

# Outward Bound

by

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*caveat lector*

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Beginnings

This memoir began as a response to a request. An associate, Carl Watner, asked me to write something for his newsletter, *The Voluntaryist*. He wanted a short history of the ways in which my transition to being undocumented had affected my employment. So, I started writing a work history. Before I finished, it was way too long for Carl to use in his newsletter. I kept working on it anyway and it became this memoir. There are a lot of tangents in the story but, primarily, it's a work history.

From the beginning of my work history, I've never been very good at physical labor. Instead, I've always been better at sedentary jobs. Thus, for me, work has usually not been of the physical variety. Nevertheless, I did begin at an early age to learn about work, such as I've experienced it, and about the reasons for it. To the best of my recollection, the first attempt to instruct me in that regard was made by my grandfather, Sam Aurelius Milam. I must have been somewhere around four to six years old at the time. That places it in the early 1950s. Whatever my age, he gave to me a gift the purpose of which was a mystery to me at the time. The gift was a shoe-shine kit. I can still remember it. There was a small wooden box with an inclined upper surface and one open side. The inclined surface had a small ridge at its lower edge. Inside of the little box there were two small cans of wax type shoe polish, one black and one brown. There were also two brushes. One brush had a handle at one end and a circular set of bristles at the other end. The other brush was long and rectangular with bristles over its entire length. Finally, there was a small piece of cloth. When my grandfather gave the thing to me, I didn't have the faintest notion what it was or what to do with it. He tried to explain to me that I could use it to shine shoes for men and then they'd give me money. That was his terminology. In this memoir, I've tried to avoid the use of the word *money*. Given the vapor standard upon which the U.S. economy is based, *funds* is a better word. For a discussion of the definition of money, see my essay *Money*. Anyway, I didn't have any idea why I'd want to shine a man's shoes, why a man would want to give me money, or why I'd want the money. The whole thing was a mystery to me. I don't have any idea what became of that little shoe-shine kit. It's gone forever.

I think that my father might have had better luck at instructing me. For one thing, he taught me the definition of money. During 19 years of formal "education" in the government schools, even in economics classes, I never again encountered that information. I learned not only by instruction but also by direct and practical experience. That is, when I was at an early age my parents began to give me a weekly allowance. With that allowance, I began to learn about spending funds, saving funds, and all of the considerations that go into making decisions about spending versus saving. It's been a long time and I was young then so I don't remember the details of the arrangement. My parents provided most of what I needed or wanted but there were certain kinds of things that I had to buy for myself. I remember walking to Avery's store on Saturday mornings to buy a vanilla malt with my allowance. After I was in high school, my parents bought a motor scooter for me, as a birthday gift, and I used my allowance to buy gasoline for the motor scooter. The arrangement gave me a good start in learning the difference between luxuries and necessities.

## Outward Bound

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Whether they're luxuries or necessities, I was interested in girls from an early age. I wrote an account of my various romantic relationships in a memoir that I call *Thanks for the Mammaries: a Ma'amoir*. Since it tells the various stories using the actual names of the women involved, I haven't actually published it. I hope that it will become available after my death. It might. I don't know for sure. Anyway, females figured into my financial thinking from an early age. Aleta Marie Rhodes was the earliest. I first noticed her while I was in the third grade and, by the time that I was in junior high school, I'd been interested in her for several years. I looked forward with magical anticipation to any event during which I'd be in her proximity. Anything seemed possible. I didn't know what the possibilities were but I was always filled with anticipation. I saved funds all year so that I could ride the carnival rides at the county fair each autumn and, one year, because of Aleta, I received a better than usual reward for my efforts. I got up the courage to ask Aleta to ride the Mad Mouse with me and she said yes.

The Mad Mouse was a little roller coaster that used individual, two-seated cars. Naturally, I paid for the ride for both of us. However my hopes were exceeded. The seats were fore-and-aft, not side-by side. The man who operated the ride, and who had the job of buckling us into the car, knew exactly what I needed. I started to do the gentlemanly thing and let Aleta get in first. He stopped her and told me to get in first. He made sure that Aleta got into the front position, sitting in front of me with her back against me. There was only one seat back so he instructed her to lean back against me, for her safety. He instructed me to put my arms around her and hang on to her, for her safety. It wasn't the first time in my life, nor the last, that I'd touched her. Even so, it was still pretty close to Heaven. It was certainly more than an adequate reward for a year's worth of saving my funds.

As the years have passed and I've pondered my experiences, I've learned a lot about the mistakes that I've made. Garrison Keillor said that, when you're old, the things that you regret will be the things that you **didn't** do. Regarding women, my regrets are the ones who got away. However badly things turned out, I don't regret my successes. Probably the biggest mistake that I ever made was failing to ask Aleta to marry me. There were good reasons for my failure to do so. The deteriorating relationship between my parents gradually disabled me from having much to do with women, even Aleta. I gradually lost contact with her. Nevertheless, it was a big mistake. I don't know why I didn't try harder to get in touch with her after the divorce from my first wife, but something inhibited me. Whatever the case, it's too late now. On September 29, 2006, my sixtieth birthday, Aleta arrived at her home and discovered intruders in the house. One of them shot her in the head and killed her.

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## New Jobs

I began attendance at East Central High School, east of San Antonio, Texas, in 1960. Initially, I hated the place. I didn't realize it at the time, but that would be a recurring theme for me. Looking back on it, I can recall that I also initially hated the Oak Crest Jr. High School. I've usually been that way about new places. It took me some time to realize that about myself. Don't misunderstand me. I NEVER liked Oak Crest Jr. High School, or East Central High School, or San Antonio Jr. College, or Texas A&M University, or any other such place. I've never like being in institutions of any kind. It's just that my initial distress was always worse than the normal level of distaste from just being there. I eventually recognized that aspect of my character.

By the time that I was in high school, my expenses were increasing. I've already mentioned buying fuel for my motor scooter. I can recall spending 25¢ per week on gasoline. That was enough fuel that I could drive anywhere that I wanted to go, all week. I was also responsible for any other costs of operating and maintaining the motor scooter. However, the motor scooter wasn't the only part of my growing expenses. By the time that I was in high school, the allowance wasn't sufficient for my needs. Consequently, I began to take odd jobs. I don't remember all of them. A few of them stick in my memory, each for its own reason. One time, I dug sweet potatoes for a local farmer. I didn't like the work so I didn't do that again. One time, I mopped the floors at a local grocery store. The owner didn't like the way that I did the job so I didn't do that one again, either. I got a job mowing Mr. Neubauer's lawn.<sup>1</sup> I used my father's lawn mower and asked 50¢ per hour, which Mr. Neubauer agreed to pay. After the second time that I did the job he voluntarily raised my pay to 60¢ per hour. He said that I was working too hard for 50¢ per hour. One time, I inadvertently mowed several of his Irises. He accepted my apology with good grace and assured me that you just can't kill those things. He was confident that they'd grow back. I don't remember if they did.

I had a few odd jobs at the high school. I can recall only one of them and that's because of some of the other students' clumsy use of the language. Or, maybe they were just stupid. Anyway, for a short while, I sold ice cream for the cafeteria, during the lunch break. Students would approach me, hold out a quarter, and ask for change in nickels and dimes. I'd tell them that they could have nickels and a dime or dimes and a nickel, but not nickels and dimes. They'd look at me like I was stupid. Okay, it wasn't clumsy use of the language. They were stupid.

During the summers, I visited my grandparents who, at the time, lived on a piece of rural land near Alma, Arkansas. A nearby neighbor, Mr. Bayne, had two daughters of about my age. Their names were Judy and Diane. Needless to say, they caught my attention. They don't figure much into this memoir but they're discussed at greater length in the ma'amoir, previously mentioned. Because of my visits to Judy and Diane, I got acquainted with Mr. Bayne. He seemed to sort of take a liking to me. Today, he'd probably end up in prison just for looking at me. Back then, it was OK for a

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<sup>1</sup> I don't remember how to spell his name. I'm guessing. In general, just assume that I'm guessing at the spelling of the names of all of the people that I mention in this memoir.

## Outward Bound

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man and an adolescent to be friends. Before long, Mr. Bayne invited me to go with him to a job site where he was building a house. Today, somebody would probably report him to the police. Back then, it seemed to me like an interesting thing to do. In any case, it never hurts to stay on the father's good side when you're interested in one or both of the daughters. When we got back to his home after work that first day, he offered me a twenty dollar bill as payment for my labor. Heck, to me it'd been mostly a vacation and a sight-seeing trip. I'd carried a few tools for him and driven a few nails but I hadn't really done a lot of work. Besides that, he'd paid for my breakfast and my lunch. A twenty dollar bill was worth a lot more in the early 1960s than it is today. I declined the twenty dollar bill, insisting that I hadn't earned it. He offered me a ten dollar bill. I refused that as well. Then he offered me a five dollar bill which I accepted. He told the story to everybody who'd listen and laughed like it was the best thing that he'd ever seen.

I gradually learned that Mr. Bayne was a skilled builder. He could start with a bare piece of ground and build a house. He didn't need to hire a plumber or an electrician or anybody else. He could do the entire construction job himself and that's what he did for a living. He worked as an independent contractor for some local real estate developers, and he built houses. I observed a variety of his skills. For example, he could drive a 16 penny nail with three blows of his hammer, with either hand. He could do it in any position. I once saw him drive such a nail while hanging upside down from a rafter, by his knees. He probably had some other tools that I don't recall but I do remember a hammer, a saw, a level, a framing square, and a tape measure. I recall that, during one of our trips, he stopped at a hardware store and bought a new framing square. As soon as he got it out to his truck, he tested it to verify that it was exactly square.

Mr. Bayne didn't use any power tools that I can recall. The region was very rural and, as often as not, he was working at a remote location that didn't have any electricity available. I know that he had a flat, yellow extension cord at home because, to this day, I coil such cords the way that he taught me to coil them, so that they don't get twisted. I don't remember him taking the extension cord on the road with us. Back then, they didn't have a lot of the fancy stuff that substitutes for skill nowadays. Hand tools, elbow grease, and a wonderful skill were all that Mr. Bayne needed.

I went with Mr. Bayne on several jobs. I never learned to be as good a builder as he was but I suppose that I did add a little more to my own personal work ethic. In one small way, I added something to his knowledge. During one of our conversations, I mentioned something about diesel engines not having spark plugs. He'd assumed that there wasn't any difference between diesel engines and gasoline engines except for the fuel. He was amazed at my knowledge. I remember him telling his wife how smart I was to know that diesel engines don't have spark plugs.

There was one thing about Mr. Bayne that surprised me and embarrassed me a little at first. I suggest that all of you ladies might want to skip the next two paragraphs. So, I'll continue from here without the ladies.

At home, Mr. Bayne was a complete gentleman, except for his Studebaker pickup truck. He called it the Stud, even in front of his wife. Whenever he did that, she usually got a certain expression on her face. However, after we were on the road, he tended to be a little (how shall I say it?) risqué. At first, I was considerably uneasy about it. After all, I was interested in his daughters and I wanted him to have a good impression of me. Besides that, I was pretty much of a puritan. I'd been raised in the conservative Southern Bible Belt. Even worse, I was at that time in the throes of a rather serious infection of fundamentalist Christianity. That is, I was an avid student of *The World Tomorrow* broadcast and *The Plain Truth* magazine, by Herbert W. Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong. I eventually recovered from the disease and, fortunately, I acquired a lifelong immunity to religion but, at the time, I really didn't know how to deal with some of Mr. Bayne's comments. A good example was his porcupine comment. The first time that I went to a job with him, we were riding along in the Stud and we passed a woman who was walking along the sidewalk in a little town along the way. He pointed at her. "Look at her," he said. "If that woman had as many pricks sticking out of her as she's had sticking in, she'd look like a porcupine!" I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to think. I supposed that he knew the woman and disapproved of her lack of virtue. However, after he'd made the same comment about several other women in almost every little town along the way, I decided that maybe he didn't know them after all. I guess that he just thought that it was a funny comment.

I can understand Mr. Bayne's penchant for unflattering comments about female strangers a lot better now than I did then. Indeed, his comments were a very normal kind of guy thing. I just hadn't ever encountered that sort of behavior before in an adult. Looking back on it, I can see that Mr. Bayne was just a little peek into the adult world that I was entering. Over the years I've accumulated my own little collection of stupid comments that I regard as funny but that I tend not to use in the presence of women. (By the way, I'll suggest here that those incautious ladies who chose to ignore my previous warning and who are still reading this might like to skip the remainder of this paragraph.) One example is, "WoooooWeee! (Pointing) Look at that! I'll bet her pussy smells like a fish!" The comment is in poor taste? Of course it is. That's the whole point. Here's another one. "Wow! With a nice wide ass like that, I'll bet that it'd be damned near impossible to fall off of her!" Or, leaning over to look out the window as a woman walks down the street, "Woo Hoo! Pussy Snatch Muff Cunt Twat Bush Clit! (Pause) Pudendum!" Nowadays, when I'm watching the TV (alone, of course) and some woman starts to talk about some product that she's trying to sell, I'm as likely as not to mutter, "Oh, shut up and show me your pussy!" When a sexy female appears on the screen, I'll chortle and mutter to myself, "Fuzzy and smells like a fish!" You get the idea. For those ladies who didn't skip the paragraph, calm down. It's just a guy thing. Good ol' Mr. Bayne. Also, please be aware that I don't intend by these comments to impugn Mr. Bayne's virtue in any way. If all men had his level of courtesy and integrity, then it would be a better world than it is.

(Ladies Restart Here)

Welcome back, ladies. I'm happy that you remained untainted.

## Outward Bound

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The last time that I went to Alma, Arkansas, after my grandfather had died and the family had moved my grandmother to Lake Charles, Louisiana, I went over to visit Mr. Bayne. He wasn't there any more. The family had moved without leaving a forwarding address. The people who were living in the house couldn't give me any clue about how to find him. I never saw any of the Bayne family again.

San Antonio Junior College

When I graduated from high school, we decided that I'd continue to live at home and go to San Antonio Junior College. I'd lobbied for The Ambassador College, in Pasadena, California. That was the religious college that was run by the Herbert W. Armstrong outfit that I mentioned earlier. However my mother refused and that was that. Anyway, my parents lacked sufficient funds, right then, to send me to a four-year college. Looking back on it, I think that I wasn't anywhere near old enough to leave home and go to a university, in spite of Mr. Bayne's beneficial influence. I needed to do a lot more growing up and the junior college was a good arrangement. My father bought a 1959 Ford Ranchero for me to drive. I don't remember for sure but I think that I had to pay its operating expenses. Maybe not. Whatever the case, since I was a college student, my expenses increased a lot so I continued to take part-time jobs. I discovered that jobs at the junior college paid a lot better than mowing Mr. Neubauer's lawn so I worked at the junior college after that. I worked at a variety of part-time, temporary jobs. The ones that I remember have each stayed in my memory because of some particular circumstance or event.

I took several swimming classes at the junior college. Because of my frequent presence, I suppose, I developed an inside track with the chairman of the swimming department, Mr. Bill C. Candler. My inside track got me a job as the lifeguard at the college swimming pool one summer semester. The job lasted for only that one semester. It's just as well because I was a very weak swimmer. To me, water is a hostile environment. Swimming is a lot of work for me and I don't particularly enjoy it. The only kinds of swimming that I ever did better than poorly were slow, long distance swimming, and underwater swimming. If I'd ever had to actually rescue somebody then I'd probably have drowned us both. The pool wasn't open to anybody but students so there wasn't much need for a lifeguard. I suppose that it was some kind of an insurance requirement.

The main reason that I remember the lifeguard job is because of one particular female student whose name I never knew. She jumped into the pool one afternoon in such a way that her shirt slid up above one of her boobs. You know what? She wasn't wearing anything under the shirt. Heck. I was so embarrassed that I was afraid to tell her. I was afraid to even look at her, after that first astonished glimpse, except maybe for a very few, extremely brief, occasional sidewise glances, purely for the purpose of checking to see if she'd pulled her shirt back down yet. It was entirely professional interest. I was just doing my job as a dedicated and selfless lifeguard. Nothing more. OK, laugh at me. I was young and I'd been raised in the Bible Belt. Herbert W. Armstrong would have been proud of me. Fortunately, I wasn't called upon in my capacity as the student lifeguard to resolve that particular emergency. After a very brief time, a sadly brief time, she noticed the situation and corrected it herself. So far as I can recall, that was the first time that I'd ever actually seen a boob, with my own eyes, and not just in a picture. Ahhh, but it was such a lovely sight! I wonder if she'd have looked like a porcupine.

I did accomplish one good thing while I was hanging around the swimming pool. One day, a female student lost one of her contact lenses in the water. It was the middle

## Outward Bound

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1960s. Contact lenses were still kind of a new thing and they were expensive. Everybody was very sympathetic but the consensus was that the lens was gone forever. I remember somebody suggesting that it would probably get caught in the filter. I don't think that any of us knew where the filter was. Being caught in the filter was the same thing as being gone forever. The next day, I brought my goggles and flippers to school with me. I started swimming lengths of the pool underwater with my face just a couple of inches above the bottom. With the big black stripes that marked the lanes on the bottom of the pool, it was a simple matter to swim each pass just a few inches over from the previous one. I wasn't even halfway through searching the entire surface yet when I found her contact lens. It was resting peacefully on the concrete, concave side up. I retrieved it and returned it to her. She was amazed and grateful. I was a hero for about 30 seconds and then I was forgotten again. She didn't even show me a boob. She'd probably have looked like a porcupine.

I took a scuba class that was taught in the evenings in the college swimming pool. After we were all reasonably familiar with the tanks, regulators, and so forth, the instructor told us one evening that he wanted to give us a couple of minutes of experience at swimming in the dark. He instructed us to go below the surface and told us that, after we were all submerged, then he would turn off the lights for about two minutes. He instructed us that we were to surface immediately after the lights came back on again, and swim to his end of the pool. So, that's what we did. After the lights were on again and we were all safely back at the edge of the pool, he asked us how long we thought we'd been under the water. Several people ventured opinions. The guesses ranged from 30 seconds to five minutes. It turned out that we'd been under water for 30 minutes. Then, he explained the lesson. He told us that a person's time sense doesn't work correctly under water in the dark. He cautioned us that if we were ever diving at night or in caves, to be particularly careful about having a reliable watch and paying careful attention to it.

That brings to mind an aspect of Southern culture that I've suspected for many years. It's subtle and I'm not sure if it actually exists but it seems to me that it does. Poppa had promised me, before I began the scuba class, that if I managed to finish it successfully then he'd buy scuba gear for me. I think that he must have expected me to fail to complete the class. When I completed it successfully, he never did get around to buying the scuba gear. A good many years later, I recalled that and arrived at this theory. It seems to me that, at least among Southern men, there's an inherent expectation of failure. There seems to be an expectation that things won't work out. I didn't notice it until I'd moved away from the South and lived in Silicon Valley for many years. Since then, I've speculated that the expectation of failure might be a legacy of the war. The South is a defeated, occupied nation. Maybe that circumstance has had a long-term effect on the Southern culture.

