

***A History of  
MECCANO***

***as expressed through***

***The Adventures of  
Shirley Nickel Strip***

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# **A HISTORY OF MECCANO**

**As expressed through**

**The adventures of Shirley Nickel Strip**

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## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP TELLS HER STORY

There was a loud crash! Then silence... I could see nothing, for all around me there was darkness. Suddenly I felt a gentle nudge and heard, clink, clink, clink. I had been dropped onto a conveyor belt that was moving me from darkness to daylight way up on the second floor of the old factory. My eyes rolled as I entered a big room. I could see tables, benches and shelves all around. I could faintly hear the constant rhythm of crashes and clinks in the distance down below but I paid quick attention to my surroundings when I heard a loud clunk. There were little yelps coming from the direction of a big machine that I was about to visit. An arm grabbed me and held me down. Then clunk! Oh that hurt! A mechanical tattoo imprinted something right across my middle. I could see the words... **MECCANO Made in England.** I smiled as another arm moved me to a table on the sidewall.

Hi! My name is Shirley Nickel Strip. This is my story! In those few minutes something magical happened, in the old factory. I had just been born. Well, born is hardly a word for me. I was stamped from a thin sheet of metal then I was punched full of holes and finally tattooed. I heard someone say, nickel-plated, part number 6a. It was, 08/08/1908. I guess I was stamped before paper trails suggest I was born.

I looked around the room. Along this side there were more shiny pieces that looked just like me. They were, I learned later, my older sisters. That just means they were longer and therefore had more holes than I have. There are ten in my family of which I am the shortest, with only three holes. Collectively we are called **perforated strips.**

On the other side of the room I could see shiny pieces that resembled my family members but somehow they had this extra spine full of elongated holes that looked like they had been blown out, a bit too much. They were, again as I learned later, my brothers. My twin brother with three pairs of holes is part number 9f. As a group my brothers are called **angle girders.**

Perforated Mom, part number 1, and angle girder Dad, part number 8, are the longest of the perforated strips and angle girders respectively. Each has this lovely pattern of 25 holes. Well, I should note, like all my brothers, Dad is two faced with that extra spine full of funny holes, on his backside. I was told that much further into the future I would have two brothers that are much longer, even than Dad, having 37 and 49 pairs of holes.

The crashing and clinking continued down below, while here in the finishing room we all had to line up in rows from shortest to longest. What a neat way to get acquainted with other members of my family.

After several weeks of waiting in line I grew restless. I wanted to know all about my history and where I came from. I asked around and found out that my early ancestors arrived in a small workshop in England back around 1900. They applied to become citizens as "Educational Devices for Children" in January of 1901. Later that year, indeed, they did become citizens. I understand they were a rugged bunch, a bit rough with folded edges and square corners, having been stamped from plain tinplate. They were easily recognized because of the standard-hole pattern and the common shapes and sizes I was becoming familiar with. Pictures taken in 1901 showed how family members joined together to become cranes, trains, towers, windmills and even bridges. This demonstrated they were plain and simple folk, with a dream. I was surprised to note that my brothers did not exist in those early days. In fact the closest I could find with some resemblance was a bracket, one pair of holes in length. It was called an angle piece and now goes by part number 12. I also learned that in time family members assembled into groups under the umbrella name of, "**Mechanics Made Easy**". Members of Mechanics Made Easy had a specific type of task to do. When joined together they were able to make wonderful shapes called models. At a major gathering they formed into a large Ferris wheel model, over 4 feet high. The success of that model sparked a celebration and a new name. In 1907 it was declared that my family chain would henceforth be called **MECCANO.** In unison, **MECCANO, MECCANO, MECCANO, may we live a hundred years,** rang out, all around the factory. **I am part of the MECCANO system.**

I didn't know it then, but I was soon to find out that I have many cousins and some very distant relatives. Some are strange looking characters. Some have fancy curves, some are round and some are square. They have names like axels, gears, wheels, pulleys and flanged plates. I read someplace that a large flanged plate, part number 50, came into being just about the same time as I did, but because of its size, it could only survive for a few years when it would succumb to a smaller version, part number 52. I was reminded that the common link, for all parts making up the Meccano system, is the regular placement of a standard sized hole and the number of holes in each given part. I was also reminded that just like for my ancestors this standard pattern of holes would allow each of us to be joined to other parts to make those wonderful models. Oh! Oh! There is more to it. In my haste I forgot to mention, nut and bolt, part number 37. I think they are a bit screwed up but they do have a way to keep us joined together.

Well folks I can't wait to get out into the real world. I do wonder what my role will be, as a part of the first model ever built, by some young engineer.

## WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP?

Christmas was just around the corner. Shirley Nickel Strip overheard many discussions about the excitement of this special time. It was a time when little ones from one to ninety-one waited and wished and watched hoping for that special gift. If you were a young engineer your wish was to get another Meccano set.

At the old factory many boxes had been filled with a preset selection of Meccano pieces, ready to be shipped to stores right around the world. Shirley Nickel Strip stood tall as she was placed in a box marked Meccano set #6. She was tied securely in place by a strong string. As the lid was placed on top, everything turned to darkness. Shirley didn't mind for she knew it would be but a short time till the box would be opened and she would be in the hands of a young engineer, in the real world. For now she felt secure to be with so many of her sisters, brothers and other relatives making up this beautiful #6 Meccano set.

Indeed, time did move by quickly. Then one evening Shirley heard singing. Sounds of Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer, Jingle Bells and Joy to the World filled the air. In her confined space she was happy to know that soon a young engineer would open the box and make one of those wonderful models she had seen in the small booklet that came with this #6 Meccano set. She wondered which model the young engineer would make. Would the model require part number 6a?

The big old house had been decorated beautifully to celebrate Christmas. There was much anticipation. Shirley Nickel Strip was curled up with excitement inside the box labeled, Meccano set #6.

But now, Christmas morning was here. It arrived quietly. Surprisingly, the young engineer was missing. How could he sleep in, on such a wonderful day? Shirley wondered.

Then, there was a jolt as if the whole world stopped turning. People came into the room talking softly. Some were crying. The young engineer was not with them.

Shirley felt the sadness and became concerned, but she didn't know why. It seemed like an eternity when she overheard someone recall the events of the evening before. "I saw the car coming. I braked and turned to miss it, but it was out of control and traveling so fast..."

This would be a sad lonely Christmas for the family. Shirley Nickel Strip shared that sadness.

On this Christmas morning instead of being part of a tower or crane or just a little wagon with four wheels and a handle, Shirley Nickel Strip was held in the darkness and sadness and silence of an unopened Christmas present.

Weeks passed. Beautifully wrapped presents remained under the tree undisturbed. Then one day the family decided to move the unopened presents to a small room, high up in the attic of the big old house.

Shirley Nickel Strip could do nothing. She never saw the light of day.

Fifty years passed. The family decided it was time to downsize, sell the big old house and move into an apartment in town. A large auction sale was planned to dispose of all the wonderful things they had accumulated over the years. Truckload after truckload moved pictures, beds, tables, cabinets and everything that filled them, to an auction house. Many things were antiques with happy memories, but there was just no space for them, in a small apartment, in the middle of town.

