



Safety 48 years ago and how times have changed

Abalinx 1 September 2018 Peter Adamis

Today being the alleged first day of Spring is not the same as those in the Northern hemisphere who believe in using the old system of weather patterns based on the sun, moon and the planets that affect our planet.

Still this article is nothing to do with your weather patterns as we who have been brought up in Melbourne no fill well the erratic and at times volatile nature of our weather. We all know that we can experience all four seasons in one day. Whether that makes us unique is a question that only we can assume.

The images were both taken outside the Cabrini Hospital in Malvern. The hospital itself is undergoing further development to cater for the local and regional communities. The other hospitals of equal or greater status are the Monash, the Alfred and the Austin and therefore the Cabrini Hospital has become unique in its own. The staff are very friendly, medical expertise as good as any major hospital and the service and conditions are excellent.

Today's foray to the Cabrini hospital was to visit a tried and true friend, Nick Bantounas who is in for a routine check-up and health

scan. Nick has proven to me and too many in the Australian Hellenic community to be a respected, good man, loved by many. A philanthropist and someone who you could trust to give you good advice. His first piece of advice to me was "be prepared for the inevitable and **don't** be surprised by the actions of others". This advice has stood the test of time and I hope that Nick has the longevity he so deserves. He is truly a gem amongst the millions of bright coloured stones we often see in life.

As I was leaving the hospital, I looked at the activity that was going on at the corner, noticing the tradies, labourers and site managers wandering about the building site. I then looked up and gazed upon the crane and the section where the operator sat and allowed my mind to return back to 1970. A time when I was just a young bloke, in my last year as an apprentice electrician, and scurrying up the crane supports to reach the top where the operator sat. My job was to ensure that there was communication between the operator and the men below when lifting materials and equipment from the bottom to the various floors.

I looked at my hands and chuckled, thinking back to my earlier years when in the middle of winter we would be called out to fix the communications as it was vital that the building project was not delayed. Safety then as it is today was important but in those early years risks were still being taken by all and one could not compare with the safety of today with those of the past. I remember climbing up the crane supports, clinging to the sides, trying to see where the breaks in the communication line was, feeling the cold winter air biting at my fingers, nipping at my ears and ice at times appearing on my cold blue face. Nose would be dripping from the condensation and I could see the puffs of air coming out of my mouth as I breathed in and out.

Once when I had found the break in the communication line, I wrapped my legs around the steel crane supports and clung on to dear life while I used my free hands to repair the line. In most cases the line was either worn away by the incessant whipping of thin line of communication against the metal and/or it was broken in one of the two lines.

It mattered little what the break was as it still need to be repaired and I was fighting against the clock as the tradesmen or the operator could not work without the communication. I must confess that some crane operators and site foremen did have the old fashioned walkie talkies but they were not as effective as the direct line.

In my case, I had with me a pair of pliers, a knife, carved out of a hacksaw blade. Small roll of communication line and some electrical tape. Splicing the communication line is not a problem under normal conditions. However when you are so high up in the air with the winds howling around you, the crane supports swaying slightly from one side to side even though they are solidly connected to the concrete building, one needs to work quickly to stop the oncoming of cramps or worse still freezing and being unable to move.

My skin on my fingers when they touched the metal supports began to peel off and I knew time was of the essence. In those days, I had no fear but I was prudent enough to respect my environment and take precautionary action. The only time I remember taking such precautionary action was when the winter was so cold that I tied myself to the crane support with rope so that I did not lose consciousness. I had heard of people falling as a result and I was certainly no fool. Once the communication line was fixed, I had the perilous task of climbing down to the ground far below, taking my time. One slip and you fell. Once on the ground, the site manager and my mate the foreman would say good job Pete and then that was it.



I took a photo of the crane which was not very high but it was surrounded with much more sophisticated safety and communication lines than in my day.

It was pleasing to note the safety signs, communication lines, cladding, hard hats and site managers of which there were three on this site, monitoring by observation everything that was going on.

It was at this point that a young bloke came up to me and asked politely why I was taking photos and I chuckled at his remarks because it was expected I guess.

His name was James, he was 29 year old site manager, who had studied for his profession and was safety conscious and took his job seriously. We struck up a conversation and he chuckled when I told him of my earlier experiences as a young electrician.

I left James and the Cabrini Hospital development to make my way home. I sighed and remembered a mate of mine called Bill who had gone down with the Westgate Bridge in 1971. Bill was a young Engineer, very much like young James and I remember making the joke to Bill back then that the Bridge would fall down about his ears if they (Holland Constructions) did not fix the bulge on the metal bridge. Bill laughed and said it would not happen. Sad to say as we all know the story, the bridge collapsed taking some 35 good men with it. I left it at that at my mind wandered onto better memories not involving chaos and mayhem of an era that was not as safety conscious as today.

My message to those in the industry is not to undermine, underestimate or take safety issues lightly. We all have families and friends and if safety is ignored or taken for granted then calamity is sure to be a witness to whatever follows.



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