I also had a job in the Biology Lab, for Dr. William E. Burris. They'd received a large shipment of dead cats for the Comparative Anatomy class. The cats were preserved in formaldehyde and stored in a 55 gallon drum. My job was to transfer the cats from the drum into smaller containers at the laboratory benches. What I remember the most about that job is, every two or three cats, I had to stagger over to the wall and

lean out of the window to breathe. The concentration of formaldehyde in the room was, literally, overwhelming.

That reminds me of one other minor incident that involved Dr. Burris. He had the head of a dead bull stored in a 55 gallon drum. I wonder where he got the drum. Anyway, he explained that he was letting it rot so that, eventually, he'd have just the skull. I think that he was planning to use it as some sort of a decoration at home. I wonder if he'd remembered to mention that to his wife. Anyway, he decided to check on it's progress and opened the lid of the drum just a tiny bit. I was standing back a few feet so I missed the full effect but I thought that Dr. Burris was going to throw up, right there in front of me, before he could get the lid back down again. He commented in a ragged gasp, between gags, that we'd better leave the lid on it for a few more years.

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Texas A&M University

After slightly more than two years at San Antonio Junior College, I received my associate degree in something or other and gained acceptance at Texas A&M University, with a major of Wildlife Science. Texas A&M University turned out to be a whole different world. It's a good thing that I hadn't gone there first. Even after some time at the junior college, I still wasn't ready for A&M. Upon reflection, I'd probably never have become ready for it by staying at home. I suppose that the only way to get ready for something like that is to just go ahead and do it. Still, I think that the two years of junior college probably helped a lot.

In addition to the various other challenges that I found at A&M, it was the first time that I'd ever been away from home and family. Because of my parents' brutal situation, I was desperate to get away from home, so it was completely unexpected that I'd be homesick. However, I was. I was so homesick that I could barely function. I didn't think that it was possible to be more unhappy than I was during my first few weeks at Texas A&M University. As it turned out, I was wrong about that. From a vantage point later in life, I've begun to suspect that there might not be any limit to how unhappy it's possible for a person to be. Grief springs eternal in the human breast.

Up until the time that I went to Texas A&M University, I hadn't been very political. Sure, Poppa had given me some clues. For example, while I was reiterating some of the Domino Theory stuff that they were trying to teach me in the schools, he commented that I was in much greater danger of losing my rights to my own government than I was of losing them to the Soviets. Nevertheless, Texas A&M University gave me a big push in a certain direction. As I adapted to living away from home, I began to notice that Texas A&M University was a miniature police state. It even had its own little police force, called the Campus Cops, KK for short. A student who'd been there for a year or so told me that KK was intended to sound like the cackle of a chicken, indicating that the KK was a chicken-shit organization. That opinion turned out to be reasonably accurate.

I recall one morning when two KK thugs came into our dormitory room and arrested my roommate, Kenny McDougle, right out of bed. The problem was that he'd received a parking ticket the previous day and had gone to the office of the KK to complain about it. During the conversation, he'd ventured the opinion, in the presence of the secretary, that the KK was a chicken-shit organization. So, they came around the next morning and arrested him for using obscene language in the presence of a lady. Notice that they didn't arrest him on the spot, at the time of the violation. I think that they needed a little time to position themselves. Maybe they also didn't want the secretary to know about it. Whatever the case, they waited until the next morning. When they brought Kenny back, about an hour later, he told us that they'd taken him to the home of a local judge, out in the country somewhere. They didn't take him to a jail or to a court. They didn't book him. They just took him to the judge's home. Sitting at his kitchen table, the judge fined Kenny \$50, which they collected on the spot. After that, they brought him back to the dorm. At the time, we thought that it

## Outward Bound

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seemed a lot like extortion. It still seems a lot like extortion.<sup>2</sup> I've always wondered how the judge and the cops divided the fine between themselves.

Some time later, I had a little experience of my own with the KK that suggested a certain limited intelligence among them. I was still driving the Ranchero that Poppa had bought for me. A Ranchero is a light-duty pickup truck. In order to load things into it at the end of one semester, I drove it along the sidewalk and backed it up to the steps. While I was upstairs acquiring a load, a KK thug put a parking ticket on my truck. I went to the chief of the KK and asked him if I really had to pay it. Since he was a good ol' boy and since I had a part-time job with the KK at the time, believe it or not, he took the ticket and said "Don't worry about it." However he explained to me, as one insider to another, that I shouldn't drive my pickup truck on the sidewalks because the surfaces weren't strong enough to support the weight. A fellow student, Doug Presley, once commented to one of the KK officers, "Aw, come on! Just because you're a cop you don't **have** to act stupid!" On my way back to the dorm, I thought of Doug. I couldn't help but to notice the dumpster sitting only a few feet away from where I'd parked my truck. I suppose that they used special, helium-filled garbage trucks back then, so that the weight of the truck wouldn't damage the sidewalk. My Ranchero must have been much heavier than a garbage truck.

Mention of the Ranchero reminds me of a spooky incident that happened to me during my first year at A&M. Right behind Leggett Hall, where I lived that first year, was a faculty parking lot that students were permitted to use during the weekends. I'd driven somewhere on Sunday and parked my Ranchero in the faculty lot when I returned to the campus. Late Sunday evening, I went to move the Ranchero back to the student lot and discovered that my keys weren't in my pocket. I looked through the window and saw that they weren't in the ignition switch. They weren't on the ground near the truck or anywhere in the lawn or on the sidewalks between the truck and the building. They weren't on the stairs or on the floor. They weren't in my stack of dirty clothes. I went through the stack very thoroughly, shaking everything and checking all of the pockets. The keys weren't anywhere. They'd just completely disappeared.

I sent a letter home and asked my mother to send me another key to the Ranchero. I wrote a note to the KK explaining my problem and placed the note under the windshield wiper. The next morning I got a parking ticket anyway. After all, the KK employed the kind of people who believed that a Ranchero is heavier than a garbage truck. As previously noted by Doug Presley, it takes a certain kind of mentality to be a cop. That same day, I turned in my bundle of dirty clothes to the campus laundry.

I need to write a few words here about the campus laundry. The laundry people put little tags, with numbers on them, on all of our clothes. My assumption is that everything was dumped into some big cleaning process and sorted out later, according to

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2 **EXTORTION.** The unlawful taking by any officer, by color of his office, of any money or thing of value that is not due to him, or more than is due, or before it is due....

In a large sense the term includes any oppression under color of right; but it is generally and constantly used in the more limited technical sense above given....

—*Bouvier's Law Dictionary*, 1889

the tags. The likelihood of a set of keys remaining attached to a particular article of clothing while going through that process is very small. Also, remember that I'd gone through my clothes, checked every pocket, and shaken everything. The keys would have needed to be attached to something very securely to stay attached while I shook the clothes and then to stay attached while the clothes went through the campus laundry.

Later that week, I received my bundle of clean clothes from the campus laundry. I unwrapped it and started hanging things. I unfolded one pair of pants, folded them across a clothes hanger, walked across the room, and hung the clothes hanger on the clothes bar. Just as I turned loose of the hanger, my keys fell out of mid-air and landed on the floor. If they'd been attached to the pants, then they must have been very loosely attached, to fall off so easily. In that case, they'd never have stayed with the pants during my search for them and during the laundry process. If they'd been attached well enough to stay attached during my search and during the laundry process, then they wouldn't have fallen off of the pants when I hung them on the clothes bar. I don't think that they were attached to the pants. That's just too unlikely. It seems more likely to me that, sometime Sunday afternoon, my keys slid through a hole into hyperspace. Later that week, they slid back out of the hole and landed on the floor in front of me. Of course, it might have been magic, instead of science.

As long as I've brought up the subject of spooky reappearances, I'll mention another such event that I observed. It happened many years later, so it's out-of-sequence at this point in this memoir. However, it fits here and I'll probably forget to mention it later. So, I'll put it here.

During the years after the stupid divorce from my first wife,<sup>3</sup> I developed the practice of filing \$220 in cash in my file cabinet immediately after I was paid. That way, I was sure that I'd have the funds to make the child support payment when it was due on the second of each month. There wasn't anything secret about it. Nobody was in the house except for people that I trusted. That being the case, I put the funds in a file folder labeled "Child Support Payment" in my file cabinet. One month, when I went to get the funds, they were gone. I asked Sir Donald the Elusive, who was renting from me at the time, if he knew anything about what had happened to the funds. He denied any knowledge of their whereabouts. To his credit, he tried to give me \$220 in addition to his normal rent payment so that I wouldn't think that he'd taken the funds. I declined his offer and apologized for possibly sounding like I was blaming him. I didn't really think that he'd done it. Actually, I suspected that my girlfriend at the time, Lorita Ann Taylor, had probably taken the funds. I might have been just a little careless when I stated, earlier in this paragraph, the nobody was in the house except for people that I trusted.

Many years later, I had occasion to go through my map collection, looking for a map of the Monterey Peninsula. The map collection was in the same room with the file cabinet, on a bookcase on the far side of the room. So far as I can remember, I'd never before even looked at the Monterey Peninsula map. It was still in its original

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<sup>3</sup> See my memoir *Glenna Elaine Cole*. It's available in *Pharos*.

## Outward Bound

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plastic sleeve. When I removed it from the shelf and pulled it from the plastic sleeve, \$220 in cash fell from it and landed on the floor. I don't know of any way that the funds could have moved from the file cabinet to the map. I don't know of anybody who would have done it. I certainly didn't do it. Again, it seems more likely that the funds slipped through a hole into hyperspace and, later, slipped back out again.

Getting back to Texas A&M, I had some interesting room mates during the two semesters that I lived in Leggett Hall. There was Don Campbell. We all called him Weatherman. He'd come to A&M from the farm to major in Meteorology. I can imagine his expectations when he'd made that decision. After he graduated and went back to the farm, he and his father would get up early, as usual, planning a hard day of planting, tending, or harvesting crops. They had animals that depended on them, too, and everything hinged on the weather. So, they'd walk out into the back yard at first light. Dad would wait respectfully while his college-educated son scanned the sky with finely trained eyes, sniffed the breeze, evaluated all of the secret considerations that he'd learned at A&M, and provide yet another incisive, learned, and accurate prediction of the day's weather. It didn't take Weatherman long to discover that you had to be able to do arithmetic in order to get a degree in Meteorology. He changed his major to Animal Husbandry but the nickname stuck.

Then there was Gordon Sagabiel. He was of German ancestry, and came from a little town called White Settlement. He spoke fluent German. He and I used to walk around campus impressing the girls by talking to each other in German. He'd speak German and I'd speak German-sounding gibberish. Gordon lasted only one semester because he couldn't pass Physical Chemistry, called PChem by us insiders. At A&M, PChem was the Kill Course for freshmen. That is, it was the Freshman course that eliminated those students who weren't going to be able make it in college anyway. PChem was the end of college for Gordon. I'll admit that he tried hard but he just couldn't pass the course. The likely end became clear late one evening when he was scheduled to take his mid-term exam. He's been studying for it for weeks. We were all sitting around that evening, studying, when suddenly Weatherman looked up from his animal husbandry book, glanced at the clock, and yelled, "Gordon!"

Gordon's answer was a dejected "Yeah."

"Your mid-term! You're missing your mid-term!"

"Yeah," said Gordon. "I'm not gonna take it." By then, we were all listening intently.

"Why not?" somebody asked.

"I'll get a better grade if I don't take it."

Then Gordon explained that the teacher marked off double for wrong answers or blank answers. So, Gordon figured that he'd do better to not take the test and get a zero rather than to take it and get a negative grade. Shortly after that, he dropped out of college and joined the Air Force. You can't help but to wonder. The next time that you hear an airplane coming, duck.

Another fellow who didn't last long was Robert Porter. He was the stereotype's stereotype of the Goat Roper faction at A&M. I suppose that an explanation is in order.

There were three main factions at A&M. The students who wore wide-brimmed cowboy hats, wide leather belts with big buckles, and boots with pointed toes, high heels, and leather-worked sides were called Goat Ropers. The guys in ROTC uniforms were Corp Turds, CTs in polite company. Anybody who wasn't either a Goat Roper or a CT was, by default, a Hippie. On Haight Street, in San Francisco, I'd have been perceived as a country bumpkin. At A&M, I was a hippie. Robert Porter talked like he had marbles in the back of his mouth. His phraseology and choice of words was very country. For example, he wouldn't say that he was going to drive to town. He'd say, "Wull, Imonna cara ol' Blue ta town." Ol' Blue was his car. On Friday evening, he'd say, "Wull, Imonna goat tha house." Translated into English, that means, approximately, I'm going home now.

Another interesting fellow was Warrick Merrill Locke. He was a wimpy little fellow who seemed much too intelligent to be living with a bunch of yokels like us. For much of my early life I was burdened by low self esteem. That caused me to perceive some people as being much more intelligent than they actually were. Ric was one of those people. After I was in my late 30s or early 40s, I was able to look back on my earlier assessment of him and realize that he wasn't the stunning genius that I'd previously believed him to be. I'm not saying that he was stupid. He just wasn't a stunning genius. In either case, he was the only good friend that I had among the various roommates and other acquaintances of my pre-marriage time in college.

During the time that I was getting to know Ric, I became disillusioned with Wildlife Science. At the time, I was taking a low-grade physics course, one that was designed for non-engineering majors. Since I was disillusioned with Wildlife Science and since I really liked the Physics course, I decided to change my major to Physics. A faculty advisor suggested that Nuclear Engineering might be a better choice for me than Physics. Surprisingly, he had a good reason. He noted that, if I changed my major to something technical, then it was going to take me seven years of college to graduate. By then, he predicted, I wouldn't want to spend any more time in college. He noted that a bachelor's degree in Physics probably wouldn't be very useful for getting me a job. A bachelor's degree in Nuclear Engineering would be better and, with Nuclear Engineering, I'd still be able to study some Physics. While I'd been talking about changing to Physics, Ric had also suggested Nuclear Engineering. With so much consensus among my friends and advisors, what could I do? I changed to Nuclear Engineering.

Ric and I spent a lot of time together and he figures at greater length in the ma'amoir, but there isn't much else to say about him here. Eventually, he dropped out of school and joined the Navy. He said that he chose the Navy so that he could stay out of Vietnam. He ended up on the USS America, in the Gulf of Tonkin. The last few times that I tried to get in touch with him, his website and email address didn't work. It seems that I've fallen out-of-touch with him.

## Outward Bound

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Before I got onto several other subjects, I was writing about the Texas A&M University police state. In addition to its own little police force, the KK, Texas A&M University also had its own little Supreme Law of the Land, called the *Blue Book*. Since I'd signed the mandatory loyalty oath when I'd registered, and since one of the oath's provisions was obedience of the *Blue Book*, I went to the trouble of reading it. I don't think that anybody else did that. As with other aspects of my own particular work ethic, reading the rules turned out to be a recurring theme. More than once, it got me into trouble. However, I'm getting ahead of my story.

The *Blue Book* was the set of regulations by which our lives were presumed to be governed at Texas A&M University. When I read it, I found an astonishing statement. One provision of the *Blue Book* proclaimed that the student accepted the university as the sole and final authority in all aspects of his life. I wasn't yet very sophisticated in my understanding of despotism and tyranny but, even so, that statement seemed to me at the time to be unacceptable. Somewhere along the way, in later years, I lost my copy of the *Blue Book*. I wish that I hadn't. I'd really like to be able to actually quote the statement and provide a formal reference. Maybe I could even provide an image of the page. Sadly, the best that I can do is to assure the readers that the *Blue Book* actually did contain the statement that I've paraphrased.

I complained about the *Blue Book* and the mandatory loyalty oath to such university authorities as were accessible to me. I was told that if I didn't like the situation then I could go to school somewhere else. The attitude was disingenuous, condescending, and arrogant. It was a typical university administrator's attitude. I learned later that it isn't just university administrators who have those attitudes. I now suspect that the corporate management system inherently and specifically selects for people with such attitudes. Back then, I hadn't yet read *Parkinson's Law* or *The Peter Principle*. Anyway, to go to school somewhere else would mean that I'd have to drop out, move my stuff back home again, try to get refunds for all of the mandatory fees that I'd been required to pay, and delay college for at least a year while I tried to get accepted at another school that would probably have exactly the same policies. Another even more important consideration was that I'd have to spend an additional year, without a college deferment, exposed to the likelihood of being drafted.

I contacted a local lawyer. He advised me to just grit my teeth, get my degree, and then try to change things after I graduated. "Be careful where you spend your money" was the way that he put it. I graduated in 1971. I've been trying to change things for about 50 years now. During that time, things have become immeasurably worse. That wasn't the last bad advice that I ever received from a lawyer. In fact, I don't recall, right at the moment, that I ever received any good advice from a lawyer. Because of things like the KK and the *Blue Book*, I was beginning to get an education besides the one intended by the Dean of Students. By that I mean that I was getting my first lessons in the smug and disingenuous arrogance of PIGS.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the nature of the place, it seemed that I was stuck with it.

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4 PIGS is the acronym for People In Government Service, source unknown.

Meanwhile, I was trying to secure sufficient funds to stay in college. I got some help from my parents, primarily from my mother, but not enough. So again, I took part-time temporary jobs. I just went around to the various departments asking for work until I had all that I could handle. There weren't any written applications that I can recall. I might have received tax withholding statements from the departments. I don't remember. There wasn't any such thing as two weeks notice. When it was time to quit one of the jobs, the student just quit. He could also be fired without notice. I thought that the system worked very well.

I worked for a while at Sbisa, the university's student cafeteria known locally as the Ptomaine Tavern. On that job, I cleared tables and filled plates and bowls at the chow line. After I'd been working there for a while, I notified the manager that I'd be gone on a specific weekend. Ric and I had planned a weekend trip to Louisiana to visit my grandmother. I notified the manager well in advance, so that he'd have plenty of time to arrange for that weekend to be covered. I notified my grandmother to let her know when we'd be there. Friday afternoon, just before my trip, the cafeteria manager told me that I'd have to work that weekend. I complained and reminded him of our prior arrangement but he threatened to fire me if I didn't work. So, I delayed my trip by one week and rearranged all of my plans. I made sure that he knew that I'd be gone the following weekend. The next Friday, he again told me that I had to work that weekend. I told him that I wouldn't do it. He said that if I didn't work that weekend then I might as well not bother to show up on Monday. I said that was fine with me. Ric and I went to Louisiana. Sadly, my grandmother hadn't received my message or had become confused about my plans. Whatever the reason, when we got to Louisiana, she was somewhere in Oklahoma, visiting other relatives. When we arrived, my Aunt Eloise acted like she wished that we were somewhere else. It was the 1960s. Eloise lived in Louisiana. We were hippies.

When the cafeteria manager saw me going through the chow line for breakfast on Monday morning, he asked me why I hadn't showed up for work that morning. I reminded him of our conversation of the previous Friday evening. I never worked there again. I was learning. Since then, I've accumulated a reputation for doing what I say that I'm going to do. People ignore it at their own peril.

One other minor incident with that particular cafeteria manager sticks in my mind. We all learned that, when we went through the chow line collecting things, we had to inspect the utensils before we took them. Sometimes, there was old food stuck to the spoons, and so forth. That manager happened to be standing behind the utensil cabinet one day and observed me inspecting the utensils before I put them on my tray. He acted offended and said, "You wouldn't do that at home!" I replied, "At home, I wouldn't have to." He harrumphed. Yes, I was learning.