Eventually it came time to go to the small room, way up in the attic. One by one unopened Christmas presents were retrieved. It was a struggle of memories past and dreams of things that might have been.

"These presents must not be sold," Shirley heard someone say. "You are right, we must share them with friends and relatives, so they can experience the happiness, planned for our young engineer so long ago", someone else explained.

Of all the packages in the room, one stood out from the rest. It was large and it was heavy. It was the #6 Meccano set that had never been opened. It was the box that held Shirley Nickel Strip prisoner, for fifty years.

Shirley Nickel Strip heard voices again. She tried to pop the lid, but to no avail. She listened quietly. "I know the perfect home for this". She overheard a quivering voice say. "It must go to our grandniece in Canada. She has big plans to become an engineer just like her dad. Meccano is a must for any up and coming engineer."

Shirley Nickel Strip settled back, knowing she had a new, happy future to look forward to.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP MEETS JESSICA JONES

It was a warm sunny afternoon in June. It was June 6<sup>th</sup> 1958 to be exact. Jessica Jones, a young engineer in Canada was celebrating her tenth birthday. Birthdays along with good grades at school always meant more Meccano for this young lady.

The candles had been blown out, the birthday song had been sung and now it was time to open presents. The first one, plainly wrapped, came from dad. He held the box for a moment to reminisce how much he loved his first Meccano, a dark red and green #5 set. His second Meccano was the blue and gold set E that he got for his 10th birthday from his grandfather. He learned all about angles, gear ratios, trusses and more. He remembered building bridges from Meccano. Perhaps that explains why he is a bridge engineer in real life. Dad's thoughts returned to the present as he read the tag, "To my Future Engineering Partner, Love Dad." In a flash the wrapping paper was off and Jessica stared at the picture on the blue box. "Gears she shouted. Oh, thank you daddy! Now I can make real working models."

The next present was from mother. More Meccano, Jessica wondered, but the package seemed to be too light. She read the card aloud, "For my little girl just turning ten. Love Mother." Eagerly Jessica tore off the pretty wrapping paper but then her mouth dropped open. "Mother what is this?" Jessica's disappointed voice tones were clear. Every side of the box was labeled LEGO. "I really hoped it would be Meccano." Jessica sat down and placed the unopened box on the table. Her eyes glittered as she looked back at the blue box from father, "Gears Outfit A. That is a real toy", she whispered.

Mother, feeling Jessica's disappointment, moved closer to her. "You know you really could make a wonderful model with this." She handed the box labeled LEGO back to Jessica. "Do open it", mother urged. Jessica picked up the box and pulled the lid off. She perked up. She couldn't believe what she saw inside. "A red and green Meccano digger bucket," Jessica choked. "Surprise," mother yodeled. "The LEGO box was just a camouflage." "Oh! You really fooled me," Jessica smiled. "Now let's get rid of the box."

Jessica started to run to the toy room but stopped suddenly as she crashed into dad. "Jessica there is more," dad said with a look of surprise, as he handed her a mysterious package. Inside this package, unknown to anyone in the room, was the beautiful #6 Meccano set and Shirley Nickel Strip. Shirley could hear all the excitement. She was astonished when she heard the digger bucket was red and green. Meccano is not red and green she thought. It must be a LEGO digger bucket. Her thoughts were broken when the box bumped. She could hear father explain to Jessica that this was a present from her great uncle in England.

Father opened the letter that was attached to the top of the parcel. Inside was a hand written note which Father read aloud, "To my favorite nephew: Please pass this parcel onto our grandniece for her tenth birthday. It is a memory of your cousin, our young engineer, as we used to call him. I know Jessica will become a great engineer in the years to come. Please give her all my love. Uncle Ian." Dad took a moment to explain the story, as it happened Christmas Eve, fifty years ago.

A touch of sadness passed over Shirley Nickel Strip as she heard the story again but she knew that there was a new life ahead. The thought of being part of a model perked her up with anticipation.

Mother helped Jessica take off the heavy duty shipping paper that protected the delicately wrapped inner package. They were surprised to see Christmas wrapping paper next. Mother read the tag, "To the Young Engineer, Merry Christmas, from Santa."

Jessica's hands trembled and a tear ran down her soft cheek as she thought about the story her father had just told her. She removed the Christmas wrapping paper very carefully. Her eyes glowed when she saw the word Meccano and next to it, set #6. "Meccano" she reeled, "I can't believe this." Carefully she removed the lid. She was surprised to see the shiny perforated strips. "But father the parts are not green and red. Is this real Meccano?" she teased. Jessica touched each part going from top to bottom stopping on a perforated strip with three holes. Part number 6a, she thought, "I wonder in which model, I will use it first," she dreamed aloud. Shirley shivered. She wanted to jump up and give Jessica a big kiss but the string that tied her down was too strong.

"Oh father, this is beautiful," Jessica stammered in a shaky voice, "I will take great care of it. I really will." Shirley Nickel Strip knew she was in good hands.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP CONTACTS THE REAL WORLD

Overjoyed with the addition to her collection Jessica Jones gathered up the new Meccano to take it to the toy-room where again she checked each item one at a time. "Gears Outfit A" she whispered as she paged through the instruction manual. "I wonder how these gears work." She paused, carefully placed the box on the desk then glanced at the digger bucket. "I know just the model I will build..." Before she could finish that thought she lifted the lid from the Meccano #6 set. She surveyed each piece and thought about the story that was hidden there. As she placed the open box on the desk she glanced up to the shelf where there were two boxes. One marked Meccano set #5, the other marked Meccano set E. Dad had told her a long time ago that the Meccano set #5 was his first set back in 1934 when he was a young boy. The set marked E was a 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, present from his grandfather. Dad explained further that a letter, rather than a number identified Meccano sets for several years when he was a young boy. Seems strange, Jessica thought. Jessica didn't pay much attention to these before and dad always said these boxes were not to be opened. Tonight she wondered why. Without a second thought she climbed up onto a chair, then onto the desk. She could barely reach the boxes, yet she managed to bring them down. Jessica removed the lids to expose the contents. Wow, she jumped back. The Meccano in these boxes looked as different, as the nickel coloured #6 set she had just inherited for her birthday. She wondered if these sets might have a story to tell. Why did dad keep them stored out of reach?

Jessica had just examined each set when mother called to remind her that it was bedtime.

Moments later Jessica was sound asleep, dreaming of the next model, she would be building. Maybe with some help from mother, she would make a working model, using her new gears.

Back in the toy room strange things were about to happen. Shirley Nickel Strip found freedom. Hello world this is Shirley Nickel Strip calling. She peered over the side of the box then dropped back in fright. All the models she could see had turned green. Oh no! Is that what happens in the real world? Will I turn green? She whimpered. Then, she heard someone call. That came from one of the models she thought. It was a young girl's voice. Oh my goodness, she heard, are you well? You look very pale. You have no colour. Before Shirley could respond she heard a boy's voice. What's all this talk about no colour and turning green? Why colour has been around since I was born, ah, that is stamped! Shirley remembered the stamping all too well. The boy's voice went on. We were the first. We invented colour.

