

sheet and received back three shop coats of a size appropriate to their build. Or nearly so.

The shop coats were glorious things of white cotton twill, embroidered across the back with the winged symbol of their employer. They were told to reserve one of the shop-coats for special occasions and to keep the other two properly washed and mended, for it was now their daily uniform.

Properly frocked and tabled, the boys were then addressed by an older man in a three-piece suit and gold-rimmed glasses, obviously someone important from the Front Office. The man spoke in a friendly, familiar fashion, smiling often and making it clear he thought them a welcome addition to the company, which is why the company was willing to go through the expense of training them for three years, providing them with their shop coats and working space, their basic kit of tools and of course the all-important toolbox to keep them in...

At which point the Instructor leaned near the Important Man and told him they were out of toolboxes at the moment but just as soon as some came in...

The Important Man didn't care for this news. Not one bit of it. He frowned and when he did so all the warmth went out of that wonderful airplane-filled space. He reminded the Instructor that the apprenticeship program was costing the company thousands of dollars and that there was a right way and a wrong of doing things and any attempt to properly train an apprentice who did not have his own toolbox was obviously wrong. They would have to send the boys home and reschedule the start of their training... at least, for any who were still qualified, for some later date.

Insert here a dramatic pause, during which apprentices had been known to faint, burst into tears or lose control of their bladder.

"I suppose I could have them make their own toolboxes," the Instructor mused in a tentative way.