I also worked for the KK, as I mentioned briefly a few paragraphs back. I directed traffic at football games and at concerts. I remember one particular Johnny Mathis concert that I lacked the funds to attend. Since I couldn't attend, I went back to the dorm after the concert was under way. Shortly thereafter, there was a power failure on campus. I grabbed my flashlight and ran back to the auditorium. At the door, the

## Outward Bound

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attendant proclaimed with enthusiasm that anybody with a flashlight got in for free. Inside, I joined a half-dozen or so other flashlight-wielding do-gooders who were providing the stage lighting while Johnny Mathis gamely continued to sing, sans microphone. I didn't get to meet Johnny Mathis.

Another job that I had at Texas A&M University was at the computer center. Us cliquish insiders called it the DPC, for Data Processing Center. My supervisor was an older student named Dick Vitek. He referred to tennis shoes as hummers. He was a hippie. Being the junior guy, I had to run the decollater and the burster. The operation of those two demonic machines requires a bit of explanation.

Back then, computer output was mostly printed on four part fan fold paper. That is, there were four layers of paper with three layers of carbon paper between them. Youngsters reading this can look up *carbon paper* in a dictionary. The individual sheets were attached at perforations, forming long strips of paper. The sheets of paper in the strips were folded back and forth like the surface of an accordion. Strips of paper along the edges, removable along perforations, had holes that were used by little sprockets in the printers to feed the paper through the printers. The decollater separated the seven strips of material from one another. Here's the operating procedure. I'd set the stack of fan fold paper on the input tray, start the ends of each strip of material, paper or carbon paper, into the input rollers (or sprockets, I don't remember any more), push the START button, and move my finger to the STOP button as quickly as possible. Then, I'd watch like a starving hawk as the paper went whizzing through the decollater. I'd keep my finger poised tensely over the STOP button. After a small but unpredictable number of seconds, at least one strip of material, paper or carbon paper, would jam and the machine would start stuffing it into a wad at an incredible rate. I'd push the STOP button as quickly as possible, untangle the jam, and start the process going again. One ALWAYS operated the decollater with one's finger poised over the STOP button. Actually turning ones back on the decollater while it was in operation was an act of sheer lunacy.

The burster was used to pop the individual pieces of paper apart, hopefully at the perforations between sheets, after the strips of material were separated from one another by the decollater. It had a similar tendency to jam. One always operated the burster with one's finger poised over the STOP button. It wasn't a very good job but it helped with my expenses.

I also worked at the Poultry Science Center. Us cliquish insiders called it the Chicken Farm. Aggies who didn't work there sniggered and chortled at any mention of it. That was because *Chicken Farm* was also the name of the famous and somewhat local whorehouse, at La Grange, Texas, about a hundred or so miles from College Station.<sup>5</sup> There was a song that some long-forgotten Aggie had written, or started to write, that Aggies often started to sing, but never finished. The first line of it was sung to the first line of *Home, Home on the Range*. I never heard any group of Aggies sing any more of the song than the first line. It went, "Home, Home at La Grange...." After singing that much, the rendition always deteriorated into a chorus of indecipherable

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<sup>5</sup> See the movie *The Best Little Whore House in Texas*, starring Dolly Parton and Burt Reynolds.

chortles, snorts, and guffaws. That's why I don't know if the long-forgotten Aggie who wrote the song ever actually finished it. Nobody who sang it ever finished it. The road between College Station and La Grange was reputed to be well traveled, although I never went to the place myself. Not only was I inhibited by the stupid Christian fear of sin, I wouldn't have been able to pay the lady.

For some reason, that brings to mind another amusing thing that happened along about the same period of time. There was a little fast food place across the road from A&M that the local Aggies called *The Greasy Dick*. It happened that, at about the same time, female students were beginning to appear in the student body. This is what happened. Some Aggie whose name I never knew came dashing into one of the lounges of one of the dorms, yelled at a friend that he'd expected to meet there, "Hey Joe, let's go over to the Gre...." He stopped suddenly, having noticed the presence of some female students. After a pause, he continued, "...to the Slimy Richard!"

His friend was baffled. "The what?"

"You know, the Sllliimmmeeyyy Riiichaaard!", with a lot of body language thrown in.

His friend thought about it for a few seconds and then exclaimed in sudden understanding, "Oh! You mean *The Greasy Dick*!"

The female students pretended to ignore the embarrassed Aggie as he and his chortling friend left the lounge, headed for *The Greasy Dick*.

Sorry, ladies, I should have warned you to skip the previous sex paragraphs. Oops. Six paragraphs. Darn.

Getting back to the Chicken Farm, the one at A&M, not the one at La Grange, sorry ladies, it was the site of many government-funded research projects. Who knows? Maybe the one at La Grange was, too.

My first assignment at the Chicken Farm provided me with a reason to doubt the credibility of such projects. This is what happened. When I reported for work the first day, the supervisor of the Chicken Farm took me into a barn in which they were conducting a study of the effect of different kinds of feed on egg production. He carefully instructed me in the method of data collection for the project. He explained that data for the study were collected each day by two part-time student employees, such as me. He walked me through the procedure. According to his instructions, the first student walked along the rows of numbered cages putting eggs in a basket. At each cage from which the student took an egg, he spoke the cage number. The second student, who carried a clip-board, followed behind the first student. The second student entered a mark on the row of the chart by the number of each cage from which an egg was taken, in the column for that day. That provided an accurate record of egg production for each chicken. Records were being kept, of course, of which kind of feed each chicken was eating. Thus, the effect on egg production of different kinds of feed could be determined. The results of the study were to be disseminated throughout the industry, helping egg producers decide which feed to buy. One aspect of the study was to test the benefits of mixing a certain proportion of dried chicken manure back into the feed that was given to the chickens. The reasoning, if I can call it that, was that

## Outward Bound

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the manure contained a lot of unused nutrition. I thought that it was a despicable idea. It wasn't the last such idea that I encountered at the chicken farm, or elsewhere for that matter, and it wasn't necessarily the worst. There are some things that just ought not to be done, regardless of allegedly logical reasons for doing them.

When I reported for work the second day, the other part-time student assigned to that project showed me how the data were **actually** collected. In the absence of the supervisor, the student collected all of the eggs as quickly as possible without making any marks on the chart at all. Then he sat at one end of the barn and marked on the chart whichever cage numbers he felt like marking. His method was a lot faster. He spent the extra time sitting in the end of the barn and smoking cigarettes. That used enough time so that he could report back with his data after the proper length of time had passed, thus averting any suspicion about his method of data collection.

The faulty data generated by that student caused the entire study to be utterly worthless. Why didn't I report the situation to the supervisor? I don't have the faintest notion. Maybe I was just young and stupid. However, I will point out that, later in my career, I did try to correct those sorts of things when I encountered them in other situations. So far as I'm aware, my efforts didn't accomplish much except to cause management to frequently view me as a trouble-maker and to get me laid-off on more than one occasion. Why did I do it? I don't have the faintest notion. Maybe I was just older and still stupid.

As long as I've mentioned the subject of government-funded research projects, I'll digress briefly. My experience at the Chicken Farm wasn't my only encounter with potentially tainted official opinion. My girlfriend Lorita Ann Taylor, while she was pregnant, got really tired of doctors and nurses harassing her about her smoking. She believed that smoking by pregnant women doesn't harm their babies. Whether she was wrong or right is irrelevant. It was her baby, not theirs. I'm really disgusted with all of the medical evangelism that permeates the country today. Those people are supposed to be medical professionals, not revival evangelists. Anyway, her belief was based upon her observations of the behavior of other women that she knew. She'd observed that various pregnant women were drug users. However, when questioned by medical people during prenatal care, those drug-using women invariably reported that they only smoked cigarettes. They did that because drug use is illegal and cigarette smoking isn't. Lorita believed that the practice is sufficiently widespread that it has corrupted medical opinion on the subject. That is, the problems caused by the drugs are erroneously attributed to the cigarettes. Her observations, in my opinion, have a lot of credibility. Indeed, I suspect that she's entirely correct. She smoked like a chimney during her entire pregnancy and I never saw any indication whatsoever that her smoking did the child any harm at all. Many of the adults smoked while I was growing up. Consequently, I breathed a lot of second-hand smoke. I'm 74 years old, as of this writing, and I haven't noticed any ill effects. I think that the anti-smoking propaganda is a lot of fascist chicken shit promulgated by a gang of repressive reformers who want to regulate the behavior of everybody else besides themselves. My conclusion is that I don't trust the results of any studies or surveys, particularly those that proclaim what food we should eat or avoid eating. For years, I've

been listening to the food fascists telling people what to eat or what not to eat. I've usually been annoyed by their conviction that they know better than anybody else and better than I do myself what I should eat. I reject their allegations that some study proves their point. Even if the research project didn't have a built-in agenda, even if it wasn't funded by some industry giant, even if it was conducted properly, the reported results don't apply to me. Why not? Here's why.

There are at least three good reasons why the reported results of a study don't apply to me. One reason is that I wasn't in the study group. The people who conducted the study have data for the people who were observed during the study. They know how each of those study group members responded to the changes in whatever variable was being studied. They don't have any data for me.

Another reason that the reported results of a study don't apply to me is that the reported results are averages. For that reason, the reported results don't even apply to most of the people who were in the study group. Those results are merely an average of a normal distribution of results. Everybody is different and a normal distribution can be rather wide. As a justification for a mandate, an average result of a wide normal distribution of results is inadequate. At the very best, the reported results apply only to any member of the study group who happened to exhibit an average response to whatever variable was being studied.

The best reason that the reported results don't apply to me is that the statistical calculations are inapplicable to individuals. The equations for such things as a sample standard deviation include, in their denominators, the term  $(n - 1)$ , where  $n$  represents the size of the population being considered. When  $n = 1$ , then the term  $(n - 1) = 0$ . Since the term  $(n - 1)$  is in the denominator, then the denominator equals zero. According to accepted theory in mathematics<sup>6</sup>, it's impossible to do a calculation when the denominator equals zero. Thus, statistical predictions are inherently inapplicable to an individual.

For our dietary decisions, I suggest that we rely instead upon our own observations and experiences, upon the dietary customs of our own families and communities, and upon our own common sense. At the very least, we have some basis for confidence in those things. We don't have any basis at all for confidence in the reported results of studies funded by governments or corporations. Furthermore, we have every reason to be skeptical of the results of such studies.

I did a lot of different kinds of work while I was working at the chicken farm. It was inevitable that some of my duties would involve shoveling chicken manure. One day, while I was shoveling chicken manure, I almost ran over myself with the tractor. That happened after I'd been working there for several weeks and had earned the trust of the supervisor. That is, he allowed me to drive the tractor. I never did work my way up to operating the manure spreader. Anyway, I just can't resist commenting about shoveling chicken manure, which involves more considerations than you might imagine. If the manure is too dry, then it blows back into your face, as dust, when you try to pitch it off of the shovel. If it's too wet, then it flows off of the shovel

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6 See my essay *There's An Arrow In The Logic - or - Maybe Pie Are Square, Maybe Not*

## Outward Bound

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when you try to pick it up. Chicken manure has to be just the right consistency to be shoveled successfully. I'll try to get through the remainder of this memoir without making any more observations than are necessary about chicken manure.

Anyway, on the day that I almost ran over myself with the tractor, I was shoveling chicken manure out of the windows of a long, narrow barn that had a long row of walk-in chicken pens along the inside, against one wall, and the walkway along the opposite wall. I had the tractor connected to the manure spreader (I could pull it, just not operate it) which I parked just outside of the window of each chicken pen, one after the other. I shoveled the manure from each pen through the window and into the manure spreader. When each chicken pen was clean, relatively speaking, I'd start the tractor and pull it forward until the manure spreader was adjacent to the window of the next pen.

In preparation for the job, somebody had previously removed all of the window screens from the windows and stacked them against the wall outside of the barn. The pens were all empty, of course. One time, when I was preparing to move the tractor to the next window, just as I started to let out the clutch, I noticed that I was going to run over the stack of window screens that had been stacked against the side of the building. I hadn't been paying proper attention or I'd have noticed the stack of screens earlier, and moved it. Anyway, I had to move the screens before I could move the tractor any further. I put the tractor back into neutral and leaped off, to the right, landing on the ground just in front of the right rear wheel. The wheel was about five feet tall. On those old tractors, the gearshift lever was situated just in front of the seat, right between the legs of the operator. Unfortunately, as I leaped from the tractor, the trailing edge of my left foot hit the gearshift lever. When I kicked the gearshift lever, the transmission jumped into gear and by the time (about a second later) that I had landed on the ground to walk around in front of the tractor and move the screens, the tractor was moving. That big drive wheel, right behind me, was spinning and moving toward me from about six inches away. I could have just run and let the wayward tractor do its terrible thing to the screens and to whatever else it encountered. I don't know why I didn't do exactly that. Maybe I still hoped to make it all the way to operating the manure spreader. For whatever reason, it didn't occur to me to run. Instead, I scrambled back up the side of the tractor, avoiding hot exhaust pipes and spinning pulley belts, leaped into the driver's seat, and disengaged the clutch. It must have been a wonder to behold.

I have one final and grim tale to tell from the chicken farm. I saw various things there that I didn't like. This incident sticks in my memory. A professor was conducting a fertility study that was nearing its conclusion. About the time that the eggs were all due to hatch, he had some students collect them all and load them into flats. He then sat on a stool by a garbage can and spent several hours cracking eggs and recording the number of live baby chickens versus the number of dead or undeveloped baby chickens. As I recall, most of the them were alive. I suppose that suggests that a chicken's reproductive system is resistant to research projects. Anyway, he dumped all of the little chickens, either alive or dead, into his garbage can. Whenever he filled the garbage can with live, cheeping little chickens he had a couple of students

dump them into the back of his pickup truck. By the time he'd finished, the back of his pickup truck was full of baby chickens. There were hundreds of them. Some of the ones on the top of the load were still struggling and cheeping. Those further down had lost interest in cheeping, in struggling, or in anything else. He drove them to the dump and shoveled them all into the landfill. The professor who killed all of those hundreds of baby chickens was, in one sense, the exception to a rule. That is, at least he had the honesty to do the foul deed (no pun intended) himself.

Throughout my life, I've noticed that the nuts-and-bolts parts of most projects are usually delegated to engineering assistants, exchange students, part-time workers, trainees, drafting personnel, subcontractors, or some other such disinterested people. Engineers, managers, or supervisors merely approve the results, usually from a comfortable distance. Except for that one professor, everything that I saw done at the Chicken Farm was done by disinterested students. My subsequent experience leads me to suspect that the situation is far more typical than we'd like to believe. I suppose that the professor's attitude toward animals isn't unique. I've seen on the television, for example, video sequences showing commercial pork production operations in which the unfortunate pigs were wedged in cheek-by-jowl, in the smallest possible space. Pigs are sufficiently intelligent that such confinement must amount to a form of torture. Then there's the controversial confinement of animals during veal production. Maybe the mistreatment of animals is common but that doesn't make it right.

In later years, while I lived on Mecham's farm, we raised goats and steers. They were intended for consumption of one thing or another, beef, milk, and so forth, but they lived excellent lives. They had plenty of pasture, lots of clean water, shelter from the outside weather, an abundance of rolled barley, and plenty of good quality hay, the best that we could find. Indeed, we paid extra to get good hay. We specified at the mill that we didn't want anything added to the rolled barley. Our animals didn't get chemical treatments for growth stimulation or anything of that sort. They did get antibiotic shots if they needed them. More than once, I sat beside a dying goat until it was dead, giving to it what little comfort my inadequate presence could provide. The billy goat that Jan had when I arrived at the farm was named Mario. She'd bought him from a woman who had kept him penned up in a little stall for all of his earlier life. When Jan got him home she put him in the barn, which had an opening to the pasture. He was afraid to leave the barn. He'd never seen open space before. Jan told me that it was several weeks before he got up the courage to go outside.

Generally, we took much better care of our animals than anybody else that I ever saw. They were as contented as we could make them until the very end. I'm not advocating the kind of authoritarian government supervision and control of the ownership of animals that's advocated by the animal's right nitwits. That's a lot of fascist crap. However, I did stop eating veal when I learned a little about its production. If we have to depend upon the poor treatment of animals for our commercial productivity or for our scientific advancement, then I can't help but wonder if we have sufficient wisdom to even own animals. Maybe we should all just go back to grubbing for worms and living in caves. Compassion is a great virtue, even toward so-called dumb animals.

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## The National Reactor Testing Station

As I mentioned several pages back, during my discussion of Warrick Merrill Locke, I changed my major from Wildlife Science to Nuclear Engineering. That happened near the end of my second semester at Texas A&M University. Counting slightly more than two years at San Antonio Junior College, I'd already been in college for about three years. However, I'd taken mostly general purpose classes and classes intended for a degree in Wildlife Science. By making such a drastic change in my major, I was essentially starting over again and facing another four years as a full-time student. Altogether, I spent more than seven years in college to get a four-year degree. Of course, there was the advantage that it kept me out of Vietnam.

Even with the help that I was getting from my mother and with all of the part time jobs that I could handle, as many as three at a time, I was just barely paying my expenses. One of the inducements of the Nuclear Engineering program was that it included the Cooperative Education Program. In that program, I could register as a full time student every semester but work full time at a college-approved job in my field on alternate semesters. Not only did I need the money, the program was approved by the Draft Board. Remember, it was the late 1960s. My draft status was 1A. I was avoiding Vietnam by virtue of my college deferment. No matter how much I needed the funds, if I dropped out of college for even one semester, then I'd be running through rice paddies before the next semester began. Without any noticeable hesitation, I joined the Cooperative Education Program. My assignment on the Cooperative Education Program was in Idaho, at the National Reactor Testing Station (NRTS). I'd be working for Phillips Petroleum, the prime contractor at the NRTS at the time. I intended to leave for Idaho shortly after the end of the summer semester in 1967.

One day shortly before I left for Idaho, I was visiting my friend Lane Brown, a female student with whom I was never able to achieve my ambitions.<sup>7</sup> She was a hippie. While sitting across her dining room table from her and trying to think of something to say, I casually mentioned that it would be only another week until I left for Idaho. She suddenly looked surprised and said, "That's the amazing thing about you, Sam. You don't say anything much, you just go ahead and do what you said you were going to do." Elaine, a roommate of Lane's, later became my first wife. After Elaine and I were married, she told me why Lane had never been willing to get into a serious relationship with me. Lane said that I was so serious that I scared her. After the stupid divorce, Elaine gave some advice to my girlfriend at the time, Lorita. She said, "You should pay attention to what Sam says because he does what he says he'll do." After I moved into the house in Arizona, the house that was owned by James Majeski, he asked me if I knew why he'd been willing to make the arrangement. I replied, "I suppose that you must approve of what I'm trying to do." He said, "No. It's because for all of the time that I've known you, you've been scrupulously honest." However, I've noticed over the years that when people get to know me a little better, they often wish that I wasn't quite so honest. One correspondent characterized me as being "brutally honest". Few people can deal with real honesty and my relationships al-

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7 She's mentioned at greater length in *Thanks for the Mammaries: a Ma'moir*.