Finally Shirley found the courage to ask a question. Are you really Meccano? Isn't all Meccano nickel in colour? Well well, young lassie, you have been under that lid for a long time. Twenty-five years, Shirley shrugged. Who are you then and who is that other girl I heard speaking? She is green too but not as dark as you. Over there I see a lot of red colours. Is that all make up?

Shirley lay back in the comfort of the box and wished that the lid were back on when she heard another girly voice. Hi everyone my name is Goldie. I am from the between generation. There was green before me and green after me but I am golden. Well now that we are all awake why don't we get to know each other?

Clink! Clink! Clink! Soon they were dancing on the desk. Lets introduce ourselves piped Shirley. I am Shirley Nickel Strip. I am the eldest, I guess. I am the first Meccano. Next was David. I am David Dark Green Girder. I am the second oldest. I invented colour, at least someone did, to celebrate the twenty-five years of Meccano. Next Goldie chimed in. I am Goldie Gold Strip and I guess I am the youngest. I haven't been around as long as you two. They all laughed but hushed when the girl's voice called from a distance. No! No! No! She said. My name is Gail Green Strip and I am the youngest. That is why I am light green. Where are you? The three voices chimed, from the desk. Over here locked tight in this model. Oh I see you called Shirley, how lucky you are to be part of a model.

Shirley told the sad story of her beginnings but went on to say how happy she was, to have found a new home and new friends, in the real world. With that they all chimed at once, **Meccano, Meccano, Meccano, may we live 100 years.**

The clock at the end of the long hall struck 12:00. The moon, high in the sky, shone brightly through the big picture window. An eerie presence filled the toy-room.

The fun was about to begin!

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP AND THE MYSTERY OF THE TOWER

It is time to party! Shirley, Goldie and David danced around the desktop in three-quarter time when suddenly their attention was drawn to the distant voice of Gail Green Strip. That looks like fun. I want to join in. Come on down Gail the three oldies begged. They heard Gail grunt and groan then there was silence. I can't come down. I am screwed down. I alone am holding this huge antenna to the top of the tower. They could hear the strength in her voice.

The tower, which held Gail Green Strip so high up, was a nine-foot model of three supporting legs, a rotating pod high up, an observation deck and an antennae system at the top. It was a masterpiece. The tripod base curved gently to a lofty height. Gaily coloured lights had been fitted from top to bottom. An elevator climbed from the tower base to the pod high above. Then another elevator pushed to the second level observation deck. The elevators worked with a pulley and rope system; however, one thing should be noted. Both elevators had a gearless drive. It would probably be just a matter of time before the new Meccano Gears Outfit that Jessica got for her birthday would be used to improve the design.

Jessica's dad was the design engineer for the tower. Now he could design a gear drive system. Jessica's mother was the construction engineer. She would assist Jessica in adding the gear-drive to the model. Jessica was only eight, when the tower was built originally, but she helped fit every piece that was joined together, to give the strength and support needed, to form this beautiful tower model.

The antenna, stretching high above the second level, was made up of several of the longest perforated strips, with 25 holes, that Shirley Nickel Strip would refer to as Mom. It was attached at its base by a 3-hole perforated strip, part #6a that introduced herself to the three new friends, as Gail Green Strip.

This tower, built totally with green Meccano parts, was the largest and most sophisticated model Jessica had worked on, in her young engineering lifetime!

Gail Green strip did a superb job in her role as a main antenna support but tonight she wanted to dance. She called again to the three friends dancing on the desk. I want to dance. Come and get me down.

David Dark Green Girder called a huddle of the three on the desk. I have an idea. I have seen this many times. We can dismantle the tower one piece at a time till we can release our friend at the top. We will take this screwdriver to remove each bolt. That will release each part and bring the tower down.

Shirley Nickel Strip wasn't sure. She had never seen this done before. After all she had been sleeping in a box, for the past 50 years.

The screwdriver was larger than the three together, but very carefully, under David Dark's direction; bolts were removed, one at a time. Parts were pushed aside. Parts were everywhere, everywhere in the room... Shirley Nickel Strip noted with interest, the green versions of her sisters and brothers, but she was anxious to meet, the green copy of herself, part #6a. Shirley took note of several very long angle girders. These were longer by far, than two-faced Dad. They had 49 pair of standard sized holes. She remembered girders of this longer size had not been invented, back when she was born, that is, stamped.

Shirley was impressed at how quickly David Dark Girder worked. What fun this is, she giggled.

At last the antenna was free! The part that held it secure was free! Gail Green Strip was free!

The four bounced to the desktop. They danced and sang Meccano songs all night long. As the moon dropped away and the sun peeked through the picture window, they settled quietly to one corner of the desk. Soon all was quiet.

Not a moment later, the door swung open. Jessica had come to see her pride and joy. She stopped short, as she almost tripped on an angle girder. "What is this," she yelled. She saw Meccano all over the floor. Only the antenna was intact, at the very spot, where the tall tower once stood. The floor was covered in a tangled web of Meccano girders and perforated strips, but strangely, there was a huge pile of nuts and bolts stacked neatly, in the very centre of the desk. To one corner of the desk, Jessica noticed, one-gold part #6a, one-nickel part #6a, one-light green part #6a and one-dark green part #9f, all sitting motionless against a Meccano screwdriver. Jessica was puzzled. She turned and ran from the room, to tell mom and dad.

Jessica still wonders who dismantled the tower, even, to this very day. Only you, the four Meccano friends on the desk and the Meccano screwdriver, know what happened that night, in the toy-room.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP AND THE DRUG STING

Jessica's mother was a fine teacher of Meccano modeling skills. Jessica was a great student. She loved to take model plans designed by dad and build her own Meccano models. In her spare time, Jessica tutored high school students. She earned enough money to buy her dream, a #10 Meccano set.

Jessica sent her order to the old factory in England. Many days later a large four-drawer cabinet was delivered to her house. Jessica took it to the toy room; she did not check or even reveal the contents. Someone had called earlier, warning, "Do not open this box. A delivery service will come by to pick it up". Shirley Nickel Strip was curious and wanted to know what was in those drawers. Was it the new #10 Meccano set in black, yellow and silver that Jessica talked about so much? She planned to find out at midnight when the moon would light up the room and Jessica would be asleep.

The sun, set. Shirley waited as dark clouds covered the silver sky. Soon the room was draped in darkness. Shirley called David Dark Girder. He would know how to light up the room.

In a moment the lights that once lit the tall tower model, brought brightness to the room. The box marked Meccano Set #10 was clearly visible on the desk.

Let's get to the bottom of this, hailed Shirley. The four friends scaled the box to get to the top drawer. In seconds they jimmied it open, and then searched up and down expecting to see Meccano parts. They were in shock when all they saw was an empty drawer. We must tell Jessica said Gail Green Strip. David Dark Girder was about to call a huddle when Goldie Gold Strip brought their attention to the far end of the drawer. A boy was calling. Hi there, am I glad to see you. My name is Simon Silver Girder, Meccano part #9f. He seemed a bit dazed. I am in the wrong drawer. The four friends knew that angle girders were always in the lower drawer. They wondered how Simon ended up alone in the top drawer, but set that aside for now.

