

From Chapter 10: Harris-Boyer Bakery

Author's note: Another favorite memory tossed on the discard pile! This cut comes from the "The Hollow." The father of my friend Terry (Jerry in the story) worked as a baker in the Harris-Boyer bakery. Once, he gave us a tour of the bakery. I thought the place was magical and I've cultivated the memory over the years. You'll notice in this cut that Jerry's name is Kerry, and that Mr. Owens' name is Mr. Johns.

...Obviously, cardboard can't withstand rain, so as soon as we had the roof on we had to find something waterproof to cover it with. For this, we went to Kerry's dad.

Mr. Johns was a baker at the Harris-Boyer Bakery, an enormous red brick building that sits only a couple of blocks from my house. For the last few of years, I've walked past it twice a day, on my way to and from Bheam School. I think the Harris-Boyer Bakery is a lot like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. It's large and brick and kind of mysterious. When you walk by it you can hear the whizzing and clunking of machinery, but you're not exactly sure what is happening inside. The building exudes the most delicious smells, but unlike Willy Wonka's, they are the smells of baking bread and donuts, not chocolate. And unlike Wonka's factory, you can easily see that people are always going in and always coming out.

Mr. Johns is one of the people always going in and out of the factory. That's because he works as a baker in the bread department. Two years-ago he arranged for Kerry and me to take a tour. We met him at the worker's entrance. Inside was a locker room. Mr. Johns put on white sneakers, a large

white apron, and a paper hat. We had to put on paper hats, too, and wear paper booties over our shoes. Cleanliness was one of the bakery's top priorities. When you think about it, keeping things clean is important in any kind of cooking. If you've ever bitten into a sandwich and found a hair or a dead ladybug, then you know what I mean.

From the locker room, Mr. Johns led us down a hallway to the bread room. There he showed us 50-pound sacks of flour piled into pyramids, and the huge steel vats where the flour, water, and yeast were mixed into bread dough by giant steel hooks that twirled around inside. The sound was tremendous – CLUNK-a-CLUNK-a-CLUNK-a-CLUNK-a – and the smell of the bread dough wrapped around you like a warm and utterly delicious smelling blanket.

Once the dough had risen, it was dumped onto a table and sliced into chunks. Each chunk would become a loaf of bread. The chunks were plunked down into a large compartmentalized bread pan, four chunks to a pan. Then the pans were placed on a metal conveyor belt, where they jiggled along until they entered the mouth of a gigantic oven and disappeared. Every few minutes, four loaves of golden brown bread slid out the other side of the oven. A baker wearing bulky oven mitts picked up the hot pans and dumped the loaves onto another conveyor belt, which rolled the bread away on a curving ramp of little black rollers. The loaves of cooling bread bumped their way down the ramp to a slicing machine. Vizzz! The bread was cut into slices. Then whap! A machine pulled a plastic Harris-Boyer Bread bag over the sliced loaf. The whole operation was really slick. Vizzz- whap! Vizzz-whap! Vizzz-whap! A

freshly baked, thoroughly sliced, completely wrapped loaf of bread was ready for delivery every five seconds. That's 12 loaves every minute or 720 loaves per hour!

The tour was great and by the end of it we were totally starving. Mr. Johns says that after a while you don't even smell the bread anymore. I was hoping to get a tour of the place where the gobs were made, but Mr. Johns said no, some other time.

So now I bet you're wondering what does all this have to do with finding something waterproof to cover the roof of our treehouse? Well, sometimes Mr. Johns was furloughed from the bakery. Furloughed means when that when business was slow because people weren't eating much bread, the Harris-Boyer company told Mr. Johns he couldn't come to work. Of course, when he wasn't working, he wasn't making any money. Mr. Johns had four kids to take care of so whenever he would get furloughed, he would paint houses to make money. And the back part of his garage, the part that wasn't taken up with Steve's amazing sky-blue Ford Mach 1 Mustang, was stuffed full of ladders, paint cans, and... plastic drop cloths.

Mr. Johns gave us a half-dozen of his most gnarly drop cloths. They were perfect for protecting the cardboard of the tree house roof. Kerry carefully folded them to fit and then stapled them down. On top of them he laid some old shingles that we found in the corner of my parent's garage. Finally, he strategically placed some flat sandstone pieces on the roof. This was to keep everything in place in case a windstorm or big thunderstorm rolled through. I told him not to use too many stone pieces

though, because a roof made of cardboard and branches couldn't support too much weight...