## Outward Bound

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ways become strained. I suppose that's a big part of why I've never been able to maintain romantic relationships — that and the fact that I refuse to allow a woman to dominate me and control me. I expect to live the remainder of my life alone.

When the summer semester of 1967 ended, I made a quick trip home to San Antonio to make a few last minute arrangements. After that, I hit the road. I'd finally been adjusting emotionally to Texas A&M University and, when I headed for Idaho, I was feeling pretty good. I was heading out on a great adventure, all alone, just like in the movies. All of my childhood dreams of travel, far distant places, and the open road were being realized. I was grown up, on my own, and heading out into the world. My euphoria lasted for a few miles and then I started to get lonely. The further I got from Texas A&M University, the more lonely I got. All of those travelin' dreams, watching shows like Route 66 on the TV, the romantic fascination of avidly following Highway 87 on my highway map all the way from San Antonio to Havre, Montana didn't seem to be there any more. I remember somewhere along the way where I topped a hill and saw, receding off into the distance, one long, straight stretch of two-lane highway through an utterly bleak and barren landscape. I remember feeling amazed the men would even bother to build a road in such a desolate place.

When I got to Idaho, I was more lonely and homesick than I'd ever been in my entire life, even more so than when I'd first arrived at Texas A&M University. In Idaho, I didn't even have roommates. I lived alone in a little one-room apartment. My job site was way out in the desert, miles from town. The desert was a bleak and forbidding landscape of sagebrush and lava rock, without a tree for miles. In spite of the way that traveling, far places, and the call of the distant horizon are glamorized in this country, I suppose that I'm just not the travelin' type.

My first day at the Site, as us insiders called it, did include one bit of comic relief, although I didn't recognize it as such until much later. I was young, naive, and just getting started in what I'd anticipated would be a glossy, high-tech, high prestige, glamour industry. Remember, I was a country bumpkin from a small country high school. I had a background not in technology but in animal studies. The Site was located on a large tract of land that was remote from Idaho Falls which was itself a rather remote place. That gave a mysterious cloak and dagger aura to the situation. I figured that if they needed to put it so far away from everybody, then it must be romantically dangerous. They even had security guards, which weren't as common then as they are now. I'd even been required to complete a very comprehensive Personnel Security Questionnaire and apply for a security clearance from the Atomic Energy Commission.

I'll digress briefly here. It isn't **atomic** energy. Atomic energy comes from rearranging atoms, like when carbon atoms combine with oxygen atoms to form carbon dioxide and release heat. A campfire is atomic energy. It's **nuclear** energy. Nuclear energy comes from rearranging nuclei, like when the nucleus of a uranium atom splits into two or more smaller nuclei, releasing energy. And regardless of the ignorant babbling of Herr Bush, it isn't nuclear energy. It's nuclear energy. Some people can't even pronounce it correctly.

Anyway, getting back to my story, the suspense of getting involved in such a secret enterprise was fraught with James Bond style glamour. Employees normally didn't even drive to work. They rode in big buses operated by, to the best of my memory, the Idaho Nuclear Corporation. At least they got the name right.

My first morning, I waited nervously at the bus stop. I anticipated that the 40 mile trip out to the Site, along Highway 20, would be filled with eager discussions among highly motivated engineers and scientists anxious to start another day of grappling with the tough challenges of wringing energy from the reluctant nucleus. I expected to see laps full of notebooks, slide rules being wielded, pencils being relentlessly applied to paper, and the occasional and deeply respected thoughtful silence of a scientist pondering his mysterious projects for the coming day. The bus arrived. The door opened. Filled with nervous anticipation, I climbed aboard, handed my ticket to the driver, and turned to face my eager new colleagues. Everybody was asleep. I found an empty seat and sat down. Somebody woke me when we finally got to the Site.

College Semesters and Cooperative Education Program Schedule

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1964						SAJC <sup>8</sup>			SAJC			
1965	SAJC					SAJC			SAJC			
1966	SAJC					SAJC			A&M <sup>9</sup>			
1967	A&M					A&M			NRTS <sup>10</sup>			
1968	A&M					NRTS			A&M			
1969	NRTS					A&M			NRTS			
1970	A&M					A&M			A&M			
1971	A&M					A&M			Done <sup>11</sup>			

<sup>8</sup> San Antonio Junior College, San Antonio, Texas

<sup>9</sup> Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

<sup>10</sup> The National Reactor Testing Station, Idaho

<sup>11</sup> Thank God for that!

## Outward Bound

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There were a few amusing billboards along the way but I didn't notice them until much later. On the Site bus, we slept through them all. As my time in southeast Idaho lengthened, and I did a bit of traveling, I eventually noticed the billboards. I recall one on Highway 20 that proclaimed, "Lava is free! Make your own soap!" Another advised, "Warning! Do not disturb breeding reactors!" On highway 26, to the northeast of town, there was one that exclaimed, "It's uncanny! No restrooms out here!" The billboards didn't present any obvious information about who'd put them there. They didn't appear to be advertisements. So far as I could tell, they were entirely for the purpose of breaking the monotony of the landscape. I don't know who paid for them.

At work, things went badly from the very beginning. It was my first full-time job, ever. My new boss was a man named Earl Feinour. When he'd made the co-op arrangement with the people at Texas A&M University, he'd expected to get a student who was well into the degree program. I'd scarcely begun. I'd changed my major at the beginning of the first summer semester and I'd been a nuclear engineering student for only the two short summer semesters. I hadn't even taken any Nuclear Engineering courses yet. I had to my credit only my second course in college physics, my first course in engineering mechanics, and my first course in calculus. Earl was openly disparaging of my experience and overtly disappointed with my qualifications. He made a big deal out of trying to find projects for me that were simple enough that I wouldn't be too stupid to do them.

I recall one incident that illustrates my frustration, my embarrassment, and my feelings of inadequacy. Earl came running into the office one day with a piece of paper on which were written some numbers. He wanted me to do some kind of a calculation, right away, and he seemed to think that it was simple enough that maybe I wouldn't be too stupid to handle it. I started to do it by hand and he yelled something like, no stupid, use the calculator. He pointed. There it sat, in a place of honor on a table midway along one wall, between two desks. It was all by itself, sort of a community calculator that anybody could use. It was one of the desk model mechanical calculators that were coming into use back then. I think, from the exuberant reverence in which Earl held it, that his organization must have recently acquired it after great and strenuous lobbying on his part. I'd never used such a machine. I'd never even seen one before I saw that one. I'd never dared to even touch that one until Earl told me, that day, to use it. Youngsters who read this won't comprehend the level of technological scarcity that prevailed in those days. For example, in the entire building there was only one copy machine, a brand new one only recently acquired. Nobody but the secretary was allowed to use it and she carefully monitored the nature of the documents that people asked her to copy. One fellow was reprimanded by the manager for trying to get copies of football schedules. So, I was already flustered by Earl's frenzy to get the calculations done immediately, and by the prospect of using such a nearly sacred piece of equipment, without the slightest notion of how to do so. I was fumbling because everybody in the office was covertly watching me while they all pretended to work. I tried to punch some numbers into the calculator but I didn't know what I was doing. With Earl watching over my shoulder and constantly

shouting drill-sergeant style instructions about how to use the machine, I managed to start it dividing without having first entered a denominator. It started cycling endlessly, clatter clatter clatter. Earl yelled at me, called me stupid, and told me to get out of the room so that he could stop the calculator before I completely ruined it. Nobody in the office tried to come to my rescue. I was utterly alone, crushingly embarrassed, and ultimately inadequate. I was thousands of miles (it seemed) away from the old familiar police state at Texas A&M University, a lonely traveler in a desolate land, among unsympathetic and superior strangers. The semester was a dismal work assignment with few redeeming features except for the funds that it generated.

Subsequent semesters were better. For one thing, I had different work assignments, with different bosses. In the subsequent assignments, things were more easy-going. For example, I recall one day when we were all sitting around the office and watching out the window for antelope, when one fellow who was leaning back with his hands clasped behind his head and his feet propped up on his desk wondered out loud if any of us would be able to survive if we actually had to go out and get a real job in the real world. Also, during subsequent work semesters I learned more about the jobs that I was assigned to do. Subsequent semesters were also better for another reason. That is, I'd actually taken some courses in Nuclear Engineering. Slowly, the Site lost some of its strangeness. Sadly, it also lost its mystery. It became just a bleak and lonely place to work, out in a bleak and lonely desert. I worked hard and saved my funds for the remainder of my time as a co-op student. Even so, I had a lot of difficulty covering my expenses.

For many years after leaving the Site for the last time, I occasionally had distressing dreams about being back there. Usually, the dreams began with me walking around in a very large outdoor flea market. Somehow, as I was wandering around, I ended up in a back lot of the Site. I didn't have any idea how it had happened. It seemed that I had wandered through some overlooked and unguarded combination of back allies, back entrances to flea market stalls, and piles of stored stuff that formed an unrecognized path between the flea market and the Site. I couldn't find my way back out again. The more I wandered, the further into the Site I went. I was skulking around empty hallways, trying to avoid being seen, because I didn't work there anymore. I didn't have a badge, so I'd be in trouble if anybody saw me. I knew that I'd never be able to get back out again, through a guarded gate, without a badge, and a guarded gate was the only way out because I couldn't find the flea market again. I'd have to live the rest of my life skulking around inside of the Site. The dream always ended when I was in a long hallway without any doors or branches and there were a couple of security guards coming toward me.

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Back at Texas A&M University

The Nuclear Engineering program at Texas A&M University was a small program with only a few students. Therefore, specific courses were offered only during certain semesters and not during other semesters. It was assumed that the students had all begun the program during an autumn semester. Since I'd entered the program during the first summer semester, I was out of sync with the other students. Thus, I had to take some courses out of order. Mostly, I managed. However, for CE 305, Mechanics of Materials, I couldn't handle the math. The reason was that the course content was based on the assumption that the students could do integral calculus. The course in integral calculus, Math 210, was a prerequisite that I hadn't taken. However, I decided to take the Mechanics of Materials course anyway because it was a prerequisite for something else that I needed that would be available the next semester. Thus, I was taking CE 305 and Math 210 concurrently. Sadly, without integral calculus, I couldn't do the calculations that were necessary to solve the engineering problems.

At the time, various universities were suffering from various kinds of advocacy things. We hadn't had much activity by special interest groups at Texas A&M University. Female students were gradually and, mostly quietly, entering the student body. There was reputed to be one dormitory of students from the Middle East, Camel Jocks as we called them, but I never actually saw any of them. The university had, a few years earlier, ceased to be an all-military school and, by the time that I was there, more than half of the student body was civilian. The CTs used to wander around, sad faced, bemoaning "Ol' Army's goin' ta Hell!" There hadn't had been any particular racial issues at Texas A&M University or any Negroes either, so far as I can recall. I suspect that the university administration was holding it's breath and hoping that problems of that sort wouldn't develop.

About a week into the semester, I went to the faculty advisor who had academic authority over me and told him that I needed permission to drop the Mechanics of Materials class. He asked why. I answered innocently and without any idea of how he was going to interpret my answer. I simply stated that I had a serious integration problem in the class. He turned white. It wasn't until later that I realized the reason. He'd believed that I was raising a racial issue and that I was objecting to having a Negro in the class. Actually there weren't any Negroes in the class or even in the university, as far as I can remember. When I made the statement, I noted his reaction but I didn't pay much attention to it. I just continued with my explanation about Math 210 and so forth. When the advisor understood that my integration problem was mathematical and not racial, he couldn't sign the permission slip fast enough. He acted like a patient whose doctor had just told him that there'd been a mix-up in the X-rays and that he didn't really have cancer after all.

In one of the Nuclear Engineering courses, I found that my sense of humor wasn't always appreciated. The professor in that particular class was stuffy, even for a professor. His name was Dr. Smathers. In one of his classes, we did a lab experiment in which we studied the attenuation of charged particles in a moderator. I don't remember what we used as a source for the charged particles. We had some little radioac-

## Outward Bound

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tive sources that emitted something. For the moderator, we used graphite. We had a huge block of it that we assembled from graphite bars. Each bar was 4 inches by 4 inches by 4 feet. Stacked on one another, they made a cube of graphite 4 feet on a side. The bar in the center had little slots all along its length and it could be pushed out of the stack. We'd push that bar out of the stack, put the radioactive source in one slot and a piece of radiation film in another slot. It was the kind of film that's used in radiation badges to record the radiation exposure of people who work around sources of radiation. By using various slots, we could adjust the distance between the radiation source and the film. That allowed us to compare the effect of the radiation on the film at different distances, giving us data regarding the attenuation of the radiation with distance travelled in the graphite. I don't remember anything at all about the results that we obtained. I do remember the smart aleck remark that I made partway through the experiment. We'd placed the source and the film each into their slots and one of the students was trying to push the big graphite bar back into the cube-shaped stack of graphite. It had become wedged and wouldn't move. He and several other students pushed this way and that on it, without success. I was standing beside Dr. Smathers, watching. Remember, we had a huge stack of graphite. I said, "Sir? Maybe we should put some graphite on it to lubricate it." He looked at me like I was a worm. Nobody dared to laugh.

We tended to be somewhat of a trial for Dr. Smathers. One day, he informed us that he was expecting some dignitary to visit during the next lab session of our class. He wanted to impress the dignitary. He cautioned us to wear good clothes and to be on our best behavior. One of the students wore a T-shirt that said, "It takes leather balls to play rugby."

Dr. Smathers used to occasionally give pop quizzes at the beginning of the class. They always had only one question. If you'd read the reading assignment for that day, then you could answer the question. If you hadn't read the reading assignment for that day, then you couldn't possibly answer the question. One day, I couldn't possibly answer the question. Rather than turn in a blank piece of paper, I wrote the *Quantization of Ketchup*. After I graduated from college and moved to California with my first wife, Elaine, we had to leave some of our possessions behind, in the care of my father. My college notes were among those possessions. The *Quantization of Ketchup* was among those notes. I never saw any of that stuff again. So, the *Quantization of Ketchup* is lost forever, along with all of my college notes, some of my text books, and whatever other forgotten treasures were in those boxes. I do recall that I went on at eloquent length about the spin on each quantum of ketchup and how that spin causes many of the characteristics of ketchup. For example, the spin is what causes ketchup to tend to stay in the bottle when you want it to come out, because the mouth of the bottle is smaller than the bottle. The centrifugal force of the spin forces the ketchup to stay in the big part of the bottle. Quanta of ketchup normally occur in pairs, each balancing the spin of the other. If you get only one quantum of ketchup out of the bottle, then the unbalanced spin is what causes it to get all over everything. If you get an even number of quanta, then you're OK. If you get an odd number of quanta, then the unbalanced spin throws the lone quantum all over the place. It's

amazing how many features of ketchup I was able to note and explain in the few minutes that were allowed for the pop quiz but I explained each and every one of them in terms of the inherent spin of a single quantum of ketchup. The next day, when Dr. Smathers was handing out the papers, he started to hand mine to me and then he hesitated. He stared blankly around the room for a few seconds and then, almost as if speaking to himself, he said, "My wife was grading these papers for me. She brought this one to me because she didn't know what to do with it. At first, I was tempted to think that it was funny but then I decided that it wasn't." At the top of the page was a big red zero.

I had one final poke at Dr. Smathers before I decided to stop making jokes. One day, he was lecturing us about something that decreased logarithmically. We could all see that he was watching the clock as he hurried to make his point. He drew the decreasing logarithmic curve on the blackboard, talking faster and faster as the second hand on the clock swept along its inevitable course. He finished with a big sigh of relief just as the clock reached quitting time. It was so funny that everybody laughed and applauded. My turn came, later, when he asked us to provide the same explanation on a quiz. I didn't have the faintest notion how to answer the question so I improvised. I drew an approximation of the curve. In order to understand my joke, you need to remember that his name was Dr. Smathers. You also need to know that the shape of the curve, a decreasing logarithmic slope, somewhat resembled a ski slope. As an explanation of the curve, I stated that the graph of the function had the characteristic ski slope that represented a particular kind of snow-job known as the Smathers' Smother. The quiz came back to me later with large red letters beside my answer. They said "NO MORE!"

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## Off-Campus

After almost two years as a co-op student, in June of 1969, I married Glenna Elaine Cole. As a married student, I moved off-campus. By doing that, I escaped from the frustrations of dorm life and from much of the police state aspect of the place. My memories of college life before marriage versus college life after marriage seem like memories of two different lifetimes. My sister Betty graduated from San Antonio Junior College, came to College Station, and married Roger Thompson, with whom I'd become good friends. Roger, Betty, Elaine, and I had some good times together.

Since I lived off-campus, I tried to minimize my use of the place. I didn't go there for anything except classes and the library. Once when I received a minor injury to my shoulder, I decided not to use the campus hospital, known locally as the Quack Shack. I'd been to that place before and I regarded it as being more dangerous than useful. Instead, I went to the emergency room of the county hospital. When they learned that I was a student at A&M, they didn't want to treat me. They told me to go to the campus hospital. I refused. A rather dismal debate ensued. I insisted that since I lived off-campus in a rented duplex, earned income in Bryan, paid taxes, and so forth, that I was therefore entitled to treatment in the emergency room. I think that they treated my shoulder just to get rid of me. As I recall, they did it with poor grace and with the condescending attitude that's often characteristic of medical people.

In that regard, I recall another encounter with a nurse. I don't remember at what point in my college career it occurred except that it was after I was married. I know that because Elaine was there with me at the time. The situation was this. There was some sort of an outbreak of something in the area. I think that it was some kind of flu. I don't remember. Anyway, the authorities, with their usual lack of wisdom and excess of control, had decreed that everybody must get vaccinated and that there would be random checks along certain highways to require people to show proof of vaccination. When Elaine and I went to get vaccinated, we insisted that the nurse give us some sort of receipt that we could use, if we needed to do so, to prove to the cops that we'd been vaccinated. She didn't want to be bothered. She was happily sticking needles into coerced patients and she didn't want to be bothered with receipts. We insisted. Shaking her head in obvious disgust, she sighed a deep and frustrated sigh and muttered, "Ah, the general public." She acted as if we were a lower life-form and not worthy to inhabit the same planet with her. We remained stubborn until we got our receipts. That was but a straw blowing before the storm. Today, things are immeasurably worse. Today, a man can be fined for failing to have medical insurance. Today, it isn't possible to even get medical treatment without having government ID.

As long as I'm on the subject of the arrogant and condescending attitude of medical people, I'll tell another little story. It happened several years later, while I was working at GE. However, I'm going to tell it here. For several years, I'd had a problem with warts on my hands. Several times, I went to Kaiser Permanente, the HMO of which I was a member at the time, and had the warts removed. As I recall, they "burned" them off with liquid Nitrogen. The warts always came back again.