The friends introduced themselves, and then listened, as each spoke of something special in their life. Shirley recalled her fifty years imprisonment in the box of a #6 Meccano set. David talked proudly about inventing colour. Goldie talked about playing Tic Tac Toe in the yellow lines of the blue base plate. Gail recalled the night she was rescued from the Tall Tower by her three friends. Simon expressed how impressed he was by Gail's rescue then went on to explain that he was from the new Meccano generation, with colours of black, yellow and silver. Simon had just finished talking when the drawer bumped closed. The five friends were startled by this turn of events. They were frightened when they heard Jessica's shaking voice, "This is the cabinet, sir. Why did it come here?" "Don't know. I just follow orders", the man said. "Where is the real #10 Meccano set, I ordered from England?" "Don't know anything", was the response. Shirley Nickel Strip wanted answers. If this box had Meccano in it, why didn't Jessica check it the way she always does, when she gets a new box. She summoned the other four. I think this drawer has a false floor. If we can lift it up, we may find Meccano parts. The five worked together to raise the floor, when suddenly; they found themselves three holes deep in bags of white powder. This is not Meccano, they all shouted at once. This powder is highly suspicious. We must report it to the police. Goldie had an idea. If we can get to the shipping label we can change the address so the cabinet is sent to the police station. The trick worked. At the Station, a dark haired man was led into the room. An officer was heard to say. "Is this your box?" "Yes." The man replied. With that, he was taken away to prison. He had been caught in the drug sting. Later, the Sergeant praised Jessica for assisting in the sting operation. "We have a little surprise. This #10 Meccano set, from England, is addressed to you. It was held at the warehouse, hoping the drug dealer would go there to get it, thinking it was the drug cabinet. You may take it home." He went on to say. "These five pieces of Meccano were found in the mock cabinet. You may as well have them." Jessica thought she recognized the four but wondered why there were five.

In a matter of minutes Jessica was back in the toy-room checking each piece of Meccano, as she always did, with a new set. Beautiful, black and yellow and silver, she thought. My first #10 set. She continued to count the parts when she realized one piece was missing from the lower drawer. It was a silver part #9f angle girder. She remembered the one extra piece the officer had given to her. Was it the missing part? Jessica turned to leave when the glitter of neon lights caught her eye. She stopped short of saying, how did those lights get plugged in! She just smiled; knowing, sometimes, strange things happen in the toy-room.



## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP AND THE CRASH IN THE TOY-ROOM

Jessica Jones studied hard, for four years at University. She graduated, with Honours, in Engineering. Dad was pleased that Jessica planned to join his Engineering firm after a short, well-deserved holiday.

In recognition of her hard work and enthusiasm for Meccano, and its engineering applications, dad bought Jessica a #5ME Meccano set. The set came in the colour scheme of the 70's; blue, yellow and zinc and included a popular Meccano motor. Jessica was thrilled. She headed to the toy-room to explore the set in detail. It had been some time since Jessica's last visit to the toy-room. She had been very busy, studying. Meccano #5ME she read, and then with bubbling excitement, she opened the box. I love the new colours, Jessica thought. Her eyes stopped at the motor. I must build a motorized model, she mused. She studied the instruction manual for some ideas but decided to build a car of her own design. It will have a motor, a gearbox, differential and front wheels that steer. Her brain was racing. Jessica worked for two hours, then, there it was, in shining silver, blue and yellow. Her model used every part from the #5ME set, with the exception of one small piece that Jessica didn't notice. One small angle girder was left on the desk as she left the toy-room to test her new model. Jessica didn't return to the toy-room that evening.

Silence settled into the toy-room, as evening shadows advanced across the floor. The angle girder left behind was part #9f with three pairs of holes. It was an exact match to David Dark Girder but in the new zinc plated colour. As light in the room grew dim, the little girder felt very much alone, sitting all alone in the hollow silence of the strange room. It was a strange silence, marked only by the ticking of the clock, down the hall. The little girder had just dozed off when the old clock broke the silence like a wand breaks a spell. Bong, bong, bong... Across the desk Shirley Nickel Strip counted twelve bongs. Midnight! Party time, shouted Shirley! She started across the desk to summon her four friends, when she heard a tall, quivering voice. Hello there, sister, the strange voice called. Well hello, Shirley responded, as she turned without thinking. Who are you and where did you come from? You do look familiar. Why my name is Henry Zinc Girder. I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting you. Shirley almost blushed, but stood straight and introduced herself, then followed with, welcome to the toy-room. Will you come and meet, my friends? I'd be delighted, replied Henry, in his now, husky voice. Shirley called to her four friends, who had been sitting by the old Meccano screwdriver. Come meet Henry Zinc Girder. David Dark Girder jumped. I am pleased to meet you, Henry, called David, as he led the introductions. I am David Dark Girder, this is Gail Green Strip, this is Goldie Gold Strip and this is Simon Silver Girder. How nice to meet each of you, Henry echoed. Henry, which generation do you represent, everyone asked, almost at once. Very politely, Henry explained that he was from the blue, yellow and zinc plated Meccano group. In turn, each of the friends told Henry about their own history. Everyone felt warm; knowing he or she was part of the Meccano system, which was almost 70 years old. It was a happy lot that danced and sang Meccano songs, that night. Henry Zinc Girder added several new songs, he had learned while waiting in line, back at the old factory.

Late into the night, as the moon beamed through the picture window, there was a squeaky sense that the drawers, twisted and heavily loaded with Meccano, were about to break apart. Then, just as an eerie silence settled in, and without warning, there was a loud crash! Meccano parts toppled all over the floor. It was a tangled, Meccano mess. The six friends on the desk looked at each other in amazement. Good thing we weren't on the floor shivered Goldie Gold Strip. What a surprised mess. We must clean this up. We can't leave it for our dear Jessica blurted Shirley Nickel Strip, almost out of breath. What can we do?

Henry Zinc Girder had an idea. We could line everything up from smallest to largest, just like they do at the old factory. That is a great idea, supported Simon Silver Girder. Everyone agreed and six friends set to work at once. Short angle girders here, someone called. Long perforated strips here, someone else called. Wheels and pulleys over here came from another direction. The friends labored for many hours without a break. The sun was just about peek through the big bay window as the last long girder was placed on top of the long girder pile. Just time to do one last check of the room, ordered David Dark Girder. The six friends scattered in six directions to be sure the room was neat and orderly. It looked just like the old Meccano factory, remembered fondly by all.

At last, it was time for the six friends to have a good days rest, back on the desk.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP HAS A DREAM

After graduation Jessica moved into her own apartment on the east side of town. She was very busy learning about dad's civil engineering business and wanted to live close to her office. This of course meant Meccano model building had to be put on hold. By now it had been two years since Jessica visited the toy-room and, it will be another three to possibly even six years till she would be able to go there again. Jessica had just signed a contract as lead engineer on a special assignment in the Middle East. The project was to supervise the design and construction of 10 bridges over the Tigris-Euphrates River system in Iraq. This assignment was an honour for Jessica and something she looked forward to.

Before leaving Jessica made one last visit to her favorite room in the old house. She was pleased to see that nothing had been disturbed since the last time she was there with her motorized car model. It was on the display shelf where she had left it almost 2 years ago, just after the big crash.

