



**E.M.E., Inc.**

*The First  
50 Years*

*The Story of Randy Turnbow  
and His Aerospace Company*



*Randy Turnbow purchased a California metal-finishing company in 1972. Through his faith and hard work, and with the help of family, Randy grew that small shop into a leading aerospace inspection and anodizing corporation: E.M.E., Inc. This is the story of his failures and triumphs.*

# **EME Inc.: The Story of Randy Turnbow and His Aerospace Company**

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**The Story of Randy Turnbow  
and His Aerospace Company**

**Joshua 24:15**





## **The First 50 Years of E.M.E., Inc.**

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**50 Years—1962 to 2012**

## CHAPTER 1

# The Turnbow Standard: Family First



What is the strength behind EME plating and metal finishing? The answer, says EME Chairman Randy Turnbow, “We have these two unshakeable bonds—faith and family. That has been a big portion of the reason for our success.” Randy purchased the company in 1972 and has become the family patriarch. Faith and family are the foundation of EME’s good name in the competitive metal finishing business in Southern California. This family-run company has been together for more than five decades, serving each other and their customers.

Aerospace metal finishing involves applying hard, impervious coatings to metal in order to enhance or protect a particular part of an airplane, helicopter, rocket, or satellite. It is this adding of layers which helps strengthen and improve an unprotected piece of metal so that it is able to withstand extreme pressure and intense stress during critical points in its life. For decades, this is exactly what the Turnbow family has done for each other, their employees and their customers; applying layers of hard work, love and commitment, especially during tough times, to create a solid work environment, impervious to any difficulty that comes their way. And one does not build a company from the ground up without difficulty.

“Over the last 50 years EME has been in business, we have had nearly every kind of employee problem, legal battle, financial struggle, equipment failure, customer loss and management fights possible,” Randy said. “But through it all, the Turnbows

have loved and cared for each other in a way I could never express. With God's continued blessing, we will still be very successful many years from now, and hopefully one or more of our grandchildren will be involved to continue the tradition of good character and honorable service that we have brought to the aerospace metal finishing industry.”

Layer by layer, coating by coating, year by year, day by day, the Turnbow family has added strong faith, good character, and undying support to each other's lives and the lives of hundreds of employees, customers and friends. They have worked together, lived together, laughed, and prayed together, even fought together. They have been there for each other in those times of extreme pressure and intense stress, during the most critical points in their lives. They have strengthened these unbreakable bonds of faith and family to withstand the test of time. Proof of this is in the longevity of their family-owned company.

The summer of 2012 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of EME, Inc., in Compton, California. It is a milestone rightly celebrated, but this milestone is not the end. In typical EME fashion, it is the intent of the company to use this success as a launching pad, continuing to focus on doing well for each other, their customers, and their employees.

Because of this focus, today, EME has 15 employees who have spent more than 20 years at the company. For many of them, it is the only job they have ever known. Another 15 employees have spent 15 or more years in these humble buildings, near where Randy and his brother Steve, the current President of EME, grew up. “Sometimes we will have employees leave here and when they come back they'll say that other companies are not like EME. “Other companies don't do it this way,” said Quality Control Manager John Lopez, Sr., a 28-year EME employee.

The family's foundation began to be laid in the early 1930s, not on the aerospace floors of Southern California, but on the iron horse of the railroad; the mechanical beast which roared



into California from Utah, carrying 16-year-old Lee Turnbow, the future father of Randy and Steve.

Lee had been raised in the “Beehive State”, but moved to the “Golden State” of California, alone, to carve out a new way of life. His step-father, Walter Hamilton, was the first of the Turnbow clan to find work in the aerospace industry. He served in the World War I Army Air Corps near Long Beach, California, where he settled and later worked at North American Aviation. Walter introduced Lee to the trade of airplane machining not long after Lee left the dry-cleaning business trade.

