were my last big assembly projects. In Shanghai, I was responsible for two pieces of equipment, one of which I assembled, the other was assembled by a young service engineer. The third project was implemented in Beijing. I also accompanied the then Sales Director Rolf Zängerle on a round trip that took us to ten customers.

### **Assembly control as collecting pond for anyone with travel fatigue**

From 1987, I was a member of assembly control, which ensured the internal acceptance of equipment according to a checklist. Assembly control was the collecting pond for anyone with travel fatigue. This is where we could apply our experience in the best way. From 1991, I worked as an instructor in the training department. We started bringing our customers to the Felben plant for training, and because I had learned to speak fluent French and English over the years, I was predestined for this role. We instructed not only customers, but also colleagues of foreign service representations.



The aim of the training, which usually lasted a week, was that the participants would then know how conversion from one product to another worked. The pace of learning varied for everyone, adjusting to it was the challenge for us instructors. The most important thing was that those attending the course would develop self-confidence when operating the system.

### **Presentations as sales support**

I remember well when the bookbinding academy opened on February 16/17, 1995, that was a really big deal. 250 journalists were expected, and even Professor Werner Rebsamen, an expert in perfect binding, came over from the US. The place was heaving, and because there was not enough space in the training room, we transmitted the presentation via TV screen to the adjoining rooms. I was pretty nervous before my presentation.

Today, I am still grateful to Sales Manager Rolf Zängerle for the in-depth, joint preparation that helped me later when I had to stand in front of people at trade fairs. The presentations became increasingly important in order to impress interested customers with our machines. The customers began to compare offers precisely, which made things more hectic for us. Every year, we held around 100 demonstrations in Felben to boost sales.

The days when salespeople put their feet up on their desks and only had to take calls were over by the mid-1990s. All the more surreal is looking back to the glorious era of the 1980s. This was the time when the Chinese were traveling around Europe to get an idea of the local industry. They came to the conclusion that they wanted to put exactly the same machines into operation, so they ordered 20 perfect binding systems at once. 20 units – that was simply unimaginable! We didn't know what was happening to us, and I think the finance department was totally amazed when they saw the many millions of Swiss francs flowing into the company account. It was the time when even a service technician was allowed to travel business class, which, by the way, was only a little more expensive because the costs for the heavy tool boxes were added in economy class anyway.

### **Books are essential!**

So much has happened since I joined Muller Martini 47 years ago. Over the years, I simply got to know everyone and everything here in Felben. Digital media has changed the graphic arts industry drastically. In the past, everything was printed, today there are e-readers, and advertising has migrated online. But I believe there will be a mix in the future. Paper won't vanish, books are essential! The only question is whether the trough has been reached and what share the graphic arts industry will secure.

My relationships with colleagues and customers have left their mark on me. It was fascinating how friendly people were, whatever the country I was visiting and which customs applied there. I was very preoccupied with the changes of the past years and the laying off of many colleagues. When the Felben plant was closed in 2015, our entire social environment collapsed, which is still very painful today.

I didn't plan to retire early, but things are fine the way they are now. I am happy about the years I have gained. It was a matter of course for me to make a contribution, so younger colleagues could keep their jobs at Muller Martini. I now look forward to the retiree meetings or the trip that 10 to 20 motorbike enthusiasts from Felben take every year. I'll remain in close contact to the company, after all I am Muller Martini through and through!

Your

Fredy Haessig, long-standing Chief Instructor for Muller Martini at the Bookbinding Academy in Felben