## Outward Bound

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Elaine ran across some information, somewhere, that claimed that warts could be permanently cured with a certain combination of vitamins. She told me to start taking vitamins A, D, B1, and B12. I did, and after several months the warts went away. I stopped taking the vitamins and, after several months, the warts came back. I started taking the vitamins again and the warts went away again. I went through that cycle several times and it was consistent. After I took the vitamins for a few months, the warts would go away. A few months after I stopped taking the vitamins, the warts would come back. Eventually, they stayed gone. Many years later, one of them came back and it remains with me to this very day. It doesn't seem to be a problem.

Some time after the warts had disappeared for the last time, until recently that is, I was visiting a Dermatologist at Kaiser on another matter and I told him the story. "Oh," he said disparagingly, with the superior grin of a confirmed snob, "it was just a coincidence." The arrogant bastard. I had accurately reported to him observed facts and he rejected them out-of-hand just because they conflicted with his medical brain-washing and because I wasn't a doctor.

Anyway, I'll get back to my story. After I married Elaine, I began to travel in different circles. I don't recall having very many friends while I was in college, either before or after marriage. However, after I married Elaine, I tended to have more friends who were married and fewer friends who were single. That was a considerable improvement. The married people tended to behave more like adults. Besides Roger and Betty, one good friend was Paul Sitler. His wife's name was Trudy. He was a large, soft-spoken, gentle fellow, almost a stereotype. During his leisure time, he'd sometimes sit with his back against a tree and play a recorder, or some such little instrument, that looked almost as small as a cigarette in his large hands. For a Bible Belt establishment like Texas A&M University, Paul was definitely a hippie.

When Paul and Trudy traveled, they did so in a little Volkswagen Squareback Sedan. I was present at the beginning of one such trip and I saw Paul tip his huge roll-around tool box onto its back and slide it into the rear of the sedan. He filled the small amount of remaining space with other assorted tool boxes. There were two reasons for taking all of those tools on their travels. One was that the little sedan would probably break down at least once along the way. For those occasions, Trudy always carried a supply of poetry books. She would read patiently, sitting beside the highway, while Paul overhauled the sedan. She was the Bible Belt's version of a Flower Child. The other reason for taking the tools was to help with repairs on any other stalled vehicles that they encountered along the way. Paul was generous and helpful to a fault. He always stopped to help motorists with stalled vehicles and he never charged anybody even a penny. Trudy's poetry books were also handy for those stops.

One incident revealed Paul's unshakable calm. It happened in front of the house in which he and Trudy lived. I don't remember for sure after all of these years but I think that the house belonged to Trudy's mother and that they shared it with her. It sat well back from College Avenue, the main street of Bryan. So far as I can recall,

College Avenue was the only road that connected Bryan to College Station. In front of the house was a large Oak tree. For several months prior to the event of which I write, Paul had been repairing a car in the umbra of the tree.

I'll digress briefly again. The shade is the unlighted portion of an object from which light is blocked by the object itself. The shadow is the unlighted portion of an object from which light is blocked by a different object. The umbra is the region between the shadow and the shade. Depending upon the sizes and the arrangement of the relevant objects and the light source, there might not be a shadow but only a shade and an umbra. Whatever the case, you cannot stand in the shade of the old apple tree. You can stand in the umbra of the old apple tree, with the shade above you and the shadow below you.

Getting back to my story, I don't remember what kind of a car Paul was repairing but I do remember that it was one of those very long, low, and wide passenger vehicles that they'd been making back then. It had a big, heavy V-8 engine in the front. I'll note, in passing, that the shock absorbers had been removed. The job had been in progress for several months and a lot of debris had accumulated on the ample horizontal surfaces of the car's hood, fenders, roof, and trunk. There were Playboy magazines, left open at unfinished articles or favorite fold-outs. There were plates, mugs, saucers, and utensils from meals of both the recent and the distant past. There was every manner of wrench, hammer, screw driver, ratchet, and other assorted tools, both special and standard. There were service manuals. There were the instructions, receipts, and boxes for various parts, some of which had been installed and some of which continued to occupy long-established positions on the car. There were lost books of poetry, jackets removed and discarded as a day warmed, flashlights, old transistor radios with dead batteries, and so forth. Everything was covered with a thick layer of dust from the bare ground and dead leaves from the overhead branches of the Oak tree. Thus, the stage was perfectly set for what happen next.

Paul had jacked up the front of the car on one side as high as he could jack it with a bumper jack. He'd put a jack stand under the frame on that side. He removed his bumper jack, which seemed small as he hulked over it, and hooked it under the bumper on the other side of the car. Bent over the tiny-seeming jack, he began to raise that side of the car. As soon as the front wheel on that side of the car cleared the ground, the car slid sideways off of the jack stand. Since all four shock absorbers had been removed and not yet replaced, what followed went on for quite a long time. The front wheels hit the ground, although not both at the same time, and the car bounced. Each corner of it reached the top of its bounce and started back down but not at the same time, since it had initially started down from a slanted position. Since its initial fall had been mostly on one side, the subsequent oscillations were uneven. The two sides of the car, as well as the front end and the back end, bounced wildly up and down, but out of synchronization. Without shock absorbers, it bounced up and down for quite some time.

Imagine the motion imparted to the collection of partially empty coffee cups, stray pin-ups, old sweaters, books, wrenches, dead bugs, twigs, and all of the various other

## Outward Bound

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debris that had accumulated on the car during the months that it had been sitting. Everything went into various trajectories each of which was modified erratically each time one of the bouncing objects came back down again and hit the bouncing car or bounced off of another bouncing object. Paul, standing hunched over his little bumper jack, never moved. He just stood there, bent over, with the jack handle in his hand, as the car bounced up and down in front of him. A veritable swarm of stray objects sped variously around him and over him. For a while, he was mostly obscured from our view by billowing dust and swirling old Oak leaves. Gradually, eventually, the tumult subsided. When all was still, when the car was merely quivering, when the dust and leaves were blowing away on the prevailing winds and the last stray plate had rolled as far as it could roll and had fallen over, when we were all standing and staring in shock, speechless, Paul slowly straightened up and looked around at us. The very picture of solemnity, he said in a quiet but strangely serious voice, "I think we've all learned a very valuable lesson."

None of us ever had enough money so we all drove old cars and kept them running as well as we could. Therefore, like Paul, I was a shade-tree mechanic, although I didn't actually have a shade-tree, like Paul did. A good many things happened while I was working on my car in the front yard. That's how I first met the yellow and white cat that Elaine adopted and named Chester. I was doing something to the car and heard a cat fight. I looked up and saw a big black cat chasing a small yellow and white cat. I watched between the houses as the chase progressed through the back yards of the houses across the street, until the cats were out of sight. About 20 minutes later, I heard a small noise and looked up from my work. There, peeking fearfully around the corner of the house was the small yellow and white cat. I should have thrown a rock at him "So you got away," I commented instead. He stayed around after that.

I don't particularly like cats but Chester was interesting because of his intelligence. Elaine had a parakeet that she kept in a cage that hung from the ceiling. Chester used to sit in the middle of the floor and search for paths to the parakeet cage. His scheming was obvious. He'd stare at one piece of furniture after another, clearly plotting paths. None of them led to the parakeet cage. He was strictly an inside cat but one time, he came close to figuring out how to let himself out of the house. I watched him and figured out what he was doing. He'd leap onto the back of the couch, reach out with one paw, and rattle the doorknob. Then he'd jump down onto the floor in front of the door and sit watching it. He was obviously waiting for it to open. He'd observed that when we rattled the doorknob with our paws, the door opened. He just couldn't quite make it work for him the way that it did for us.

At the time, we lived in a duplex that had the bathrooms of both sides of the duplex right across the wall from one another. I don't remember how or why it happened but, for some reason, a marble ended up in our bathtub. Chester got into the bathtub and discovered that he could have a lot of fun by batting the marble with his paws. He'd play with the marble for many minutes at a time, batting it wildly around inside of the bathtub. Since he got so much enjoyment from the game, we left the marble there for him. It made a lot of racket but we were college students, so that sort of thing didn't bother us too much. However, one day the lady who lived in the other half of the du-

plex was visiting us and seemed to have something on her mind. She beat around the bush for a while and then eventually, and very hesitantly, she asked us what was it that made that strange rattling noise in our bathroom. When we showed her the marble in the bathtub and explained Chester's game, she seemed unduly relieved. I don't know what she thought we'd been doing in the bathroom but she seemed happy to know that we weren't perverts after all.

Chester lived with us for the remainder of our time at A&M and moved with us to San Antonio after graduation. While we were there, he escaped from the house and there was a brief stressful time while Elaine panicked and I got some fairly serious cuts on my hands from sharp debris under the house, where I was chasing the cat on my hands and knees. I chased him, while Elaine stood in the doorway quivering and whimpering, until Chester decided to casually stroll back into the house.

When we moved to California, Chester and his litter pan traveled inside of the bottom of our overturned washing machine, in the back of my 1961 Plymouth station wagon. He lived with us in Los Altos, in Willow Glen, and then in east San Jose in the house that eventually became Mere Keep. He was strictly a house cat until we adopted Catherine. After that, Elaine put him outside and tended to neglect him. He ended up spending most of his time next door with Joe and Kay Reis, the people from whom we'd bought the house. Some time after the stupid divorce, Joe sadly informed me that Chester had died. When I told Elaine, she didn't seem to care.

Another strange thing happened in connection with working on my car in the front yard. This particular incident involved Tic-Tacs. At the time, I ate a lot of Tic-Tacs, trying to keep my breath fresh. I don't know how Tic-Tacs are packaged now or even if they're still available but, back then, they came in little transparent plastic boxes. For some reason, I'd taken my little box of Tic-Tacs with me when I went out to work on the car. When I went back into the house, I forgot about them. Thus, I left the Tic-Tacs sitting on the corner of the front porch. That was sometime during the morning. That afternoon, I went looking for my Tic-Tacs but the ants had found them first. When I found the little box of Tic-Tacs, it was full of dead ants. They'd crawled into of the box to get at the Tic-Tacs and had died before they could even get back out of the box again. After that, I didn't think that good breath was necessarily so important any more.

Thinking about working on our cars brings to mind Roger Thompson, mentioned earlier, and his Ohell. The Ohell was an old blue Opel that he bought for \$50 from one of his brothers. Roger later speculated that, evidently, the brother didn't like him very well. The fact is that Roger did a lot of hitchhiking to and from A&M, both before and after he bought the Ohell, and it isn't completely clear to me whether or not the Ohell actually reduced the amount of hitching that he did.

There are many stories that could be told about Roger and the Ohell. Most of them are better told by Roger but I'll present a few of them here. For example, the Ohell would start only with its timing fully retarded and run only with its timing fully advanced. Thus, when Roger wanted to start the car, there was a procedure. He'd open the hood and retard the timing. He always left the distributor loose, for that purpose.

## Outward Bound

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He'd get into the Ohell, start the engine, jump out, and run around to the front as quickly as possible so that he could advance the timing before the engine died.

Roger had the Ohell before he married Betty and he'd already established his relationship with the car before their marriage. One Saturday morning, after Betty had come to College Station and married Roger, she learned something about him that she hadn't known before. He'd been working on the car for several hours that morning when she decided that he needed a break. Consequently, she decided to take out something for him to drink. As she carried a glass of iced tea toward Roger and his Ohell, he was bent under the hood and didn't hear her approach. When she got close to Roger and the Ohell, she stopped for a few seconds and then tiptoed away. She later confided to us that she hadn't known that he used such language.

However, the all-time best ever Ohell story is about something that happened before Roger and Betty were married. She still lived in San Antonio at the time, attending San Antonio Junior College. It isn't surprising that every Friday evening, as soon as possible after his last class, Roger jumped into the Ohell and headed for San Antonio. Roger worked hard on the Ohell, especially since he depended upon it to get him to San Antonio, where he could visit Betty each weekend. The prospect of such visits can provide a very strong motivation for a young man. For a long period of time, the car had a maximum speed of 40 miles per hour but Roger worked hard on it and, with various improvements and repairs, he managed to get its top speed up to 42 miles per hour. That difference was crucial to the event of which I'm about to write.

The trip from College Station to San Marcos was on Highway 21. At San Marcos, Highway 21 met Interstate 35 and from there to San Antonio it was interstate highway all the way. However, that stretch from College Station to San Marcos was about 100 miles of narrow, two-lane, Texas country highway. It was the only way to get from College Station to San Antonio. It could be a very busy highway on Friday evenings.

On the particular Friday evening of which I'm writing, the Ohell ran quite successfully at its top speed of 42 miles per hour. As Roger motored along, he was one of a long line of motorists who were all following a large cattle truck that was going 40 miles per hour. When the driver of the last remaining car between Roger and the cattle truck had finally managed to pass, Roger was grimly elated. He could go 42 miles per hour and the truck was going only 40 miles per hour. Behind Roger, the traffic extended out of sight. Presently, Roger saw his chance and with a gallant glint in his eye and a sneer of disdain on his lips, he floorboarded it. The Ohell leaped out into the left lane, attained its top speed of 42 miles per hour, and crept along beside of the cattle truck gradually passing it, as Roger gripped the wheel with grim nonchalance. Meanwhile, the next car in line behind Roger, the car that had been in the number two position, moved into the number one position, right behind the cattle truck. The car behind it, the one that had been in the number three position, moved into the number two position. That pattern was repeated by every car behind the truck, out of sight.

When the Ohell was about half-way past the cattle truck, its engine began to miss. Its top speed dropped from 42 miles per hour to 40 miles per hour. Roger couldn't

drop back behind the cattle truck because position number 1 had been occupied by car number two. He couldn't drop back into position number two, for the same reason. Meanwhile, car letter A was rapidly approaching in the oncoming lane, followed closely by car letter B, which was followed closely by car letter C, and so forth. Not willing to give an inch, and with nowhere else to go in any case, Roger pulled onto the left shoulder and continued driving at 40 miles per hour, on the dirt, along the left side of the highway, parallel to the cattle truck. The oncoming traffic whizzed past between Roger and the cattle truck. Eventually, all of the oncoming traffic had passed and the oncoming lane was clear again. Car number 2 passed the cattle truck. Car number 3 passed the cattle truck, and so forth. Eventually, there was a clear space behind the cattle truck. Roger drove back into the left lane, dropped back behind the cattle truck, and resumed following it at 40 miles per hour. Maybe it was just a Texas thing, I don't know, but it didn't seem that anybody was particularly concerned about Roger driving along the left shoulder of the highway at 40 mph.

Sadly, and in spite of Roger's heroic efforts, the Ohell didn't make it all the way to San Marcos on that fateful day. About 10 or 15 miles further along the road, it died completely. I expect that the driver of the cattle truck didn't even notice as Roger and the Ohell faded from view. The cattle truck was most likely long gone by the time that Roger and the Ohell coasted to a stop alongside of the road, on the right side that time, not the left. Roger got out and kicked the Ohell a few times. He spoke unkindly to it. According to Roger, it wasn't a pretty scene. He hitched a ride in the very next vehicle that was going his way. It was another cattle truck. It took him as far as the intersection of I-35 and Highway 1604. Fortunately he was able to ride in the cab.

Roger's parents came and picked him up at the intersection. Later, they took him all the way back to where the Ohell was located. Roger was familiar with the virtues of Permatex and came armed with a tube of the stuff. A few minutes later, he got the Ohell restarted and went back to A&M. Such are the things that a man will do in order to visit a woman.

After I married Elaine and moved off-campus, I continued to work at part-time jobs during my school semesters. Throughout the preceding time in college, while I was single, I'd grown a lot in experience and awareness of the local area and of the larger world. That process continued after I married Elaine and began to live off-campus. I'd essentially moved beyond being a college student. Instead, I'd become a young adult attending college. My part-time jobs expanded accordingly. In addition to part-time jobs at A&M, I began to take part-time jobs in Bryan, among the adults.

One job that I took for a while was at Mr. Anderson's machine shop. I operated a lathe or a drill press, depending upon his needs. Mr. Anderson paid by the part but guaranteed the minimum wage. Anybody who could turn out parts fast enough could earn more than the minimum wage. I worked there part-time for several months. The job was significant for two reasons. One reason was that it earned some funds for me. The other reason was that it created in me a desire to own a machine shop of my own. That desire influenced my behavior for a few years after I graduated but not much ever came of it. I bought a lot of tools but, eventually, for one reason or an-

## Outward Bound

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other, I sold most of them. I never did establish the machine shop that I'd wanted. One other thing that's worth mentioning briefly is that Mr. Anderson was an Amway representative. Neither Elaine nor I wanted to sell Amway products but, since I worked for Mr. Anderson, we sort of got hornswoggled into doing it. Thus, for a few months we made a half-hearted effort to sell soap to our neighbors. Nothing ever came of it.

During my last semester in Idaho, Elaine and I splurged on a 1961 Volkswagen sedan. The car was painted Hugger Orange, and we called her Ladybug. When we arrived back in College Station with Ladybug in tow behind my 1961 Plymouth station wagon, I became inarguably a part of the local Volkswagen sub-culture. That brings me to my job at the Bug Shop.

After we bought Ladybug, I began to hang out at the Bug Shop. I had plenty of reasons to go there because it was the only place in town to get a Volkswagen repaired. Since I was an impoverished student, I mostly got a lot of free advice and bought a few parts. I also learned some caution about the place. One lesson involved my oil pressure light. Shortly after we got back to College Station from Idaho, I started noticing that the oil pressure light would flicker during acceleration, near top speed in first gear. I asked Jim Harris, the owner of the Bug Shop, what might cause that. He was adamant. "Worn main bearings," he said. "That's the only thing that can do it. You need a complete overhaul." I couldn't afford a complete overhaul so I went back home. A few days later, I checked the oil and discovered that it was low. I added some oil and then I noticed that the oil pressure light didn't flicker any more. The next time that I was at the Bug Shop, I mentioned it to Jim. "Oh yeah," he commented, "I forgot about that. Yeah, that can cause it too." Thereafter, I was forewarned. I learned later that Jim was notorious for over-tightening the valves during a tune-up. With the valves really tight, the engine ran a lot more quietly than was common for those old Volkswagens. The customers were usually impressed with how good the engine sounded after the tune-up. A few thousand miles later, the car would come back for a valve job, due to burned exhaust valves resulting from the valves being too tight.

Paul got a part-time job at the Bug Shop and quickly rose to the position of head mechanic. It might seem strange that a college student working part-time would be the head mechanic. Compared to the other things that went on at the Bug Shop, that wasn't strange at all. For one thing, all of the mechanics at the Bug Shop were college students working part-time. Eventually, partly from Paul's influence, I got a job there. As the new guy, I got to take parts out of the solvent tank, carry them out back, and hose the solvent and goo off of them with a garden hose. The gooey mess flowed (slowly) around the building, into the gutter in front, down the street, and accumulated in a big, black, gooey, smelly puddle in the parking spaces in front of the flower shop next door. The flower shop lady hated us.