Lee never advanced past high school in formal schooling, but he carried a brilliance that astounded those around him. It was Lee who laid the Turnbow foundation, which is still rock solid today. “I couldn’t wait to see what Lee was doing next when I came to the plant,” said Dalton Turnbow, Randy’s middle son. “He had a true engineer’s mentality and could fix anything.” “We always said there was nothing Lee couldn’t build with a piece of 2-inch pipe and a welder,” Wesley Turnbow, the current CEO added.

Hardened by the Great Depression, Lee Turnbow always had a variety of jobs, including working as a machinist at Screw Products Corporation of America. But ultimately the most important job he worked on was with California Metal Processing in 1954, because that is where he would hone his skills in aerospace metal finishing.

Evelyne Turnbow had arrived from Kansas by automobile at age 15 and cared little about the metal plating business at first, but was soon drawn to the brilliant, driven, future aerospace engineer who was planting himself firmly in the still-growing California aerospace business. She first met Lee, and later married him, while she was working in her family dry-cleaning business. “Lee was just a brilliant man. All he did was go to high school, but he never stopped reading and learning; he even made his own plans for our house which we built in Ojai,

California. His plans were accepted, without changes, the first time they were submitted to the city planning office,” Evelyne proudly said.

Lee is the one who started the idea of the family all working together. While Lee never piled up loads of material riches, he poured his life and his street-honed skills into his family and others. “Our beloved dad was the genius, that’s what people called him. “The Genius,” said Steve Turnbow. “And because he was a man of the Great Depression, Dad saved anything and most everything he found. He could make just about anything we needed from the stuff he found for free. Seriously, though, he was truly a mechanical genius. I’m truly amazed by my old man, the Genius from the Great Depression. He’s the toughest man I ever met.” Lee brought great assets to the new young company. He could work on boilers used for heating the tanks. He could work on the rectifiers that supplied electric DC current for the plating and anodizing operations. He could design and build a crane to lift the work, and build an entire building which he did as required.

For a while even Evelyne worked in an aero-space machine shop in Gardena before Lee thought it was time to start training up the next generation of Turnbow men for leadership. That meant it was time for Randy to enter the business. He had already been working in the aerospace industry as a machinist in high school. At Lee’s insistence, Randy enrolled in the Magnaflux Corporation School of Non-Destructive Testing (NDT). There he graduated as the youngest certified inspector in their history, at the age of 17.

Because of his Depression upbringing, Lee was convinced that the way for any young person to be prepared in the post-World War II world was to have two professions, so that if the economy turned sour, he would always have something else to fall back on. That turned out to be just what Randy did. He attended college at nearby California State University in Long Beach and also was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the California National Guard. But during the

same time he worked part-time as a machinist and sometimes metal finisher. Randy began to realize that he had a real interest in the metal finishing, finding it both creative and challenging. This fascination would provide the avenue for spending the rest of his life working in aerospace industry.

Randy inspected aerospace parts all through the time he was in college and for two years after he got out. “I will forever be grateful to my dad for making me get a second job because I always had something I could fall back on. I had worked at a company named California Metal Processing every summer almost from the beginning, and I worked there as an inspector during my senior year of high school,” Randy continued. “I always liked the trade. It’s a never-ending, demanding job, but is something I really enjoy.”

The area where Randy grew up was perfect for a young man with ambition and a desire for success in the aerospace industry. In the 1960s, Southern California was undoubtedly the largest aerospace manufacturing center in the world. “Everybody was here when I was growing up. Lockheed had a plant, Hughes, Rocketdyne, Bell Helicopter, General Dynamics, and Rohr all had plants here; as well as Northrop and Douglas, and North American Aviation, which were headquartered here. Even now, if you combine the Los Angeles and Orange County areas, it’s still the largest aerospace manufacturing and processing hub anywhere.”

It turned out to be the prime area for a young man and his father to discover the aerospace industry and live their dream. “Lee started working with parts from the DC-3, then the DC-8, even as Douglas Aircraft became McDonald Douglas Aircraft and then finally, the Boeing Co. He worked with them all,” Evelyne said.

