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FORMER, 60 years as a pipe maker - and still going strong!

In this fall, Former celebrates his 60th anniversary. Isn't it amazing? Think about dealing with the same thing for almost a lifetime! Former is also a contented, 78-year-old man. He is incredibly happy about his health: Spared from various diseases and knows good courage. Over the past six decades he has met a lot of people who have helped put life into perspective, which gives a great motivation to keep spitting out one masterpiece after another.

Former has previously been mentioned here in the "Piber & Tobacco"-magazine - in May 1983, November 1986, September 1995 and December 1997, but times change, new readers arrive, so let's start with a little history:

At the age of 15, Former (Hans Nielsen) has to figure out what he wants to do for a living. The dream is either a job as a mechanic or a machine worker, so he gets a learning position (that does not meet the criteria at all points). However, there is a mechanic who is quite good at working with metals. He teaches Former how to turn and grind steel; one thing that today is an indispensable thing to master when working as a pipe maker.

In addition, Former gets a job at Suhr's pipe repair shop, which is run by the well known pipe maker, Poul Rasmussen. Former has to go all over Copenhagen to deliver the repaired pipes. At that time there were around 25-30 pipe shops in the center of Copenhagen.

One day, Poul Rasmussen reads that W.Ø. Larsen is looking for a pipe maker. At that time, Former was involved in the pipe production at Suhr's. Among other things, he has learned how to use the band sander, while pipe maker Svend Knudsen looks over his shoulder. Poul Rasmussen suggests Former to apply for the job. The young man enters the W.Ø. Larsen shop on Amagertorv, where Ole W.Ø. Larsen said: "Make 7 pipes" - and Former returns to Poul Rasmussen and stands for the first time at the lathe. Next day: Back to Amagertorv - showing the 7 results, and then Former got the job as pipe maker at W.Ø. Larsen.

It turned into 10 years in the workshop. The workshop then moved out onto Jagtvej, before eventually ending up on Gartnervej, where W.Ø. Larsen had their wholesale department. Many prominent Danish pipe makers have been through the workshop, thereby receiving expert guidance from Former, who over time grew in degrees and ended up being the workshop manager. Poul Ilsted, Tonni Nielsen and P. H. Vigen has all benefited from knowledgeable guidance that has enabled them, later in their lives, to live as pipe makers with a fantastic reputation in the great outside world.

Former has been around the world before he decided to settle in "Toksværd" in the late 90's. He started with a workshop in "Høsten" (near Haslev), then onto Bru-Bru Werke in Switzerland, which later moved the production to Lauenberg outside Hamburg. In Toksværd Former and his wife Daniella has arranged themselves perfectly: The small 100 square meter workshop is located right next to the private quarters, so when the desire comes over the couple, they just take two steps to the left and they are ready to produce the lovely, delicious, hand-cut pipes.

The workshop is an eldorado for people interested in pipes: drawers with lots of half-finished pipe heads from the time when Former was responsible for the production of Bentley pipes, a drawer system with all kinds of mouthpieces - and then of course there is the machinery: Several lathes, each with their own function, band sanders, drills, copy cutters, sandblasting apparatus - and then there are pipes everywhere.

Former does not have a specific system when creating a new pipe, he explains: "I have no rush. People will have to wait!". A healthy attitude that ensures that the unique pipes are made with a gentle hand.

When asking the world-famous pipe maker whether a Former pipe has a specific characteristic, he replies: "I just make them...." And then after a little reflection time: "It is a matter of balance. The relationship between the tip, neck and head must be connected!". Many newly started pipe makers have been given good advice by Former during the learning process, but he has never

had apprentices. There has been no need for this, but it does not rule out that Former does not work as a mentor. He is currently an advisor for young Chinese pipe makers who benefit greatly from Former's knowledge and experience.

Together with the fellow pipe maker, Kurt Balleby, Former goes to Italy to hand pick the briar blocks, so it is top quality used for the lovely hand-cut pipes that today are stamped with: "FORMER - Denmark" - nothing with "Handmade" - people hopefully knows that the pipes is made by hand. Once the pipe has been through the 125 processes, it is impossible to avoid having to spend a good deal of money before calling yourself the lucky owner of a FORMER. If you are lucky, you can now acquire a Former pipe at "The Danish Pipe Shop" in Copenhagen or at "Bisgaard Pipes" in Vejle - or through the dealers abroad. Especially in China and Italy, there is a demand that allows Former and Daniella to live a decent life.

And now Former has been pipe maker for 60 years. A real, warm person whose company is indescribably nice. Former looks back on an amazing life. He thanks the genes for his good health, and has no plans to put the pipe making on the shelf. Forms have been called "Master of the Classic pipes" - something I can agree with. He is a Master, in many ways. Happy anniversary - and best wishes for the future.