I saw a lot of strange things while I worked at the Bug Shop. My introduction to that aspect of the place happened on my first day. I was out back hosing solvent and goo off of the parts that I'd taken out of the solvent tank. I heard a series of noises from inside. They were approximately, "Squeak!" "Ahhh!" "Crunch!" I finished hosing the

part that I was holding, sat it down, turned off the water, and went inside to see what had happened. Paul was busy on the other side of the shop but each of the other mechanics was concentrating intently upon his own job. I asked the fellow nearest to the back door, "What happened?" Grimly he muttered, without looking up, "Just go back outside." Later, I learned what had happened. A customer had come back with a complaint about his recently repaired Volkswagen. He complained about a strange noise in the rear when the car was in motion. Paul had jacked the rear of the car into the air with a floor jack, started the engine, put the thing into low gear, and then with the wheels spinning, he and the customer had listened intently for strange noises. There didn't seem to be any strange noises. Paul said, "Well, it sounds OK to me" and twisted the release on the floor jack. The rear of the Volkswagen dropped like a dead bird. When the spinning rear wheels hit the concrete floor, they said, "Squeak!" Paul said, "Ahhh!" and ran to catch up with the Volkswagen. When the Volkswagen hit the collection of engines and parts at the edge of the work area, and began to shove everything into a big pile against the wood stove, it said, "Crunch!" Those were the reasons for the noises that I'd heard, "Squeak!" "Ahhh!" "Crunch!" As the Volkswagen was climbing up onto the pile of engines and parts, heading resolutely for the wood stove, Paul caught up with it, scrambled into the seat, and got it under control. He backed it down onto the shop floor and jumped out intending to apologize to the customer. The customer didn't wait around. He jumped into his car and drove away, never to return. Paul's activity just after I walked back into the shop, after the noises, was due to his efforts to excavate the wood stove from the pile of engines and parts that the Volkswagen had pushed up against it, to pull the stove away from the wall, and to extinguish the fire that had resulted from chunks of burning wood that had been knocked out of the stove. It was just another day at the Bug Shop.

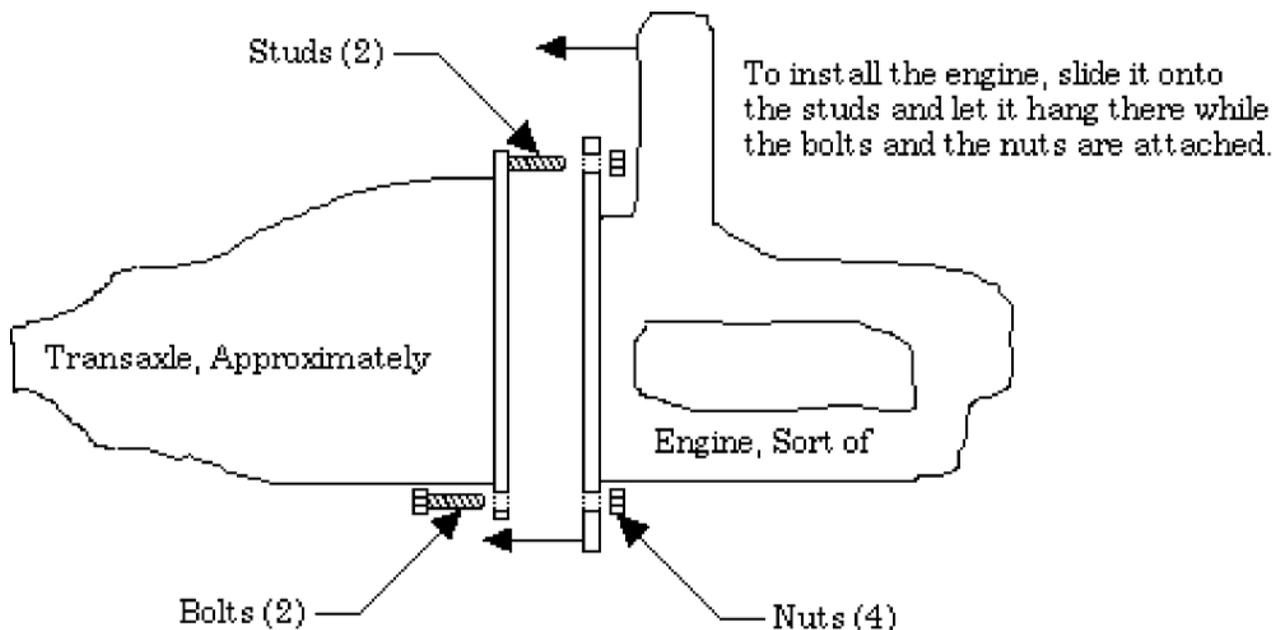
The Bug Shop suffered from bad management. By the time that I was working there, the owner, Jim Harris, was usually gone. The shop sort of ran itself. We all tried hard and did the best that we could. Sometimes, that wasn't very good. I remember one car that was a real puzzle. The mechanic, and I use the word loosely, had installed the engine after a major repair and had then taken the car for a test drive. When he drove it back into the shop and got out of it, he had a puzzled expression on his face. Naturally, we all stopped whatever we were doing and walked over to hear his story. He didn't know what was wrong, he said, but the car didn't feel right. He said that the accelerator was behaving strangely and the clutch was almost unusable. Acceleration was strange and the car had a peculiar kind of motion. Another mechanic drove the car and verified its weird behavior. Yet another mechanic came back with the same report. We all began to poke around and somebody discovered that the mechanic had hung the engine onto the two studs that extended out of the top-rear of the transaxle but had forgotten to install the two bolts that held the engine against the bottom of the transaxle. He hadn't even put the nuts on the two studs at the top.

See the illustration on the next page for a better understanding but here's a brief description. A Volkswagen transaxle is firmly attached to the car but the engine just hangs on the two studs and the two bolts that attach it to the transaxle. So, that particular engine was just swinging backward and forward on the two studs. Every

## Outward Bound

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time that it moved, it either pulled or relaxed the accelerator cable. The only thing keeping the clutch engaged was the weight of the engine. When the clutch pedal was pressed, the clutch plate caused the engine to move relative to the transaxle. Every time the car accelerated or decelerated, the pressure on the clutch changed. It's a wonder that the car moved at all. It's a wonder that the engine didn't fall out on the road. It was just another day at the Bug Shop.



### Extremely Approximate Side View of How a Volkswagon Engine Mounted onto a Volkswagon Transaxle

One time, a mechanic (and again I use the word loosely) completed a repair and started the engine to see how it ran. It went, approximately, "Fft, Fft, Fft, Pow, Fft, Fft, Fft, Pow", and so forth. We all stopped what we were doing and walked over to watch it run. Eventually, somebody noticed that the mechanic had crossed a couple of the spark plug wires. The hot wire from the ignition coil was connected to the number one position on the distributor cap. The wire from the number one cylinder was connected to the center of the distributor cap. The engine was running on one cylinder only, number one.

In spite of the shenanigans, I learned a lot about Volkswagens. It was a good job and we all had a good time. The main problem was the owner. He did a lot of weird stuff. One of his main tricks was to take a car that had been repaired and use it for his own purposes. He didn't own a car. He just drove customers' cars. If a customer ever asked, then Jim just claimed that he'd been giving the car a test drive. He had an engaging personality and so he was usually able to placate an irate customer. He got away with it until one time when he used a customer's car for a trip to somewhere out in west Texas. The car was gone for more than a week and, obviously, it wasn't there when the customer wanted it. When Jim finally got back with it, the customer complained about the odometer reading. Although it might have been a coincidence of

timing, that incident occurred shortly before the Bug Shop went out of business. The place had been going out of business anyway.

The place was losing money and, eventually, pay checks began to bounce. Trudy confronted Jim and demanded that he cash Paul's pay check right there at the cash register. There wasn't enough cash in the cash register to cover the check. There was a scene. After that, Jim showed up even less often than had previously been the case. Mechanics began to tell customers to "leave it blank, we got a stamp". Then, each mechanic would make the check payable to his own name. So far as I'm aware, we were all honest about it. We each took sufficient checks to cover our own salaries and, if there were any checks remaining after that, we stamped them for payment to the Bug Shop. Those checks went to the bank. I don't remember for sure but I think that Trudy, being the wife of the head mechanic, began to handle the deposits after Jim stopped putting in an appearance.

One day, Jim showed up with his arm in a cast. He had some phony-sounding cock-and-bull story about how he'd broken his arm. None of us believed him and neither did the insurance company. Shortly after that, the Bug Shop went out of business. I expect that the shouts of joy from the flower shop lady, next door, were heard for many blocks around.

One of the reasons for all of the part-time work was that we were all afraid to drop out of college for a semester to work full-time. Even while we were full-time students, we were all a little nervous about our college deferments. For Paul, the axe fell. I don't remember if it happened before or after the Bug Shop closed. In either case, he received the dreaded order to report for induction. He couldn't get out of it. That was the only time that I ever saw him lose his tranquility. For days he was gloomy. He wandered around in a state of distraction, shaking his head and muttering, "All is madness." When he reported for induction, he tried his best to provoke the people who were in charge. The man in charge of getting Paul through the process was a Negro and, every time that Paul completed something or could think of any kind of an excuse, he'd snap his fingers and shout, "Hey! You! Boy! Here! I'm done! Come take this!" He wasn't able to provoke anybody into punching him. When he had completed his various tests, the man in charge said, "You've done very well. You can be whatever you want to be." Paul casually said, "Fine. Make me a general."

Paul was very gentle-natured and the war in Vietnam was raging. He probably expected the worst. However, it seems that Fairy God Mothers really do exist and that, occasionally, one of them will wake up and wave her magic wand. That happened to Paul. He was sent to Hawaii. Not only that, he was assigned to the motor pool. It was his dream assignment. No more Bug Shop. He had all of the tools that he needed and all of the parts that he could ever desire. He served his entire tour of duty at the motor pool in Hawaii and, to the astonishment of us all, he re-enlisted. He served his second tour of duty at the motor pool in Hawaii. Meanwhile, Elaine and I graduated from college and moved to California. My draft situation was desperate and, with the help of Elaine's father, I joined the Naval Reserve. I ended up assigned to an anti-submarine warfare squadron at Moffatt Field, California. When my squadron went to

## Outward Bound

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Barber's Point two summers in a row, I stayed with Paul and Trudy at their home in Wahiaawa.

After Paul's second enlistment was complete, he and Trudy moved back to Texas. On the way, they stopped in California to visit me and Elaine. While they were visiting, we all went over the mountains to the Pacific coast and nosed around along the beach. The gentleness that was a part of Paul's nature was illustrated by an incident that I observed during that trip. Paul was examining the little critters that lived in the tidal pools. He observed some small sea creature that was anchored to a rock, just below the edge of the water. He tried to pick it up and accidentally crushed it. I thought that he was going to cry. He actually apologized to the little thing. Such was his gentle nature. After that visit, Elaine and Trudy wrote a couple of letters but we fell out of touch with them. It's baffling how people who have been through so much together and who are such good friends can lose contact like that.

There was a lingering residue of my time at A&M. For years after I graduated, I received letters from the former students association, begging me for money. The letters always contained postage-paid return envelopes. They always came to my post office box, which was danged handy. Right across the lobby from the post office box was a big rack full of recruiting brochures for various branches of the U.S. military forces. For a long time, I stuffed the postage-paid return envelopes with recruiting brochures and mailed them back to the association of former students. Eventually, I stopped receiving regular solicitations. I don't know if the people at the association of former students figured out who was filling their postage-paid return envelopes with recruiting brochures or if they just stopped all regular mailings. Actually, I couldn't care less. However, I still occasionally received solicitations that didn't include postage-paid return envelopes. In response to those, on a few occasions, I sent back letters. I've included an example at the end of this chapter.

I'll mention one other incident that happened while Elaine and I lived in College Station. It isn't of any significance except that it was interesting in and of itself. Beyond that, it didn't have any effect on our lives. Here it is, exactly as I remember it. Elaine and I were traveling along College Avenue one day through the sprawling small-business area between College Station and Bryan, when we heard chickens cackling. It sounded like a lot of chickens and, as we crept along in the commute-hour traffic, the noise gradually got louder. Neither of us knew of a large chicken farm in the area, so we were quite puzzled by the noise. We were both peering out of the windows intently, trying to see where all of the chickens were. We'd traveled that road dozens of times before and we'd never heard so much as a cluck. Then, inexplicably, the noise began to fade. We presumed that we'd passed the chicken farm, although neither of us had seen it. Then, as we continued to crawl along in the slow traffic, the noise began to get louder again. Two invisible chicken farms was entirely out to the question and we were both starting to get a little spooked. The noise gradually got louder and louder and then really loud. We didn't have any idea what to do. It was Twilight Zone time. Then, in the lane to our left, a large limousine came alongside of us. The noise was coming from under the hood. In the car was a little old white haired man with a

pointed white beard. He looked exactly like the picture of Colonel Sanders in the advertisements. I don't know, I'm only reporting what we observed.

There was one thing that gradually became important to me during my final months at Texas A&M University. I eagerly anticipated my last view of the place in the rear view mirror, as I drove away for the last time. When I drove away for the last time, I forgot to look.

For years after I graduated from Texas A&M University, I had distressing, recurring dreams about the place. In the dreams, I was always hurrying from one class to another. The classes were on opposite sides of the campus. As I hurried along, I was fumbling through the armload of books and file folders that I was carrying, looking for something. What I discovered instead was my old schedule of classes, from the beginning of the semester. In dismay, I noticed on the schedule a class that I hadn't attended for the entire semester. I'd just completely forgotten about the class until I noticed it on the old schedule of classes. It was the last week of the semester and I didn't know anything at all about the subject matter of the class. I couldn't possibly pass the final examination and the class was required for graduation. After the dreams, I'd always wake up trembling and sweating. Realizing that I wasn't in college any more was always a huge relief. I haven't had any of those dreams for several years now. Maybe they're finally gone.

## Outward Bound

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August 29, 1987

The Association of Former Students  
Post Office Box 7368  
College Station, Texas 77840

Attn: James M. Jeter, Associate Executive Director

Whenever I receive a solicitation from the Association of Former Students, I recall those things about A&M which most impressed me:

1. Compulsory student services fees, for services which were of no interest to me.
2. Compulsory payment for Sbisa. They said I wasn't required to eat there, just to pay for it. Right.
3. Compulsory payment for the campus laundry, whether I wanted to use it or not.
4. The stupid required student participation in the "cheering section" at the football games. I only went once.
5. The MSC, and its idiotic rule against walking on the grass.
6. Compulsory payment for the Quack Shack.
7. The required loyalty oath at registration.
8. The Blue Book, with its statement that the University was the sole and final authority in all aspects of my life.
9. The campus cops who came in one morning without a search warrant, or even knocking, and arrested my roommate right out of bed for calling them "chicken shit" in front of the secretary the day before. I guess they proved he was right.

A university is to provide formal, technical education. Other services besides education may be offered to be used by students who wish to do so, but payment for laundries, cafeterias, hospitals, football games, yearbooks, and yes, even libraries, should NEVER be mandatory. If Sbisa couldn't compete with Mrs. Godfrey's restaurant, then it should have been closed. Don't tell me I should have just gone elsewhere if I didn't like A&M. We both recognize a cop-out when we hear one.

Sincerely,



Sam A. Milam III  
Box 21633  
San Jose, California 95151

The Real World, At Last

In August of 1971, I graduated from Texas A&M University with a bachelor's degree in Nuclear Engineering. After a brief stay at my father's place, near San Antonio, Texas, Elaine and I moved to Los Gatos, California, and lived for a while in her parent's house.

I'd always been taught that a college degree would make things a lot easier for me. Maybe it did make things easier but it wasn't the end of my problems. Instead, it was merely a transition from one set of problems to a different set of problems. However, one problem spanned the transition. That problem was the draft. A question of primary importance on every job application was draft status. Since my induction into the glorious service of the fatherland was imminent, employers wouldn't hire me for permanent jobs. Thus, even though I had a bachelor's degree in Nuclear Engineering, I worked at a variety of temporary jobs for Manpower.

I'll mention one such job that I held for a while during that period of time but, first, I'll make another short digression. A man will voluntarily jump from the top of a burning building but that doesn't mean that he wanted to do it. In this country, the concept of choice has been corrupted into a sick parody of its legitimate meaning. The older I got, the more I began to realize that my alternatives had been reduced to the lesser of several evils before I was ever presented with them. The Naval Reserve is a good example. My alternatives were to become a criminal, to go to Canada, to join something, or to get drafted. That isn't a choice. It's coercion. My alternatives ought to have included getting a job and staying a civilian. By making the most onerous alternative mandatory, they forced me to "volunteer" for a less onerous alternative. Then, my "superiors" in the Naval Reserve claimed that I couldn't complain about anything, because I was there voluntarily.

For the final temporary job that I held before I voluntarily joined the Naval Reserve, I was sent by Manpower to a company called Grainger Associates. The company was somewhere along the Bayshore Freeway between San Jose and San Francisco. I no longer remember exactly where the place was. Redwood City would be my best guess.

Grainger Associates manufactured some kind of electronic equipment or components. I think that it was some kind of radar equipment, but I don't remember for sure. I was never involved in that part of the company. I worked in the shipping department for a supervisor named Al Valdez. My job was to build shipping crates. Every morning, Al brought me a stack of cutting orders that described (sort of) the crates that would be needed on that particular day. It didn't take me long to acquire the necessary understanding of the cutting orders. I'd examine them, take my hand cart outside to the pile of lumber, rummage around for what I'd need for the day, bring it into the warehouse, and then go to work building crates. I had a radial arm saw, a table saw, a tape measure, a ball-point pen, and a pneumatic nail gun. I worked alone. After Al discovered that I could be trusted to do the job, he seldom bothered me. I had that entire corner of the warehouse all to myself, all day. When I had arrived, that entire corner of the warehouse had been essentially a junk yard. It was almost en-

## Outward Bound

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tirely filled with scraps of wood left over from the construction of countless previous crates by countless previous temporary employees. As I worked on my crates, I gradually removed the junk wood by pitching it piece-by-piece into a convenient dumpster. I gradually opened up a lot of space. As I opened up the space, and before somebody else could start using it for something else, I began to bring in more wood than I actually needed for each day's work. I sorted it into stacks and, after a while, that entire corner of the warehouse was a well-organized and well-stocked supply of the material that I needed for my crates. Nobody bothered me. On most days, I saw Al only twice per day, once when he brought me my cutting orders and once when he came for the crates. Occasionally, some guys in suits would come around unexpectedly and select one of my crates for a drop test or a corner impact test. The crates always passed.

Al and I got along pretty well. I recall, on one of those days when I saw him more than twice, he and I were walking through the warehouse. He stopped to pick up a roll of tape that they used for something. It was a paper tape with a dry adhesive on one side. The adhesive became sticky when it was wet. Dry, it had a distinctive odor. There was a big open box of the tape sitting there and when he reached into the box for his roll of tape, he snorted and said, "That stuff smells like a three-day-old snatch!" The glue must have been made from fish. Anyway, I leaned over the box, sniffed, and commented, "Well, sort of but not exactly." When I made the comment, I hadn't realized that I was implying some experience in the matter. He laughed like it was the funniest thing that he'd heard all day. I was a little embarrassed. It sort of brings Mr. Bayne to mind. I suppose that I'd come a long way since my days in Arkansas with Mr. Bayne. Sorry, ladies, I should have warned you to skip this paragraph.