But Randy had already found his most important discovery during junior high school. He had met his future wife, Brenda, who attended nearby Bixby Knolls Christian Church. There they

met when a friend invited him to a Christian Youth Fellowship group that was meeting there. Although Randy and Brenda dated all through high school, they had to be reunited in college while Brenda was attending Chapman University.

Brenda soon knew enough about Randy to be very interested in him, however, she knew very little about the aerospace finishing industry. “I knew Randy worked in the summer for his dad in the shop, but that’s all I knew. At first I felt that it was an unglamorous business, but it was all totally new to me.”

One thing Brenda did quickly find out and greatly appreciated was that the Turnbows were a bonded, loving family, and that family togetherness was their first priority. “Lee and Evelyne and Randy and Steve were a very loving family. To an outsider like me that was very appealing. It was certainly something I wanted to be a part of.” So in 1965, Randy and Brenda were married at Bixby Knolls Christian Church and began applying the next layer of strength and stability to the family.

While EME was still a faraway dream, it was clear from the beginning of their marriage that planning for its future was a huge priority to Randy. “When we got married, I knew a little more about the business and I wanted to be supportive, of course. Randy explained that we couldn’t buy a house right at the beginning because he was saving up for his own business. He said we needed a five-year plan, sort of like the Soviets were doing at the time, to plan everything out in our household,” Brenda said. “After the first five years, it seemed like many of our friends had bought a house, but Randy said we weren’t quite there yet and we needed a second five-year plan. I agreed, but put my foot down; there would be no third five-year plan.”

Randy was well into his aerospace finishing career by the early 1970s, working with his dad at California Metal Processing, as well as working second and third jobs at Alert Metal Finishing and AAA metal finishing as a salesman. He was intent on improving the skills he had learned as a teenager so that he

could move on to his next career, his ultimate goal, owning and running his own metal finishing company. But how and where and when this was to occur was only known by God. All Randy could do was follow the signs.

“I had tried to buy AAA metal finishing and a couple of other local companies, but nothing ever worked out,” Randy said. “I had known Brenda since junior high and she had plenty of family here, with her sister only a few blocks away. I liked Southern California and nobody was offering me a chance to move, so I figured I was going to stay. The question was, stay and do what?”

Brenda and Randy had already started their own family, first with a baby girl, Rhanda, followed by three boys, Wesley, Dalton and later, John Travis. The unshakeable family bonds were growing deeper and wider in the Turnbow family. Steve, younger than Randy by three years, had married his sweetheart Melody and had had a son, whom they named Bryan. Learning from his father’s edict, and his older brother’s example, Steve had graduated from the Northrop’s Technical University and was working as a helicopter mechanic at the Long Beach Airport.

The family was now firmly planted in the Long Beach area. The layers were growing and strengthening, and the only question remaining was, what was the next big family step? The answer came in a phone call Randy took from a local businessman, Bob Butler, late in 1971. Would Randy have any interest in buying a local metal finishing company of his, located in the nearby town of Compton, California, a company named E.M.E., Inc.?

EME was still a fairly new company, having been founded in 1962. But the price was right. The timing was optimal. It specialized in the career Randy loved and had proven he could succeed in. Plus, it offered him the opportunity to fulfill what he said he had always wanted to do in his chosen profession; own and be the boss of his own metal finishing shop, something that had first been relayed to him by his granddad, Walter Hamilton,

and then delivered to him daily by his dad, Lee.

Would Randy have any interest in purchasing EME in Compton? Yes, indeed, he very well might. The next chapter in the Turnbow family story was about to begin.



## CHAPTER 2

# EME's Humble Beginnings: Dreams and Debt



“In February of 1972, I paid Bob Butler \$4,000 for EME. It was too much!” Randy joked. The price had seemed fair enough at the time, and its purchase did fulfill his dream of owning and operating his own company, but there were surprises and unseen frustrations ahead. Unbeknownst to him Bob owed a year’s worth of rent to the landlord, thousands of dollars to financial creditors, and there were even a few absentee co-owners that were never mentioned. “Even the company name was quirky,” Randy recalled. “When I asked Bob what EME stood for he said that it was short for Electro-Machine and Engineering. I joked back and said, ‘Since we don’t do electrics, machining or engineering, I see why you just stick to EME.’”

