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(FINAL DRAFT)

Winter. A sharp chill permeates the air ensuring that none of the metal will ever warm up today, freezing the hands of the workers. The cold air smells of plastic—cooked plastic, a harshly bitter scent. On one side of the warehouse-like building, the sounds of hammers and drills fill the air. The other is home to a number of mechanical groans all coming from 4-wheeled metal machines. The drills in the background stop long enough for jovial singing to be heard. They're singing "Bohemian Rhapsody".

This is what someone might hear on a typical day inside of The Metal Company. Everyone who works here or works with The Metal Company calls it TMC, an acronym owners Greg and Christy Wolfe now display proudly above the front doors. Greg and Christy are siblings who grew up in Colorado alongside TMC, a small family business first started by their dad, Lynn Wolfe.

"His original vision for the place was just to work for himself, do things his way. Growing up he told me, if you can't afford to pay your employees, you don't deserve to be in business," Greg says, remembering his late father's original idea behind starting TMC. It started small in the 80s, Lynn and a few of his friends only running certain kinds of metal. Now, years later, TMC has gotten bigger, but Lynn's values still stand. In business, profit is paramount, but that doesn't stop TMC from focusing on the *greater* aspects of running their own show, just as Lynn always did. They enjoy the freedom and challenge of running a family business, and chief among those challenges is opening the family up to the crew.

“To us, our business and our crew are like family. We’re definitely close knit,” Christy says. Everyone who works at TMC knows one another and they all work together towards similar goals. In this setting, the workers are working alongside their bosses day in and day out. There is no corporate ladder, and Greg and Christy don’t hide behind a privileged title. They work openly with their crew, ensuring everyone’s needs are met.

Work is work, especially in a factory setting, but Greg and Christy do their best to lighten the day. Greg drives through the shop on a forklift carrying heavy boxes of polyethylene powder. He stops to beep loudly at his son Matt and another member of the crew.

“Hey, I’m driving here, I’ve got shit to do!” Greg yells. In response Matt walks as slowly as he can past the forks, yawning dramatically and resting an elbow on the edge of the powder box. Greg honks the forklift’s horn again, and the crew disperses, everyone chuckling loudly at the encounter.

“You know, you have to build positive relationships with your employees because then they’ll want to make money for you,” Greg says, leaning casually against the now empty forks. It’s true; the crew loves working at TMC, and they feel like part of the Wolfe family, even if they are the business side of it.

Greg and Christy firmly believe in building strong relationships with the customers and crew and hold this as one of the philosophies of working at TMC. There aren’t many family-run metal shops. The term ‘family owned’ is often thrown around with bakeries, antique shops, or small restaurants. Though TMC was originally supposed to only manufacture specific metal pieces for RVs and campers, Greg and Christy’s creativity has expanded the business over the years.

When TMC was first opened by Lynn in the 80s, he had to sell his airplane and corvette to get the funds necessary to start a business. It wasn't easy, and the company nearly shut down after getting robbed. The family had to recover from this, and they knew that more sacrifices would need to be made in the future. Unfortunately, sacrifice and success are sometimes two sides of the same coin. Greg had ideas to expand the business after the robbery, and being a tinkerer for his entire life, he pitched the idea of homemade machines and rotational molding. After some debate, TMC expanded into plastic work. In the beginning they only had one machine, but just as Lynn had sacrificed for his own vision, Greg sacrificed for his expansion into plastics.

Greg knew they needed more machines, and he deconstructed his championship winning Punkin Chunkin machine to build new machines for rotational molding.

"It was sort of a stroke of mad genius, or maybe a blessing from God, but those machines worked, and they're still working," Greg laughs. This freedom to work is one of the main appeals to running a family business. Christy's desk is adorned with sparkly pens, colorful drawings, and a number of unicorn pictures. Greg's desk has permanent grease stains on it and blueprints for old jet engines sit propped against a long cold cup of coffee.

"I love that our personalities can shine here," Christy says while filing papers into a weathered cabinet, "we set our own rules here, it's great. There's no like, sensitivity training or anything, we can run ourselves how we want, and I love that freedom."

TMC holds a niche in the metal and plastic manufacturing industry where they can choose to take on unique requests from customers. The same freedom that allows Christy to

write with sparkly blue pens also gives TMC the chance to work with what they want, something both siblings stress as an advantage over working in a huge factory setting.

The end of the day is nearing, and a few members of the crew take off to go home. Before leaving, everyone shakes Greg's hand and hugs Christy. Their clothes are greasy, some are torn up from working with the metal. Those working on the tank line will carry the slight odor of burnt plastic home with them, but they will hardly notice after working all day.

Greg watches a few leave the parking lot. He wipes his hands uselessly; the dirt is caked into the lines of his hands. He stops to shake Matt's hand, each possessing a vice like grip.

"You know, I'd definitely encourage running a family business. It's great. I love working with my sister. We're bound to butt heads, but this place couldn't exist without her," Greg says, taking a seat back at his desk. Christy walks in and jokingly accuses her brother of 'talking shit' about her.

"He [Greg] is a pain in the ass, but he's a good guy. I love working with him," Christy says.

The two love their business and encourage anyone looking to start a business to do it with family. The Metal Company proves that business is more than profit, and nearly any style of business can thrive with family. It takes hard work and dedication, but the bonds made will last a lifetime. Tomorrow will start like any other, the grumbling of machinery, the hiss of an air hose, and maybe some lyrics by the *Rolling Stones*—just another day in the family of The Metal Company.