There was one funny thing that happened while I was working at Grainger Associates. It involved two completely unrelated aspects of my circumstances at the time. One of those aspects was my background in the Martial Arts. During the previous five years, while I'd been at A&M and in Idaho, I'd tried really hard to learn Karate and Judo. I wasn't ever any good at either of them, but I tried hard. At least, I learned the shout. The other aspect of my circumstances that contributed to the funny incident was the inferior quality of the lumber that Grainger Associates bought for the construction of the shipping crates. It must have been the worst wood available and much of it just fell apart when I picked it up. It was replete with splits, cracks, knots, rotten places, and so forth. It didn't take long for me to learn to recognize at a glance which pieces of wood were inadequate for the job. As I said, much of it would just fall apart under its own weight.

I happened to have one such piece of sorry lumber in my hand one morning when I saw Al Valdez coming my direction. It was a 2x4 with a huge knot across almost its entire width. I could see Al through the shelves of stock in the adjacent part of the warehouse but he didn't see me. I immediately had a bright idea and I impulsively acted on it. I carefully laid the 2x4 on the edge of the table in which the table saw was installed, with the knot just at the edge. I recall that I had to set it in place very gently and it almost fell apart when I laid it on the table. Then, pretending to be completely unaware of Al's approach, I drew back my hand and whacked the 2x4 right

near the knot with the edge of my hand real hard, to the accompaniment of a lusty “Hayak!”, just as Al came around the corner. My timing was perfect and the 2x4 cooperated beautifully. One end of it went flipping up into the air. Al stopped and his mouth fell open. I acted embarrassed at being caught in such a manly display of my amazing Karate skills. Al turned around and left. I never did find out what he’d intended to tell me.

When I finally had to leave the job at Grainger Associates to report to boot camp, Al Valdez urged me to come back afterwards. He said that he’d give my job back to me, no matter who else was doing it at the time. However, I’d been taught that I ought to be looking for a career in my field. They didn’t do nuclear engineering at Grainger Associates. If I’d gone back there, then I’d probably have ended up running the company. I should have gone back. It was one of the mistakes of my so-called career.

It was during this period of time that I met Wayne Werner. He was Elaine’s brother-in-law and I met him through her, after we graduated from Texas A&M University and moved to California. We were living with her parents while she sought a job and I waited hopelessly to be drafted. Wayne had started out his career by working as a gunsmith. His capabilities and his work had gradually escalated until he had two one-car garages so stuffed with machine tools that you could just barely walk between them. He was the best welder and the best machinist that I ever knew. He supported his family entirely with work that he did in those two garages. His work was so reliable and so precise that, when he did a job for Lockheed, the parts that he manufactured bypassed the incoming inspection process. I was greatly impressed with him and with his situation. He was one of the reasons that I decided to build my own specialty machine shop. Sadly, it was one of my plans that never came to fruition. I did accumulate some machine tools but I never became anywhere near as skilled at using them as Wayne was at using his. Eventually, after the stupid divorce from Elaine, I had to gradually sell most of the stuff. Today, my dream of having my own specialty machine shop is only a fond and distant memory.

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## Naval Interlude

By the time that I graduated from college, I'd pretty much given up on avoiding the draft. I was just waiting to be drafted. I must offer here my thanks to my father-in-law, Fletcher Cole. He was the one who cajoled, coerced, and manipulated me into finding an alternative. Actually, he did most of the research and the work. While he was looking for alternatives, I received two draft orders. At his insistence, I appealed both of them. Each one was suspended, pending the consideration of the appeal. It was Fletcher who'd discovered that we could do that. I'd never have known it if he hadn't done the research and told me. Eventually, Fletcher settled upon the Naval Reserve as my best alternative. However, the recruiter refused to accept me if there was a draft order in effect against me. I enlisted in the Naval Reserve as soon as Fletcher could arrange it after we appealed the second draft order. Just one day after I enlisted, the third draft order arrived in the mail. That's cutting it close.

The recruiter was happy to enlist me, provided that there weren't any draft orders in effect against me. However, I was fundamentally anti-military. In fact, the years of dread of being drafted were probably an important aspect of my education into the true nature of government. The U.S. government made a mistake by providing me with such a thorough education. In later years, I decided that the U.S. government can't be fixed. Instead, it must be destroyed. Eventually, I decided that it can't be destroyed. Since then, I've pursued a strategy of abandonment. See my essay of that name, in *Pharos*. Anyway, I was essentially opposed to joining anything and I'd been thinking about running away to Canada. The recruiter tried to get me to become an officer. With my degree in Nuclear Engineering, he wanted to put me on a nuclear submarine. I insisted on whichever program he had that would give me the absolute, utter, minimum possible exposure to the military. Thus, I enlisted in what the recruiter called the Mod 4x10 Program. It had a very short boot camp, only four weeks, in Millington, Tennessee. It had a very short period of active duty after boot camp, only two months, at Alameda, California. The deal also guaranteed that after the initial active duty at Millington, Tennessee and Alameda, California, I'd serve the remainder of my active reserve duty at Moffatt Field, California. That was close enough to home that I'd be able to go home at the end of each day of reserve duty except, of course, for the summer cruises which were at remote locations. Even though it was the Naval Air Reserve and we never got anywhere near a ship, the summer deployments were still called cruises.

The program had two disadvantages. One was that I wouldn't be on active duty long enough to qualify for so-called veteran's benefits. I couldn't have cared less about that. The other disadvantage was that I'd have a full six years of active reserve duty. The other programs had two years of active reserve duty and four years of inactive reserve duty subject to recall. I considered the longer period of active reserve duty to be an acceptable price to pay for minimizing my active duty. The Mod 4x10 Program minimized my active duty so I took it. Right up to the dismal swearing-in ceremony, the recruiter kept trying to get me to become a regular Navy officer and serve on a submarine.

## Outward Bound

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I discovered that most of the challenges of boot camp were minimal. There wasn't any intellectual challenge at all. Whatever I had to learn was trivial compared to my education in Nuclear Engineering. Some of what I had to learn was literally a joke. A good example of that was our history instructor's explanation for the causes of the so-called Civil War. He told us that the Southerners had refused to sell cotton to the northern states, thereby forcing the Northerners to wear wool underwear. The wool underwear was so scratchy and so uncomfortable that it caused the Northerners to get grumpy. It made them so mad that they went down south and fought a war to force the Southerners to start selling cotton to the North again. I'm serious. That was the entire section on the War Between the States. The instructor gave us that information with a perfectly straight face, as if he completely believed it. Maybe he actually did believe it.

The physical challenges were also unimportant. I'd been studying the Martial Arts for about five or so years and, consequently, I was in excellent physical condition. Once, during a belt level examination for a Karate class that I was taking in California, after my stint in boot camp, my instructor punched me in the belly so hard that it picked me up off of my feet and sat me back down on them about a foot back from where I'd been standing. I didn't change my stance at all. I just rebounded back a step when he punched me. Back in Idaho, where I studied Judo, I could lay on the mat on my back, curl my legs toward my face, kick my legs upward, and leap to a standing position without touching the mat with my hands. One Karate instructor made us all lay on the mat side by side and then he'd run back and forth along the line of us, running on our bellies. I could dive head-first from the stage of an auditorium, hit the floor rolling, and come to a standing position without harm. I actually did it, several times, without a mat. I was terrible at Karate and Judo but I was in great physical condition. In that sense boot camp was, as we used to say at A&M, a pussy course. Sorry, ladies. The long history of A&M as an all-male institution was occasionally reflected in the terminology.

Emotionally, boot camp was difficult. The absolute regimentation and the constant insulting harassment were an ordeal for me. However, I learned some unexpected things. For one thing, our company commander, Mr. Kenyon, wasn't our tormentor. In the movies, the Company Commander, AKA drill instructor, is shown as the source of all anguish. It might be that way at other boot camps but it wasn't that way at the Naval Reserve boot camp in Millington, Tennessee. Mr. Kenyon was more like our protector and our savior. Everybody else in the entire place tried in every possible way to harass us, to offend, and to insult us. Mr. Kenyon did his best to help us and to keep us out of trouble. Before boot camp was over, I saw the logic of it. In just four short weeks, we'd become a cohesive unit and any one of us or all of us would have done whatever Mr. Kenyon wanted us to do. He wouldn't even have had to give an order. All that he would have had to do was to let us know what he wanted. We loved the man. We weren't homosexuals and it wasn't romantic. You won't understand it unless you've experienced it. We just would have done anything for him. We also developed a loyalty to the group. I discovered that partway through the training, This is how that particular discovery happened. I decided that I might be able to get

some special slack if I complained about my flat feet. I saw a doctor and he issued a chit that permitted me to ride in the van to chow and to the other places where the company normally marched. The first time that I rode past the company when the men were marching somewhere, I felt a strong need to be out there with the rest of them. I felt guilty about riding in the van while they were out there marching. I wanted to be a part of the group and, by riding in the van, I was cutting myself off from them. I threw the chit away and went back to marching with the other men. Nobody ever said a word about it. If that much bonding can happen during just four weeks of boot camp, then I can't even begin to imagine the connection that must form between soldiers during combat. When we graduated from boot camp, all of that remarkable conditioning was wasted. We didn't stay together as a group, with Mr. Kenyon as our leader. After boot camp, we all scattered to the four winds and, with few exceptions, we never saw each other again. Even today, I wouldn't mind seeing Mr. Kenyon again.

One peculiar aspect of boot camp was the lack of available punishments. According to rumor, some extreme punishment in the recent past had caused the death of a recruit. Thereafter, according to rumor, the bleeding-hearts had been up in arms and severe restrictions had been imposed upon the authorities at the boot camp. I don't know if there was any truth to the rumor but I do know that there were very few punishments available that could be used against us. Of course, they could yell at us and insult us but they did that anyway so it wasn't particularly useful as a punishment. They could make us do push-ups but nobody cared very much about that, either. It just used up time during which they'd otherwise have been yelling at us or insulting us. In some ways, it was more of a break than a punishment. The only other available punishment was to be set back a week. That meant being transferred to the following company and doing an entire week of boot camp over again. It meant spending an extra week in the hellish place. It was such a horrible punishment that it was reserved for only the most heinous of offenses. During my four weeks at boot camp I saw it administered only once. Our Recruit Chief Petty Officer, Roger Pennington, was set back a week after he was caught chewing gum in ranks. The rest of us were forced to turn out our pockets but nobody else was discovered to be in possession of prohibited substances. I guess that it just goes to show that, no matter where you are, no matter how reprehensible the habit, any evil substance can be obtained if you just want it badly enough, even chewing gum.

The tradition in naval terminology was to distinguish between officers and men rather than between officers and enlisted men. It went without saying that the officers were also male. At least, they used to be. Since feminism, I don't know what the naval tradition is. Probably, the bitches have destroyed all possible traditions except that the men must all be pussy-whipped. When I was a child, Poppa told me that it was considered to be bad luck to have a woman aboard ship. He was correct. I'll go even further and assert that it's bad luck to have women in any work environment. There isn't any reason why women shouldn't have jobs but forcing their way into an all male workplace, where they aren't wanted, isn't about equality. It's about control. Why can't there be male only workplaces, female only workplaces, and mixed gender work-

## Outward Bound

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places? Then people could work in whichever kind of workplace suited them. The reason is that feminism was never about equality. It was about forcing their way into male workplaces and then whining about the way that men behave. They just extended wifely nagging from the home into the workplace. That was their intention all along.

Anyway, about the officers and the men. Maybe it was my poor eyesight. Maybe it was my attitude. I don't know. However, one of the things that I didn't learn in boot camp was how to distinguish between officers and men at a distance. The term *uniform* is supposed to mean "all the same". However, there were so many variations in the uniforms for both officers and men that I just couldn't distinguish, at a distance, which was which. There were a few exceptions. For example, officers didn't wear the blue working uniform that the men wore. However, a sufficient number of the uniforms were sufficiently similar that I just couldn't tell the difference until I was close enough to actually see the pins on the lapels. Even then, I had to look very carefully. My eyesight is poor and my perception is slow. Staring at an officer's lapel isn't an adequate substitute for a salute.

My difficulty with distinguishing officers from men didn't matter much at boot camp because we all saluted everybody no matter who he was. After boot camp, and while I was on duty elsewhere, I was constantly terrified of saluting the wrong person and getting laughed at or of not saluting the right person and getting punished. During six years of active reserve duty, I never learned how to tell the difference, with the exception that I previously mentioned. I could easily distinguish between the blue working uniforms that the men wore and all other uniforms. Beyond that, my strategy was to just try to stay out of sight as much as possible and never go anywhere or do anything that might result in an encounter with an officer.

My two months at Alameda passed relatively free of incidents. I do remember one thing that I did that annoyed Lt. Young forever afterward. That happened because our spaces were immediately adjacent to the flight line. By the way, in the navy it isn't an office. It's a space. Later, during one of the deployments to Barber's Point, Hawaii, I saw a door with this motto: "To err is human, to forgive, divine, neither of which happens in these spaces." Strangely enough, it wasn't a hatch. It was a door.

Back to Lt. Young. We didn't have any air conditioning so we had to leave the windows open most of the time. Jets were constantly turning up right outside of our windows and the air inside of our spaces was often thick with jet fumes. The walls, the ceilings, the floors, and probably our lungs were coated with the sticky goo that came out of the fumes and stuck to everything. The anti-smoking nitwits don't know the meaning of second-hand smoke. They should breathe jet wash for a while. Maybe they'd quit whining about cigarettes.

One day, Lt. Young got tired of the sticky surfaces and ordered us to clean them. We broke out the mops, the sponges, and the buckets and went to work. Lt. Young went away for the rest of the day. While he was gone, we scrubbed the walls and the ceiling of his office. I was horsing around and scrubbed flower-shaped clean spots on the ceiling. Later, when we actually cleaned the ceiling, we discovered that we couldn't get

the flower-shaped clean spots to match the rest of the ceiling. We scrubbed and scrubbed but it was no use. The flowers were there to stay. The petty officer in charge apologized profusely but Lt. Young was annoyed anyway. Not only that, he was repeatedly annoyed thereafter because he liked to lean back in his chair, prop his feet up on his desk, and stare at the ceiling. Many times after that, I observed him to lean back in his chair, prop his feet up on his desk, stare upward, and mutter "Damned Milam anyway!"

Most things at the Alameda Naval Air Station weren't of any interest to me. However, there was one situation that, surprisingly, appealed to me. That situation was the late night watch, from about 11:00 PM, oops, sorry, from about 2300 hours until about 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. I don't remember the exact times but that's close. I was assigned that watch several times during my two months at Alameda. It took place on the part of the airfield just outside of our spaces, where the airplanes were parked. I never learned the actual designations of those airplanes because I just wasn't even remotely interested. They were A-somethings or F-whatevers. I didn't know and I didn't care. However, I discovered that, at night, they were part of a strange and spectral scene. The parking lot and the landing strips were intensely quiet. There were spooky blue lights, evenly spaced, tapering away into the distance, seemingly to infinity, along the runways and the taxiways. There were the dark, gaunt shapes of the aircraft, perched atop their tall and spindly landing gear, lined up in the dark. The only light was the stars or maybe the moon, the spooky blue runway lights, and my dim flashlight. I walked completely alone, for hours, through a fantasy of hulking silent shapes in a dark, flat, infinite landscape. The silence was broken only seldom and then only by the sudden and unexpected banshee shriek of a lone flight, arriving or departing. It was a spooky experience and I was enchanted by it.

When I completed my time at the Alameda Naval Air Station I was transferred to Moffatt Field. I was assigned as the junior Yeoman in the Admin Office of VP-91, an anti-submarine warfare squadron. That might sound like a bad place for me to be. You'd expect an Admin Office to be crawling with officers. It turned out to be reasonably safe. In the Admin Office, deciding when to salute and when to not salute wasn't usually a problem for me. If I could make it from the parking lot to the office without getting into trouble, then I could just sit at my desk and look at my typewriter. I could pretend that I hadn't noticed an officer approaching until he was close enough that there wasn't any doubt about who he was. Besides that, most of the people who came into the Admin Office were people who regularly came there and I was able to learn who was an officer and who wasn't. Furthermore, they all tended to give the Yeoman some slack because he did the typing. Another thing that helped was that most of the officers wore khakis and most of the men wore blue working uniforms. Even I could tell the difference between blue and khaki, even at a distance. Not only that, if an unfamiliar officer entered the spaces, someone would shout, "Attention on Deck!" and we'd all stand up. In that circumstance I didn't need to worry about saluting and after the officer had gone away we'd all sit back down again. However, that custom did cause one really funny problem for a fellow named John Klink.

## Outward Bound

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The reserve squadron was largely manned by reservists but there were a few regular navy men who kind of kept things going. One of them was John Klink, a First Class Petty Officer. He'd been in the navy for years. He'd never risen above the level of First Class Petty Officer. He would never rise above the level of First Class Petty Officer. He was perfectly happy being a First Class Petty Officer. He had all of the rank that he wanted to have.

John Klink was a true friend if he was your friend but he didn't take any crap off of anybody. He especially didn't like to fall prey to the silly games that us weekend warriors played with each other. One such game was for a reservist to see if he could get everybody in the room to stand up needlessly by yelling "Attention on Deck!" when there wasn't really an officer coming through the door. So, whenever somebody yelled "Attention on Deck!" on a drill weekend, John Klink usually ignored it. One day John Klink was leaned back in a chair with his feet propped up on something, reading a magazine. I don't remember exactly which magazine it was but you can use your imagination. There weren't any women around back then to whine about our magazines so you can assume that it was of great interest to all of us. I recall, in particular, a stunning pictorial on one of Disney's Mouseketeers, Doreen, I think, several years after she'd left the Mickey Mouse Club. She'd blossomed into — however, I digress. Anyway, somebody yelled "Attention on Deck!" and everybody except John Klink came to attention. It happened that John had his back to the door, an unusual error on his part. John, who wasn't about to be fooled, began to mutter curses at whoever it was that had yelled "Attention on Deck!" He had an ability with language that was widely admired and, lacking the inhibiting presence of women, he was putting it on display for us. He declaimed profanely with his back to the door, as the room got quieter and quieter. Eventually, he noticed that nobody was saying anything. He looked around and there, standing right behind him with his hands clasped behind his back, was an admiral. The magazine flew in one direction and John knocked his chair over in his haste to get to his feet. He came to attention. The admiral looked him up and down, very carefully, very slowly, about three times. Without a word, the admiral turned and walked very carefully back out the door. Later, after some reflection, I decided why the admiral hadn't said anything to John at the time. It was because he knew that if he opened his mouth at all, if he even unpursed his lips, then he'd end up rolling on the floor in an uncontrollable fit of hysterical laughter, behavior unbecoming of an offended admiral.

