

35-year

AIST Life Member

Bonnie Poulsen



My story probably isn't what you are used to reading here. My position at California Steel Industries Inc. (CSI) in Fontana, Calif., USA, has been that of support staff. I like to think of the many of us that hold these positions as cogs in the wheels that help a company succeed; we don't necessarily have the most notable job titles within a company, but our jobs nonetheless help that wheel turn.

I came to CSI in 1987 as a two-week temp and I'm still here! My duties began and continue to be in the Engineering and Environmental Services departments, two departments that I knew nothing about when I started.

I have loved my 35 years at CSI! I have a position where creative thinking is welcomed and appreciated and I have been afforded the freedom to do more than just what my job description states.

My first involvement with AISE happened a couple months after I started at CSI when my manager, Bob Bergmark, asked me to make arrangements for five managers

and their wives to attend the AISE annual convention in Pittsburgh. I soon discovered that all the hotel rooms, in what seemed like all of Pittsburgh, were sold out. Luckily AISE's Gerry Kane was able to help me out — she was my life preserver!

My husband, Dennis, and I met at CSI. Starting a month before me, Dennis had been the last remaining environmental employee at Kaiser Steel in Fontana, where he was working when CSI offered him a position as assistant manager of environmental services, a position that within a year transitioned to the manager position. It was Dennis who brought me the form to join AISE when my temp job became permanent. At his retirement in 2016, Dennis was a 38-year member of AISE/AIST. Membership has been a family affair!

In 1990, Dennis wrote to the presiding AISE president suggesting that AISE consider adding an Environmental Engineering Division to the organization. The suggestion was warmly received and the

new division was added to AISE, with Dennis becoming CSI's representative in the division. I often attended the national and regional functions with him and we made many friends over the years at headquarters.

My work life, personal life and interests have often intersected. My job description contains the last line of "other duties as required" and that is exactly what my environmental duties added to my resume. I learned how to do things as diverse as domestic water testing and government liaison work; and I went on to earn certifications in environmental management and auditing from the University of California – Davis, and EPA pre-treatment facility inspection from California State University in Sacramento.

My work in the Environmental Department also opened my mind to what I thought were untapped opportunities to bring ideas to others at the mill about how even the smallest changes could reap significant benefits for our planet. With that belief in mind, I proposed an Earth Day program at the plant.

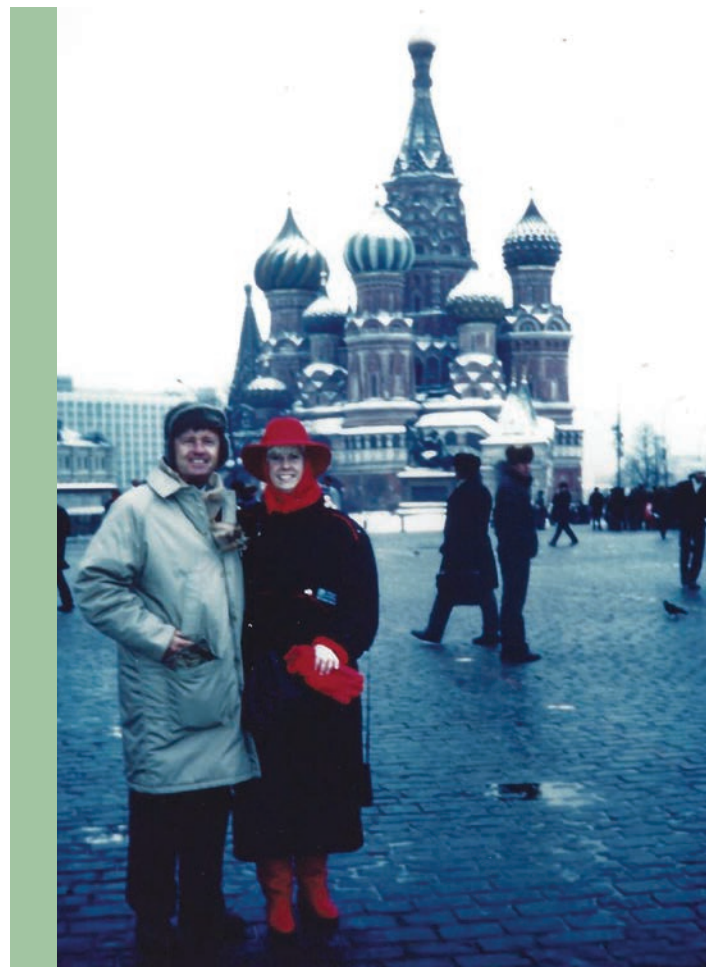
I love working at a place where ideas are given serious consideration! CSI fully supported the Earth Day program, which grew from gifting each employee with a small, live tree to commemorate Earth Day, to a program that included an EcoFair; an annual partnership with schools in which every child at the school also received a tree; a paper recycling program; scholarships and contest awards; and a children's EcoFair. The program garnered CSI recognitions from all levels of government.

In 1990, Dennis and I were invited to join the first environmental delegation to the (former) Soviet Union under the auspices of the Citizen Ambassador Program of People to People International. It was a delegation of 20 environmental management specialists from around the United States, plus two wives. Dennis was the only delegate representing the steel industry. We visited Moscow, Kiev and Minsk, with the delegates having daily meetings with the Moscow City Executive Committee, members of the Supreme Soviet, the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers, and the Chernobyl Commission, among many.

In Kiev, I was able to cautiously and privately ask for a personal account of how the meltdown of the reactor at Chernobyl had affected the people. In Minsk, during a private tour for just the wives, we were told that we were going to be taken to a hospital the next day — a hospital for the children of Chernobyl.



Poulsen at the United Nations.



Poulsen and husband Dennis in Moscow.



Poulsen holds the inaugural trees that kicked off California Steel Industries' Earth Day program.



We were emotionally unprepared for what we encountered.

When we returned from our two-week trip, I submitted what became my first published article, “But What of the Children of Chernobyl?” published in the National Environmental Health Association’s *Journal of Environmental Health*. The next month, Dennis and I were invited to be the keynote speakers at the AISE Southern California Chapter meeting to talk about our trip, which was my first public speaking experience.

Along the way, here at CSI, a coworker and I started a backpack program for underprivileged children, wherein we filled new backpacks with a year’s worth of school supplies, all donated by employees, several outside friends and financial donations from the AIST Southern California Member Chapter. To date, over 2,500 children have received CSI’s donations the generosity of my fellow steelworkers touches my heart.

AISE/AIST was the first professional organization I ever joined. I faithfully read the monthly magazine and especially enjoy the annual member lists that are published, always looking for members I have known through the years, including my friend and former co-worker, Gary Bowman, who is a 50+ year Life Member.

For me, retirement could have happened years ago, but — by choice — I’m still here at CSI! When I was asked for this interview, I balked a bit because of my position at the company, not sure it was fitting for this publication. But I was told that only a handful of women have earned the distinction of AIST Life Member and that it didn’t matter which cog in the wheel I was part of — I belong to an elite group and that feels pretty good! In reading the magazine, I’m also happy to see how many women are now holding notable positions in the steel industry, a huge change from when I first started in 1987. I hope that they will remain members so our short list grows!

So much has changed in my 35 years in this industry. Thank you, AIST, for all the memories that you have been part of in my life and for all that this organization does for the steel industry! ♦