Randy had also inherited three employees with the company, which was two too many for the quickly sinking company. But typical of the Turnbow spirit, hardened and determined to achieve his dream, Randy quickly did what had to be done. “By the end of the first week I had let go of the two production employees and had only kept the secretary, simply because I needed somebody to answer the phone,” Randy said.

His next move turned out to be one of his most important, one that is still paying dividends today. He called on an old friend, Rudy Munguia. Randy had known Rudy from his early days in the metal finishing business and persuaded him to accept his

offer as the first official EME employee. “Rudy knew how to run every kind of plating there was for any type of industry or job,” Randy said. “He was an invaluable help, especially in the early years, and stayed with me for the rest of his career. Today, his brother Danny still works for me as a master painter.”

Danny Munguia said that his brother, who has been slowed by health challenges in recent years, always speaks with pride of those early, sometimes dark, days of EME. “Every time I talk to my brother, he asks how Randy is doing, how Steve is doing. He always wants to know everything about the company. He wants to know how it is going. He is very happy and very proud of all the success we have had.” Danny says he learned early on the secrets of the company’s success, both then and now: love and hard work. “I love these people and they love me. I always try to do my best to see the company succeeds.”

With his one key employee in place to help perform the plating, and somebody to answer the phone, it was up to Randy to do the rest. “That left me to rebuild the shop, literally: find customers, pick up the parts, do all the processing work, deliver them back, print the billing and seek new approvals for new processes,” he explained. “I worked 12-16 hours a day, seven days a week, but it wasn’t all that bad. I had a beautiful, loving and supportive wife and two wonderful kids at the time. And at age 26, I was free. I made all the business decisions and succeeded or failed by my own hand, which was what I had always wanted to do.”

Luckily, in these early days of EME, the industry was not nearly as complicated or as technical as it is now. “There was a time when the words used in the aerospace industry made sense to the common man. Words like, ‘form, fit and function’ drove the industry.” Steve said. There were no reams of instructions or government documents to fill out or follow. The person who knew the right guy and worked the fastest and the hardest got the job. These were Turnbow family strengths.



Randy was able to use his industry sources and rely on the relationships he had formed while working for a decade in the metal finishing trade. The people he had met through his dad and on his own now became a key part of the early Turnbow success. “Randy knew lots of aerospace people and was able to get the first aerospace prime contractor approvals fast, just because of his contacts,” Steve said.

“In those days, items had to be delivered in a cost effective manner to meet End Item Testing Requirements.” Working with less than optimum equipment in small, cramped facilities, without computers, technical manuals and high tech chemicals was a challenge to say the least. Yet surprisingly, EME was able to accomplish things never before attempted in the business quickly and for little money, which pleased their clients and resulted in immediate approvals.

Perhaps the biggest surprise, and the biggest blessing in the initial growth of EME, came barely six months after Randy had taken over the company. He was working in the small facility one day when he saw his father, Lee, stroll up the front driveway of the small company. “Hey Pops, what are you doing here?” Randy asked his mentor. His dad’s reply stunned him. “I’m working for you now.” With his business still in survival mode, Randy became flustered. He told his dad that there was no money to pay him with and that he should not have quit his job without discussing it together. “Don’t tell me your troubles. I’ve already got work on the way over here,” Lee replied.

“If you knew Lee you would understand that this impulsive move was not unusual. He was quite a character and very compulsive and independent,” Randy said. Lee had been a salesman for an EME competitor, but when he saw the chance to work with his son at his company, he couldn’t pass up the chance. “Financial security was always number one priority to him, but despite the risk, Lee began to work at EME just six months after Randy purchased it and stayed there the rest of his

life,” Evelyne said. “What more could I ask for, to see my family work together? So many families have problems or don’t like each other. It’s a blessing.”

Lee had worked in the plating industry most of his life, since arriving in California at age 16, and was well known in the local industry of aerospace metal finishing. Early on, Lee’s talents with machines and his connections to people and key customers proved to be very beneficial to the company. Lee quickly became an invaluable asset to the company.