Jessica often wondered what happened when the storage cupboards broke down and how all the Meccano parts ended up in such neat piles along the wall. She grinned, and then stopped for a moment to wonder what might happen while she was away on her assignment for the next three and likely, six years. She took one last glance then turned to leave. It wasn't clear but Jessica thought she heard six little whimpers coming from the direction of the desk. We will miss you... She paused then whispered. "I will be back, my little friends, good bye for now."

Jessica closed the door then slowly walked down the hall. She walked past the old clock, as it struck eight.

Won't be long till party time! The six looked at each other in turn. Don't feel much like partying was heard six times over. That night as the old clock struck twelve; there was sadness in the toy-room. Not one of the little friends wanted to party. The room was full of quietness. Next morning, the sun came up. The room was quiet. In the evening, the sun went down. The room was quiet. At midnight, the old clock struck twelve. The room was quiet. Again the sun went down. The room was quiet. Shirley Nickel Strip passed the time by counting each time the old clock struck the hour. Nine she counted then ten, then eleven then thirteen... Thirteen she bellowed. Shirley Nickel Strip couldn't believe what she heard. Frightened by Shirley's outcry the sleepy friends jumped to see what had happened. The clock! The clock! Shirley gasped. It must be broken. It struck thirteen. The friends listened. Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock was all they heard. Sounds ok to me David Dark Girder spoke up. The six friends sat around and talked for some time when Gail Green Strip brought attention back to the old clock. I don't think the clock struck one. It must be past that by now. The six listened. Tick Tock, Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock, then suddenly, Bong, Bong. The old clock struck two. Now there's your answer, explained, Henry Zinc Girder. What do you mean? asked Shirley. Well, you heard the clock strike twelve then dozed off just long enough to hear it strike one. In your dozing state you thought you heard thirteen strikes. Everybody laughed but Shirley laughed last. I do feel a bit dozy she admitted but now that we are awake, it is time to party. Yes, yes, I agree, supported Simon Silver Girder.

At last the spell was broken. The six friends were back in a partying mood. The night passed quickly. The sun started to peek through the big bay window. The exhausted friends, squared up to the old Meccano screwdriver on the desk, for a day of rest.

Soon Shirley Nickel Strip grew restless. She had been entranced in a dream. My friends, my friends Shirley called, as she sat up. I had a dream. I must tell you about it. Sleepily the five friends jumped to attention. This was a call to duty. Shirley spoke to eager ears. She spoke softly. Remember the night we dismantled the Tall Tower. David Dark Girder and Goldie Gold Strip nodded in agreement. Henry Zinc Girder was puzzled. Having joined the group very recently he knew nothing about any Tall Tower. David, Goldie and Shirley took turns retelling the story about freeing Gail Green Strip from way up on the antenna of the Tall Tower. Henry was amazed by the story but happy Gail was free to be with the group. Simon Silver Girder was all-ears, even though he had heard the story before. The six agreed they were part of the best Meccano team ever. David Dark Girder suddenly jumped up. He turned to Shirley. You have us all psyched up. Tell us your dream? Shirley blushed. I dreamed we would rebuild the Meccano Tall Tower, for Jessica.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER

The Meccano room was buzzing! There was excitement all around as the six Meccano friends talked, about Shirley's dream. Shirley Nickel Strip took it all in. As Chief Design and Construction Engineer, she made a list of all the ideas, so each could be reviewed in detail, in a planning session. I think we need to have functioning elevators called David Dark Girder. I think a rotating floor in the pod would be neat, voiced Simon Silver Girder. Goldie Gold Strip thought decorative lighting from top to bottom was a must. Henry Zinc Girder pointed to the old antenna, still sitting over in the corner, intact from the original Tall Tower. I think we should reuse this antenna. It would be nostalgic and save on valuable design and construction time. As Shirley surveyed the group for consent, she noted a sense of sadness coming over Gail Green Strip. Gail, why are you sad at the mention of the old antenna? Shirley asked. Gail dropped a tear then scampered to the base of the old antenna to show where she had been locked, as the vital piece, holding the unit to the top of the Tall Tower. We must find a new way to make this attachment. I don't want to leave my good friends and be frozen in time, forever! Shirley found reassuring words for Gail and assured her that the Meccano engineers would come up with an alternative way to attach the old antenna. Six voices chimed in, yes, yes, yes, we must stay together. Gail was so relieved then spoke up. This is wonderful. To celebrate, I think a special set of coloured lights should be installed at the base of the antenna to mark the point from which I was released. Shirley acknowledged Gail's request, then went right to work. I want to call a huddle of the supervisors, here on the desk, at this time, one month from today. Again everyone buzzed. Things were starting to move. There were parties every night, to celebrate the event and sleep-ins every day, to recover. On the day of the scheduled meeting, the Meccano room was, again, a hive of activity. Shirley took the chair. She opened the meeting by acknowledging and welcoming each of the supervisors then explained the purpose of the gathering. We are here for two reasons. First, I propose to set out a schedule for the planning process. Second, I will assign responsibilities to each supervisor.

With the agenda approval out of the way, Shirley moved ahead. She explained that planning details must be completed within two maybe three years. Given that the approval process at city hall may take one, maybe two years, we will have one, maybe two years, for the construction phase. She reaffirmed that it was a good idea to use the old antenna, as it would indeed save eighteen to twenty-four months in design and construction time. Holding to this time frame will assure completion and testing of the Tall Tower facilities at least two days before Jessica's planned return from the Middle East. The sitting supervisors agreed that this was a workable schedule and were pleased with the reminder that Jessica would soon be home.

Shirley was anxious to keep the meeting moving. She reminded the group that the next agenda item was to assign supervisory responsibilities to each member. She went on; reporting to me will be David Dark Girder as, project supervisor with Goldie Gold Strip as assistant project supervisor. Also reporting to me will be Gail Green Strip, as construction supervisor, with Henry Zinc Girder as assistant construction supervisor. Simon Silver Girder will be my assistant, design and construction supervisor. The sitting supervisors agreed that these were workable assignments. With that, the meeting adjourned. It was recalled momentarily to announce that there would be another huddle in one month. Its purpose will be to review and approve the slogan, for this major Meccano project, **"We can do this one piece at a time"**.

Exhausted, but happy everyone headed home, to prepare for groundbreaking celebrations.

In due course, the slogan was approved. Shirley's detailed official plans reached City Hall on time and the Mayor, a Meccano nut herself, called a special meeting of the town-planners to approve the plans for this special Meccano project. Shirley was pleased. She noted the construction team had two years less a day. And so, construction of the Meccano Tall Tower, started. One piece at a time, the tripod base came together. One piece at a time the long central portion above pushed upward to take the pod assembly, with its rotating floor. The observation deck topped the upper section and to it, the old antenna was installed with a specially designed anchor. Elevators were added and finally neon lights were stretched from top to bottom. Gail's coloured lights highlighted the antenna base. Construction of the Tall Tower was completed on schedule. The six friends, anxious about Jessica's return in just two days, took a well-deserved rest, snug against the old Meccano screwdriver, on the desk. Shirley Nickel Strip's, Meccano Tall Tower dream, had come true.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP SIGNS FOR JESSICA JONES

The doorbell rang three times. Then there was a loud knock. Oh, another delivery, mumbled the cleaning lady. This must be something important for Mr. Jones, she thought. At the door, a friendly looking delivery person smiled then said. "Hello Ms. I have a special delivery from Jessica Jones in Liverpool, England, to Jessica Jones at this address. It says to be delivered directly to the Meccano room." The cleaning lady, knowing Jessica was on her way home, felt it was important to accept the package and so, said, "Well the Meccano room is right down the hall past the old clock. Do be careful Mister, strange things go on there." The gentleman opened the door slowly then repeated, "Special delivery from Jessica Jones in Liverpool, England to Jessica Jones at this address." Shirley Nickel Strip perked up. I know Jessica Jones. "Oh yes", the gentleman responded but as he turned he was drawn to the Tall Tower. "Well, well. That sure is a great model of the CN Tower," he said, as his eyes climbed the tower from bottom to top. Quietly, the Tall Tower came alive. Lights sparkled from top to bottom. Two elevators, shuffled in opposite directions from the base to the pod as a third elevator drifted up and down from the pod to the top observation deck. Stairs were visible from top to bottom. The man's heart thumped when he noticed the floor, of what he recognized as the rotating restaurant, actually rotating. Next his eyes were lifted to the base of the antenna as a set of coloured lights began to flash in sequence, almost saying, hello there. "Wow, this indeed is the CN Tower. Built by Jessica Jones, I suppose," the man said as he shook his head in admiration. Oh indeed, he heard a voice with giggles coming from the desk, but he saw no one. Remembering what the cleaning lady had said earlier, the gentleman decided his best move was to trace his tracks back to his truck. As he was about to drive off, his eyes dropped, on the delivery receipt. It had been appropriately signed, as received, by Jessica Jones. With that, his foot hit the accelerator and he was gone.

Shirley and the five friends had a good laugh. I guess we gave that man an eyeful, blurted Gail Green Strip. Oh yes, and an earful, giggled Goldie Gold Strip. I was impressed with how well the Tall Tower worked, added David Dark Girder. Shirley Nickel Strip couldn't hold back. The man correctly identified our Tall Tower as the CN Tower. I move that henceforth we will call it, the CN Tower. Both Henry Zinc Girder and Simon Silver Strip seconded the motion at once. Yes, yes, yes six voices agreed in paired unison. The excitement of the past hour was exhausting! The six friends decided to have an early rest, on the desk. It was a peaceful quiet, except for the tick tock of the clock and the relaxing whimpers coming from the desktop, when suddenly there was something more than a whimper. It was a scratching sound, loud enough to wake even the deepest sleeper. Simon Silver Girder sat up first. He poked Henry Zinc girder. Henry jumped up and then the whole desktop was astir. What is it? What is it? Called Gail Green Strip, for a moment, thinking she was still frozen in time, holding the antenna to the top of the Tall Tower. The sound got louder. Then a distinct voice could be heard. Let me out! Help! Help! I am trapped! Clearly the sound is coming from the box left by the deliveryman, observed Goldie Gold Strip. Shirley Nickel Strip and David Dark Girder decided to investigate. Moments later the protective packaging lay in a pile on the floor. Oh look blurted Shirley. It is a beautiful cabinet, labeled Meccano Set #10.

The voice went quiet, perhaps frightened by all the commotion, as the cabinet was being unwrapped. David called out in his loudest friendly voice. Hello! Who is there? There was no response. Shirley opened the first drawer. Oh look! Beautiful dark blue angle girders and perforated strips, neatly tied in place. She said then listened for the voice. Did anyone here call, she queried? Still, there was no response. Shirley opened the next two drawers. There was silence with more, dark blue, yellow and brass Meccano, tied in place. Let's open the top drawer, supported David. The two inched the drawer open. They blinked at what they saw! Amongst all the beautiful Meccano parts still tied neatly in place, was one special part. A little whimpering wheel, as Shirley described it. Another Meccano friend! What is your name, welcomed David? I am Barry Bush Wheel, part #24. Where am I? Barry blurted. This is the Jones' house, in Canada. Shirley responded. Oh! Are you Jessica, asked Barry? No, No, I am Shirley Nickel Strip, Shirley laughed. This is David Dark Girder. We live here, in this toy room. That is, we party here with our friends! You must meet them, continued Shirley, as she led the way. Wow, more Meccano here than at Binns Road, exclaimed Barry Bush Wheel, observing the Tall Tower and all the boxes of Meccano.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP GETS THE SCOOP ON BINNS ROAD

Mom and Dad arrived home after two months vacationing across Canada in a shiny, new mobile home. The house is spotless noted Mom. I am so glad we had Maria in to do the cleaning and bring in the mail. It makes me feel good to be home again. There was a lot of mail all in neat piles on the kitchen table. Two pieces were of particular interest. One was a letter from Jessica, posted in late July, in England. Jessica had mentioned the possibility of a stopover in England to see great Uncle Ian and to visit the Meccano show everyone talked about. Jessica's letter confirmed that she would not be home till the end of the month and that she had a fine visit with Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty. Dad continued to read aloud, "Both are in their late nineties but still spry as a spring. They loved to talk and wanted to know all about my project in the Middle East. Mom, Dad I spent a whole day with them and promised to come back before I left for home. Dad I am really sending this to tell you to look out for a large special delivery container. You won't believe this Dad but I bought a #10 Meccano set. It is in the latest dark blue and yellow colours. This set may be one of the last to be packaged at Binns Road in Liverpool. Uncle Ian heard a rumor, through his sources, that the Meccano factory will be closed for good, before year-end. That is sad news. I did enjoy listening to Uncle Ian talk about the days he worked in the packaging department of the old factory. For forty years he helped fulfill the dreams of young engineers. I can't wait to tell you and mom everything about my visit here and the Meccano show at Skegness. Dad someday we must exhibit our Tall Tower model right here. It would rise above everything. Oh I keep wandering. Dad continued reading. Back to the special delivery, I sent it from myself to myself with special instructions for the delivery person to take it directly to the Meccano room. Dad I don't want you to try lifting it. Love Jessica. See you all soon."