“My dad was physically gifted. He could work on anything, build anything, do anything,” Randy said. Due to his Depression-era roots, Lee knew how to find, bargain and salvage anything that others had thrown away. On a very limited budget, or no budget at all, Lee worked hard to find needed building supplies, while Randy acted as the company’s one-man sales and processing and delivery team. “This started a long and fruitful relationship between me and my dad, and we worked together all the rest of his life. He was a genius in so many ways, especially in the construction and maintenance of just about everything,” Randy said.

Knowing his son’s limited financial condition, Lee never asked Randy for a nickel as an employee. Instead, Lee leased to EME some of the equipment that it needed. This agreement set Lee and Evelyne up financially even in their later years, and also helped EME immediately. Equipment was definitely one of EME’s weaknesses at the time.

Often Randy would go out in his old pick-up truck, which had been hit from several different angles, to pick up jobs, parts or supplies. He would travel the Southern California roads in that truck while looking for new work and taking care of old and new customers. The ‘original’ headquarters, which Randy would return to from these deliveries, was also decidedly humble. The rented building was a mere 3,750 square feet. They would have to conduct business both inside and out because

there was not enough covered space for even the small number of employees they had.

The first chance at expansion came in 1974, two years after the original purchase. EME's landlord, Mr. Neeley, now fully paid, offered Randy a chance to buy the small property they were renting and also purchase three other pieces of property in the area. They chose to take that deal, and immediately began to enlarge the footprint of EME.

Hard work and dedicated employees like Rudy Mungia, factored into early success for the new company, or at least enough success to get it off the critical list. Rudy, the original new employee, was so dedicated to EME's welfare that he moved into a small house located on the EME property where he acted as an unofficial security guard for the company. It was common for thieves to break into companies and steal parts to sell for scrap metal. Rudy knew that if anything bad happened to EME, it affected him as well. So Rudy took an active part in securing EME property at night.

Having an employee's home on company property had other perks as well. Often on Friday night, Rudy would have everyone over to his house to celebrate the week's work and to encourage the small band of new employees. It was their commitment and willingness to take chances that was furthering EME's success. "As time went by, EME continued to grow and prosper," Randy recalled. "Well, prosper might be a bit strong," he said smiling, "but we did pay the bills and had enough left over to expand some and take care of our families."

The property at 431 E. Oaks St. in Compton California was slowly growing. Eventually Randy and the company purchased the property directly north of the current facility and that enabled EME to expand to the next street over. "With the new property we were able to build a new state-of-the-art paint building. My guys built this outer building right here," Randy said, pointing to a huge metal structure while making

his daily morning walking tour of the facilities. “We ordered the steel building from Arkansas, and it came in a huge flat-bed truck one day. That truck just pulled up to the side of the property and dumped everything right here. Wow, we didn’t know what we were going to do with all the parts and pieces, but eventually we built that 10,000 sq. ft. building with our own hands. Lee and Steve and our entire crew all working together on the project put it together in record time.” In addition, Randy hired a well know architect named Peter Porter to design a new contemporary office complex. He did a great job incorporating the feel of the aerospace industry into the outer design. With the addition of the new paint shop and modern headquarters building, EME now has buildings inclosing 90,000 square feet, and total property extending clear through the city block with addresses on both streets.

The new company became increasingly known for processing complicated parts that no one else was willing to tackle, especially large or heavy parts. As a result, they were awarded one of the largest parts ever to be “electro-polished” in history, stainless steel missile body parts. These tubes were two feet in diameter and 30 feet long. Using a clever contraption, which slowly rotated the part while it was suspended in a horse trough lined with plastic and filled with plating solution, the 30-foot parts were chemically polished both inside and out at the same time. EME had found their niche in the field of metal finishing and plating.

After the first five years of owning E.M.E., Inc., Randy was finally beginning to see a glimmer of the hope of success. In order for his small company to really take off, however, a third key player needed to be brought on board.



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