Almost missed in the interest of reading Jessica's letter was the note left by Maria. "What is this?" wondered Mom. Dad looked at the fine writing, in broken English. "Special del Jessica. Man take to Meccn rom. Hop god. Maria." Read Dad. "That must be the Meccano box Jessica wrote about. I guess it arrived ahead of us. Good thing Maria was here." whistled Dad. "Let's go check it out." He continued. Together Mom and Dad traced the steps taken by the deliveryman. "Oh the old clock is still ticking; Maria must have wound it up." observed Mom. Just then the old clock started to strike. It went bong, bong, bong... Mom counted twelve bongs. "Strange, it's the wrong time." Mom commented. As Mom and Dad approached the door they heard a scurry and giggles. Then there was more laughter. Dad thought he heard someone say "Party time." He opened the door slowly, just a crack, at first. Seeing no one, they walked into the room. The door closed behind them! Something was different. They surveyed the room. The old sun smiled through the big picture window. There were neat piles of Meccano along the wall but the drawers were empty. There were eight interesting pieces of Meccano perched beside a Meccano screwdriver at one corner of the desk. On the floor next to the desk was the #10 Meccano cabinet, Jessica had written about. Dad wondered how the cabinet could have been unwrapped. "Do you think Maria has a Meccano interest we don't know about?" Dad asked. Before Mother could answer she grabbed Dad's arm. "Look, isn't the Tower beautiful?" With that both Mom and Dad started to reminisce. "I remember when you first started on the project to design the world's tallest freestanding tower. It was so many years before the CN Tower was built. I remember your slogan. 'If I can design a bridge that crosses a river, then I can design a bridge to reach the clouds.'" Both had a good laugh. "Do you remember building the model?" Dad asked. "I do remember." replied Mom, "Jessica was just eight at the time. It was the first time she showed a real interest in Meccano and engineering," mom went on. Just then the lights started to twinkle from top to bottom, the elevators went into action and the floor of the pod began to rotate. A moment later coloured lights at the base of the antenna started to flash. Mom and Dad were amazed; almost dazed when they thought they heard a giggle coming from the other side of the room. As they turned to look the tower lights went out, the elevators stopped and the floor of the pod came to rest. Only the coloured lights at the base of the antenna continued to flash. Dad studied the flashes using his signal operator experience from the army. He recognized a distress signal. "Some place there is a big problem." Dad spoke up. "I hope Jessica is ok." Mom responded. The sequence started again. Dad followed each signal aloud. "The Meccano factory, in Liverpool, England, will cease operations, today." Dad was shocked! Uncle Ian was right. Shirley sobbed.

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP TRIPS OVER ERECTOR

Shirley Nickel Strip huddled with her friends on the corner of the desk. They didn't like the news dad had left with them. It was dusk. Long shadows reached to the far wall. Could this be a Halloween prank suggested Gail Green Strip? No, piped up Goldie Gold Strip. Halloween was here a month ago. She remembered that spooky night. The tower lit up the room. There were scary shadows all around and everyone was having fun. This was different. Dad picked up the signal from the flashing lights on the tower. There could be no mistake. I can't believe our Meccano fathers would let such a thing happen. Shirley knew Jessica would arrive home in two days. She would have some answers. Uncle Ian must have told her what was happening before she left for home. They all agreed to wait it out.

Two days turned into four days that seemed like an eternity. It was mid-afternoon on a sunny day when the door to the big toy-room squeaked open. A familiar face at last!

Jessica tiptoed to the desk then placed a parcel down to open it. Father was not far behind. "What did you bring back this time," he whispered. "Oh father I could hardly wait to show you." Jessica pulled back the wrapper to reveal a beautiful tin box. "Look what Uncle Ian gave to me." Jessica lifted the tin lid. From her perch, Shirley watched as Jessica and dad examined metal strips neatly tided together with wire, small round boxes of nuts and bolts, shiny angle pieces and bright brass wheels. One of the little angle pieces fell to the desktop, unnoticed by Jessica. Shirley's pulse peaked when she heard Jessica say, "The beginning of a beautiful dream." Shirley wondered what the dream was. Is this really the end of Meccano, she chirped to herself? Did it really happen? What has Jessica done? Did she decide to go to another construction toy to replace Meccano? Shirley went pale.

Just then mother called, "Dinner is ready." Jessica took one last long look at the box of gold and its contents then carefully replaced the lid. Jessica and dad left the room anxious to tell mother all about the surprise from Uncle Ian. As the door squeaked closed, the room went quiet.

Shirley Nickel Strip couldn't wait. If Jessica decided to move to a new construction toy to replace the defunct Meccano system she had to know. Why would Jessica give up on Meccano? The question rolled over and over in her mind. I must find out. She bolted across the desk and was about to climb onto the golden box when she heard a frail voice. Ahoy there! Who might you be? May I show you aboard? Indeed, shrieked Shirley. She didn't look to see who spoke. In her mind's eye she saw a shiny bent over piece of tin that could be from a box of Erector. I need to see what it says on this box. Without introductions the two started to climb. Upon reaching the top anxious and breathless Shirley's eyes bulged as she scanned the length and breadth of the lid. At the near end there was a picture of a locomotive, at the far end there was a picture of a crane and right across the midsection she saw read, **Mechanics Made Easy**. Mechanics Made Easy she bubbled! She felt so relieved. Shirley knew this was the forerunner of the Meccano System. She was ecstatic that it wasn't that "Erection toy", people spoke of. Relieved and no longer speechless she turned to see who was with her. Hello there, welcome to Canada, she giggled. I am Shirley Nickel Strip. Thank you, I am happy to be here, came the breathless response. My name is Andrew Angle Piece. I have been locked in that tin box since the beginning of time, 1901. I am so happy to be free! The two reminisced as they scampered back to the corner of the desk to meet all the Meccano friends.

Delightful introductions went like this:

I am, Andrew Angle Piece	Tin era	1901-1908	#4 Angle Piece, later #12
I am, Shirley Nickel Strip	Nickel era	1908-1926	#6a Perforated Strip
I am, David Dark Green Girder	Dark Red/Green era	1926-1934	#9f Angle Girder
I am, Goldie Gold Strip	Blue X-hatch/Gold era	1934-1942	#6a Perforated Strip
I am, Gail Green Strip	Medium/Light Red/Green era	1945-1962	#6a Perforated Strip
I am, Simon Silver Girder	Black/Yellow era	1962-1970	#9f Angle Girder
I am, Henry Zinc Girder	Blue/Zinc/Yellow era	1970-1978	#9f Angle Girder
I am, Barry Bush Wheel	Yellow/Dark Blue era	1978-1979	#24 Bush Wheel

With that, cheers of, **Meccano, Meccano, Meccano, may we live a hundred years**, filled the room!

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP LEADS THE SURPRISE COMMITTEE

The house was full of excitement. Maria, the cleaning lady, was busy making everything look warm and fresh. New linens were put on the big bed in the special guest room next to the parlor. In the toy room every box and every piece of Meccano was dusted down. The Tall Tower was given a special once over. The eight friends took turns sitting very still as Maria gave each a dusting. That felt so good, Henry whispered to Goldie. Maria left the room in a hurry, closing the squeaky door behind her.

I wonder what the occasion is, said Gail with a wink. Andrew Angle Piece turned to Shirley. Back home, I did overhear Aunt Nitty and Uncle Ian talk with Jessica, about coming to Canada, for a holiday and to celebrate Jessica's birthday. Uncle Ian plans to bring his Meccano collection to give to Jessica. I remember, Jessica was so excited as she explained that she dreamed of someday building a model of the Giant Block-Setting Crane, just like in the picture on so many of the Meccano instruction books. I could tell Uncle Ian is very fond of Jessica, Andrew continued, smiling. Shirley Nickel Strip wouldn't bring it up now but a note of sadness struck her with all the talk about Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty. She remembered for a moment the long days following the accident, before Uncle Ian sent her with the #6 Meccano set to Jessica, here in Canada. Today, she mused it would be best to recall just the pleasant memories, that followed.

Shirley pondered. What could we do to celebrate this visit? She stood up to take the floor. This will be a special time for Jessica and mom and dad. Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty will want to see the toy-room. I suggest we do something to surprise them. The friends agreed that each should write down an idea for something they could do with Meccano. They would then vote on the final proposal.

In short order there were eight suggestions before the group. Excitedly the friends reviewed the suggestions and picked the one they liked best. It was a unanimous first choice. They agreed to rest for the afternoon then work out a plan of action. Shirley would be the lead in charge of the project.

Darkness drifted in. Shadows shivered on the wall. They had just settled down when the old clock bonged, midnight. It was party time! Instantly Shirley began shouting orders. The friends darted about the room, moving boxes, moving special Meccano sets and parts, here and there. Shirley made sure everything was just right. Finally, with things in place, each member wrote a little story to tell why the set or part he or she picked was part of the display. When morning came there was just one thing left for the friends to do. Get back up on the desk to rest!

Before heading out to pick up Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty, mom and dad toured the whole house for one last time, to be sure everything was ready. They checked the guest bedroom, the parlor, the bathroom, the kitchen and last but not least the toy-room. Dad paused to wind the old clock as mother opened the squeaky door to the toy room. "Oh look!" called mother. "Jessica must have been working here all night." Dad couldn't believe what he saw. "Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty will be so pleased to see this" Dad beamed! Just then the old clock bonged, reminding them that it was time to leave to pick up the guests.

It was a short drive to the airport on this beautiful sunny afternoon. Mom and dad arrived just as the arrival of British Airways flight BA0093 was announced. How will Uncle Ian ever bring all that Meccano through customs, dad mused, but it wasn't long till someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Uncle Ian with a trolley load of heavily wrapped boxes. "Hello Uncle Ian," greeted dad first, then mother. "Where is Aunt Nitty" mother queried? "Oh she was stopped by customs," chuckled Uncle Ian. "Her purse was full of nuts and bolts. She has a little explaining to do." Not long after, what seemed like an eternity, a tall officer appeared carrying Aunt Nitty's purse. Tagging along behind was Aunt Nitty. The officer was laughing so hard he almost dropped the purse full of nuts and bolts onto the floor. "Sorry for taking so long." He said. "But everybody in the office had to meet this lady and hear the story about her purse. We called her Nutty." There were lots of laughs as the car was loaded and everyone climbed in for the drive back home.

Jessica was waiting. She welcomed them with fresh scones and tea as Aunt Nitty retold her story.

Greetings aside it was time for a rest. It really was way past bedtime for these tired travelers.

With the guests looked after, dad turned to Jessica. "You really did a wonderful job of setting up your Meccano display." "Yes and labeling everything as well! Your display tells the Meccano story from 1901 to 1979", Mother chimed. Jessica just smiled, wondering to herself. How did this all happen?

## SHIRLEY NICKEL STRIP MEETS UNCLE IAN

Well rested after a good night's sleep, Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty were ready for the daily ritual, a ten-kilometer, post-breakfast walk, in the country. Quite a feat for these two nonagenarians!

It was some time before Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty returned from the walk. Jessica arrived from her office and dad finished unloading the car of its precious cargo just as mother called, "Lunch is ready".

Lunch finished off with mother's apple pie and coffee, but the real dessert was listening to Uncle Ian talk about the Meccano factory, as Jessica opened boxes of Meccano containing all the parts needed to build the Pinyon Block Setting Crane, featured on the instruction manuals during the red and green era. Jessica was thrilled. It seemed like Christmas had arrived early.

Back in the toy-room Shirley Nickel Strip could sense all the excitement in the house, but the big door was closed, as it usually is. Not to miss anything, Shirley climbed up to the doorknob so she could peek through the keyhole to see what was happening. Down the long hall and past the old clock she could see Jessica, opening a box. What do you think is in those boxes, she said, not expecting a response? There was a clink, clink, clink, as the friends who had been half asleep on the desk scrambled to join her. They could peek through the gap under the door. Wow, shouted Simon Silver Girder those are boxes of Meccano. I can see red and green Meccano pieces. Uncle Ian must have bought up all the remaining stock from Liverpool, echoed Gail Green Strip. I can see a picture of the Pinyon Blocksetter Crane on the far left corner of the first box blurted Barry Bush Wheel. Yes, spoke up David Dark Green Girder, those boxes hold all the parts to make a real model of the Pinyon Blocksetter, I'll bet! Oh, that and more exploded Henry Zinc Girder. Someone is coming, whispered Goldie Gold Strip. They all darted back to the corner of the desk, beside the old screwdriver. All except Shirley Nickel Strip, she got stuck in the keyhole and was unable to make it down before the door opened. It creaked open slowly, then as if by accident, it swung wide open till someone grabbed onto it to stop a crash against the plaster wall. The jolt knocked Shirley to the floor. She lay silent hoping to remain there unnoticed, as five pairs of shoes moved past, within inches.

Proudly, Jessica paraded the guests past all the exhibits that had magically been set in place by the eight Meccano friends, just the night before. Uncle Ian was very impressed with the array of beautiful complete sets, representing a history of Meccano at Binns Road. Turning to admire the Tall Tower, he noticed something glitter on the floor beside the door. He picked it up. "Oh look, one piece that almost got away." Everyone laughed so loud they didn't hear a tiny giggle and the words, action please! They did take notice when the Tall Tower came to life. Lights glittered brightly, elevators climbed up and down and the floor of the pod began to rotate. "Awesome, awesome!" was all that Uncle Ian could say. Aunt Nitty giggled. Mom and dad stood proudly, taking it all in. Jessica smiled.

Uncle Ian took a step forward for a closer look when something strange happened. The elevators slowed, the tower lights went dim and the pod stopped. A light at the top of the tower began to flash, first one flash per second, then two flashes per second, then nothing. The sequence kept repeating. Father spoke up. "The tower is about to relay a message. Watch the lights at the base of the antenna." The room went silent. The coloured lights started to flash. Dad and Uncle Ian took turns deciphering the coded message. "Welcome to Canada, Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty." There were cheers all round. The top light flashed again, indicating another message was about to start. The two men spoke in unison, "This tower stands in loving memory of the Young Engineer." There was silence. Shirley sobbed proudly, still in Uncle Ian's hand. No one spoke! After some very emotional moments the party moved back to the dining room for second helpings of apple pie and coffee. On the last sip of coffee, Uncle Ian looked at his hand amazed. He began to laugh, and then sputtered. "Why am I clutching this piece of Meccano?" Jessica beamed, "That little piece of magic comes from the #6 set that you sent to me for my birthday, so many years ago. It is special; it is a memory, of the Young Engineer." Shirley Nickel Strip almost giggled aloud, knowing she was the centre of attention.

Time passed, since Uncle Ian and Aunt Nitty said their good byes. Shirley Nickel Strip spent hours with her friends, sharing Uncle Ian's stories about the old factory. The old factory is gone, but Shirley had vibes that the Meccano name, would someday reside in her neighbourhood. **Meccano! 100, plus many more years!**





1901



1950



2020



Meccano Parts 1901 to 2001