There was one regular navy chief who'd find a bunch of us reservists who weren't doing anything, a common situation by the way, and then order all of us to start emptying garbage cans or picking up trash or whatever else came into his mind at the time. I was part of just such a bunch of reservists one drill weekend when we all saw the Chief come through a door several spaces away. He immediately spotted us and headed our direction without noticeable hesitation. John Klink was sitting with his chair leaned back and his feet propped up on something. He was sitting at an angle where he could see the door in his peripheral vision. Maybe he'd learned a lesson from the incident with the admiral. Whatever the case, he was telling us all an amusing story. He didn't appear to notice the chief approaching. However, just at the last in-

stant, just as the chief was drawing breath to start issuing orders, John appeared to suddenly notice him. He jumped like a startled rabbit, his chair came upright, his feet slapped the floor, and he shouted, "Hey! Chief! I been lookin' for you!" The chief hesitated. John asked with great enthusiasm, "Chief! Is your wife at home!?" Puzzled, the chief stuttered, "Yeah, sure. Why?" John jumped out of his chair and, as he ran past the befuddled chief, he yelled, "Thanks, chief!". Before the chief could gather his wits, John was safely out the door. He didn't get included in the jobs that the irate chief dreamed up for us to do. In later years, I decided that John and the chief might have had some sort of an understanding about that kind of thing. After all, they were both regular navy men and they worked together there all of the time.

In general, the time that I spent in the Naval Reserve was miserable. Elaine called it man's answer to the menstrual cycle. Once a month, I got grumpy. The summer cruises were even worse because they lasted for two weeks instead of two days and because I had to spend my time at a regular navy facility. The first two summers the cruises were at Barber's Point, Hawaii. A few interesting things happened at Barber's Point. Several of them come to mind.

One job that I had to do during the summer cruises that I didn't have to do at Moffatt field was to make the copies of the flight schedule each day. While we were at Barber's Point, the Admin Officers spent the entire day drinking coffee, eating donuts, and figuring out a flight schedule for the next day. I never noticed that any particular flight schedule was very much different from the previous flight schedule but it still took them all day to do it. The flight schedule was never completed until the last few minutes of the day. Then, I had to type it from their notes and get the CO to sign it before he left. The window of opportunity was usually small. I didn't like to make the CO wait after quitting time to sign the flight schedule.

I typed the flight schedules on mimeograph paper. Maybe nowadays nobody remembers mimeograph paper. A mimeograph set was two sheets of paper joined by a perforation at the top and with sticky purple stuff on the inside of the back sheet. When I typed on the front side of the front sheet, the characters were imprinted with sticky purple stuff, in reverse, on the back side of the front sheet. That front sheet became the master sheet. Then, I'd separate the sheets at the perforation, put the master sheet onto the drum of the mimeograph machine and run the machine. Blank paper went into the machine from the input tray and as it went through the machine it was pressed against the master sheet. Purple stuff was transferred from the master sheet onto the blank sheets that were going through the mimeograph machine. Since the purple letters on the back side of the master sheet were reversed, they came out correctly on the front sides of the sheets of blank paper that went through the machine. Eventually, all of the purple stuff would be transferred from the master sheet to the sheets of blank paper. That was the limit of how many copies could be made from one master sheet.

If I made an error while typing on a mimeograph set, then I couldn't just use correction fluid to fix it. The error was imprinted in purple stuff on the back side of the master sheet. Eventually, I developed an excellent way to correct errors. I'd just back-

## Outward Bound

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space and type another character over the error. Then I did it again. After several times, I'd replaced the error with a rectangular black space on the front side of the master sheet. On the back side of the master sheet, it would be a rectangular block of purple stuff. After I'd completed the page, I could open the mimeograph set and, using the tip of my pocket knife, I could carve the appropriate letter out of the block of purple stuff. I was quite good at it and the only time that I ever made a mistake was when I forgot to carve an S backwards. Since I carved it frontwards, it came out backwards when I ran the copies. I didn't even notice it but the first class petty officer who ran the Admin Office did. He was utterly baffled at how I'd managed to get a backward S out of the typewriter. I didn't want to reveal my method of error correction so I pleaded ignorance. He seemed spooked. I've never seen the incident reported in the *Ripley's Believe It Or Not*, but you never know.

There was always the risk of somebody writing on a sheet of paper that was laying on top of a mimeograph set. If that happened, then whatever the person wrote on the paper would be inadvertently transferred to the back of the future master sheet of the mimeograph set. A person who used such a corrupted mimeograph set probably wouldn't notice that it was corrupted because the front of the first sheet would still be blank. Such corruption usually didn't come to light until the unfortunate yeoman put the master sheet on the drum of a mimeograph machine and started getting copies with some extraneous scrawl on them. To prevent such occurrences, mimeograph sets always had a safety sheet inserted between the two sheets. That way, any careless writing of something on top of a mimeograph set would cause the writing to be transferred to the safety sheet instead of to the master sheet. All you had to do was to remove the safety sheet before you put the mimeograph set into the typewriter and put the safety sheet back in place again when you took the mimeograph set out of the typewriter. Naturally, I was careful to keep the safety sheet in place except for when the mimeograph set was actually in my typewriter or when I carried it directly from my typewriter to the COs desk, for his signature.

One day, the flight schedule was completed a little earlier than usual so that the CO wasn't actually waiting for me to finish typing it. For that reason, I didn't hand it directly to him. Instead, I carefully put the safety sheet back in the mimeograph set and laid the set gently on the corner of his desk. He was busy and I didn't want to interrupt him. The CO was well aware of mimeograph safety sheets. He must have been distracted because he grabbed the flight schedule and signed it without removing the safety sheet. He was also in a hurry and rushed out of the office before I noticed his error. In fact, I didn't notice the problem until I started the mimeograph machine and noticed that his signature was absent on the first sheet that I printed. I stopped the machine and retrieved the safety sheet from the trash. Sure enough, there was the CO's signature, on the safety sheet.

I was near to panic. Everybody else was gone. I didn't have any way to contact anybody and, even if I could, I sure as Hell didn't want to call the CO back to base after hours. Nevertheless, I HAD to get those flight schedules printed. It was my job. Everybody knew that it was my job. If the flight schedules didn't get printed, then everybody would know that I was the person who hadn't done it. If they didn't have

the CO's signature on them, then that would also be my fault. I couldn't imagine what the punishment would be but I expected that it would be something awful, maybe a bunch of irate flight crew members harassing me for the remainder of the deployment.

I stared at the one flight schedule that I'd already printed. It had a blank space where the CO's signature should have been. I stared at the safety sheet. It had the CO's signature on it, at a location that corresponded to the blank space on the flight schedule. I had a bright idea. I put the printed flight schedule back into the input tray, removed the master sheet from the drum, and put the safety sheet on the drum. I ran the flight schedule through the machine and the signature was added to the flight schedule, near to the correct location. I made a slight adjustment to the position of the safety sheet on the drum and ran it through again. It came out perfect. So, I put the master sheet back on the drum and ran all of the copies that I needed, without the signature, plus a few extras. Then I removed the master sheet from the drum, put the safety sheet back on the drum, put the printed flight schedules back into the input tray, and ran a sample. I made a slight adjustment to the position of the safety sheet and then ran another sample. It was perfect. I ran all of the flight schedules through the machine, a second time. The signature fell exactly into the blank space. While I was watching the mimeograph machine add the CO's signature to a document that hadn't previously had it, I couldn't help but to speculate about all of the many things that one might do with such a trick, if one was sufficiently unscrupulous or sufficiently desperate. Just to be safe, I destroyed the safety sheet that had the CO's signature on it after I was done with it and before I put it into the trash can. I considered the possibility of removing purple stuff from master sheets, as I did to correct errors. With that in mind, I thereafter destroyed any master sheet that had the CO's signature on it, after I was done with it.

The squadron was at Moffatt Field, California during most of the year. So long as we were at Moffatt Field, we were all reservists, except for a few regular navy people like John Klink and the old chief that I mentioned earlier. However, I got the impression that, when we were at Barber's Point, we represented somewhat of an inconvenience for the regular navy people who normally used those spaces. I think that maybe they had to move out while we were there. I don't know that for a fact. It's just an impression that I had. One of the incidents that gave me that impression happened late one evening while I was printing a flight schedule. I had the mimeograph machine going when a regular navy petty officer, one of the Barber's Point people, came storming into the office and demanded that I get my job out of the way so that he could use the machine. I asked him if I could just finish the job first, since I already had it set up and running and it would only be a few more minutes. He outranked me, for whatever that was worth, and he was being very belligerent and using some strong language. Suddenly, and in a very quiet and calm voice, someone said, "What seems to be the problem here?" Me and the petty officer both turned and looked in that direction and there stood one of my reserve officers. He'd been in the next cubical, working quietly. Neither me nor the petty officer had been aware of his presence. I saw then a very powerful example of the authority of a naval officer over an enlisted man. The petty

## Outward Bound

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officer wilted, almost literally. Without further prompting, he admitted to being out-of-line, to using inappropriate language, and even to having drunk a little more than he should have. All that he wanted was to leave and be somewhere else and he asked very nicely if the officer would please allow him to do exactly that. The officer dismissed him, gave me a halfway grin and a shrug, and sat back down at the desk in his cubicle. I completed the flight schedules. If the irate enlisted man had been a woman, then things might have ended very differently. For example, with both me and the officer being sent up for sexual harassment. Who knows? Thank God my time in the Naval Reserve preceded the arrival of the women.

Another of my end-of-the-day jobs at Barber's Point was to take the box of trash paper out to the dumpster. The Admin Office generated an entire box of trash paper every day. The trash paper was placed flat into the box in which the reams of paper had originally arrived. I had to carry the box of trash paper out to the dumpster. The first day, I learned a lesson. The paper was laid flat in the box, clear to the top. That first day, I carried the box in front of me, with my hands under the two front corners. I went out the door of our spaces, along the end of the hangar, past the corner of the hangar, and straight out into the parking lot. The dumpster was across the parking lot. When I stepped past the corner of the hangar and into the parking lot, I incautiously stepped into a considerable wind that was blowing along the hangar and of which I'd previously been unaware. The papers in the box sort of went ffffvwwwttt! and, just about that fast, one after the other and in perfect order, they were sucked by the wind right out the top of the box. As they blew away from me, flipping and tumbling in the wind across the parking lot, they reminded me of a bunch of rabbits running. I stood aghast, watching those hundreds of pieces of paper blowing before the wind. "I have to pick them up," I thought, "they'll know who caused this, I can't possibly get out of it." The papers blew across the parking lot, further and further into the distance, across a piece of bare ground on the other side of the parking lot, and (each and every one of them) over an edge and into an irrigation canal or creek of some kind. They all disappeared from sight and not a single one of them blew out on the other side. I watched for about 30 seconds, shrugged my shoulders, muttered "that'll do," and went back into the hangar. After that, I kept my hand over the top of the box whenever I took the trash paper out to the dumpster.

Then there was the time that I got trapped on the base. That happened because of a combination of several circumstances. One of them was that I was living off base, with Paul and Trudy Sittler, at their home in Wahiawa. Thus, unlike most of the men, who were billeted on the base, I left the base after work every day. Another circumstance was that I always wore the blue working uniform. I put it on in the morning before I left the house in Wahiawa and didn't take it off again until I was back there in the evening. Yet another circumstance was that I didn't have a regular ride. I hitchhiked both ways. It was easy for a sailor to get a ride. I just stuck out my thumb and within a few minutes I was on my way. The final circumstance was an unexpected order that came down to us one day. That order was that nobody would be permitted to leave the base except in a full dress uniform. It didn't occur to me that I had a problem until I was already in a car and headed for the gate. Then, I suddenly re-

called, with a sick feeling in my belly, that the guards were going to be inspecting everybody leaving the base for compliance with the new order. I suddenly asked the man who'd given me a ride to let me off right there. I slowly walked back along the road toward the hanger, watching warily for anybody on foot who might be an officer and therefore would require a salute, and wondering how I was going to get off of the base. I didn't have any civilian clothes with me so I was stuck with the blue working uniform. I could have taken off the blue uniform shirt but then I'd have been out-of-uniform. If I left the blue uniform shirt on, then it would be unavoidably visible to the guards when I went out the gate as a passenger in a car. After a few minutes, I had a plan. It depended on the next driver who gave me a ride not being an officer and not caring how I behaved. I stuck out my thumb, a car stopped, and I got in. Then, with elaborate casualness, I stretched, yawned, shrugged my shoulders, grunted in discomfort, and took off my blue uniform shirt. Still with elaborate casualness, I folded it in my lap where it wasn't obviously a uniform shirt and where it somewhat hid my uniform pants. The driver didn't make any comment and the guard didn't say anything. Maybe God was helping me. After that, I always traveled back and forth in civilian clothes and carried my working uniform with me. Without any women around, changing clothes at work wasn't any problem at all.

The first two summer cruises were at Barber's Point, Hawaii. The third one was scheduled to be in Rota, Spain. I was terrified of the bureaucracy that would be involved in going there. Fortunately, by then I'd begun to learn some things about the squadron. One important item was that both officers and men loved to get away from their wives for two weeks. They seemed to regard the summer deployment as more of a vacation than anything else. Since the wives didn't seem to object, one has to wonder what they were doing while the sailors were gone. You could make a TV show. You could call it Navy Wives or some such thing. Anyway, everybody was as anxious for the cruise as a kid before Christmas. Another important item was that somebody had to stay at Moffatt Field while the squadron was deployed elsewhere, to answer the telephones. Bingo! I volunteered to stay at Moffatt Field. They loved me. So, for the remaining four summer deployments, I stayed at Moffatt Field, alone, the only Yeoman in the entire squadron. I had a great big blimp hanger essentially all to myself. It was lovely. No officers, no nothing. All that I had to do was to be there when the telephone rang. I was completely alone, all day. As long as I answered the telephone when they called, then they all knew that I wasn't skating. *Skating* is Naval jargon for goofing off, wasting time, and so forth.

Actually, there wasn't much need to have anybody there to answer the telephone, not officially anyway. Indeed, I never had any actual business to conduct over the telephone. I spent most of my time reading Science Fiction. However, there was an unofficial need and for that they carefully instructed me in the covert procedure before they left. Actually, in spite of all of the horsing around, those guys were very good with hardware. Here's what would happen. The telephone would ring. "VP-91, Yeoman Milam speaking, may I help you?" It would be one of our people calling from wherever the squadron was deployed. He'd give me a telephone number. I'd carefully write down the number and then put the caller on hold. It was one of those old office

## Outward Bound

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telephones with a row of buttons along the near edge, one button for each different line. The button for the active line lighted. The button for a line on hold blinked. Using the button adjacent to the one for the line on which the caller was on hold, I'd call the number that he'd given me. Usually, it was his wife. After she was on the line and had been informed that she had a call from whoever-it-was, I'd very carefully push the button for the line that was on hold. I didn't push it all the way down or even until it clicked. That would have put the wife's line on hold. I pushed it just until its light stopped blinking and became a steady light. Then, both lines were connected together in the telephone at the same time. I don't know if the telephone was originally designed that way. Maybe the sailors had modified it. Anyway, the two lines were connected to each other. I'd set my handset down on the desk and go back to reading my Science Fiction. It didn't cost the sailor anything to call Moffatt Field but it would have cost him a hefty long distance charge from Spain to call his wife at home. So, they'd talk for free for as long as they wanted via their bootleg connection through the telephone on my desk. When the two lights on the telephone went out, then I'd hang up the telephone. That's why they needed somebody to stay at Moffatt Field during deployments. What a wonderful world it is.

Since I didn't have to go on the summer cruises any more, the remainder of my active reserve duty was at Moffatt Field. That was fine with me. However, even at Moffatt Field, things didn't always go as planned. For example, some agency or other occasionally audited the readiness and capabilities of the various reserve squadrons. One year, VP-91 failed one such audit. The squadron failed so miserably that the reserve CO who was in charge at the time was replaced by a regular navy CO. As the junior yeoman in the Admin Office, I was relatively unaffected by the resulting changes. I had the impression that the problems had been mostly operational, not administrative. However, I wasn't immune to all of the changes. One such change was that the new CO required a roll-call and personnel inspection on the Saturday morning of every drill weekend. At those inspections, we all fell in and stood at attention on the hangar deck. The CO and his entourage stalked up and down the rows and columns of rigid sailors, inspecting uniforms and haircuts. Anybody who failed the personnel inspection on Saturday morning, or who missed it, had to stand inspection again on Sunday morning. Those who passed the Saturday morning inspection were excused from the Sunday morning inspection. I usually passed. One Saturday morning, I failed.

Later that Saturday morning, I sat at my desk typing the normal reserve crap that I always typed on Saturday mornings. It hadn't occurred to me to think about the list of people who had to be reinspected. I just regretted the necessity of standing inspection again on Sunday. The first class petty officer who ran the office walked over to my desk and laid down the list of those people. He did that every Saturday morning. I still didn't think about it. When I finished what I'd already been doing, I picked up the list, placed it on my gizmo that held the paper from which I was typing, and began to type the list of names. I still didn't think about it. When I got to my name, I stopped. Suddenly I thought about it. Hmmm. I thought about it real hard. After a few minutes, I continued typing, right after my name. I didn't actually leave my name off of the list. I just sort of stopped for a break when I got to my name and then started

again where I'd left off, as close as I could remember. I was almost physically trembling when I handed the original list, that included my name, and the typed list, that lacked my name, back to the petty officer. He headed into the CO's office with the two lists. I quivered quietly for a while, utterly unable to type. The petty officer came back out of the CO's office and dropped the signed list in its normal place. He didn't have the original with him. Presumably, it was in the trash can in the CO's office. I'd successfully falsified a document for my own benefit by leaving my name off of the list of people who had to stand inspection on Sunday. Nobody ever said anything to me about it.

I didn't engage in many pranks while I was at Moffatt Field but, once, I did something that I thought was worth the risk. At that time, men of my age were trying to wear their hair long. The Navy required short hair. It was an ongoing annoyance for most of us. Unrelated to that, there were some stencils that were occasionally used to stencil "NAVAL AIR RESERVE" onto pieces of equipment. The stencils were made from heavy card stock and the lettering on the stencils was arranged in such a way that NAVAL was on the first line, AIR was on the second line, and RESERVE was on the third line. Thus, there was a considerable amount of space to the left of the word AIR. I took out my pocket knife on one slow Sunday afternoon and carefully cut a letter H just ahead of the word AIR. The next drill weekend, I waited for an opportunity and cautiously took a look at the stencil. Somebody had put a piece of tape over the H. No sense of humor at all. I wonder if anybody painted NAVAL HAIR RESERVE on any airplanes or dumpsters before he noticed my modification.

I wasn't much impressed with most of what I saw of the Naval Reserve while I was stationed at Moffatt Field. However, I did see one fat old chief who'd developed a remarkable skill. That was the one and only time that I had to go over to the Mess to get the box lunches for the flight crews. Normally, I managed to be somewhere else when they were looking for someone to do it. That one day, I got stuck with it. So, I got into the Mess without getting into trouble and I tried to look inconspicuous while I waited for somebody to get the box lunches for me. While I waited, I noticed the old chief. He was sitting on a stool. In front of him was a huge metal tub. It was hemispherical and it must have been about two feet in diameter. To the left of the tub was a table with a stack of flats of eggs on it. To the right of the tub was a metal garbage can. The chief was moving his arms, both of them, rapidly back and forth between the flats of eggs and the garbage can. At the flats, he'd pick up an egg in each hand. As his hands moved across the open top of the tub, the insides of the eggs would fall into the tub. He'd drop the egg shells into the garbage can. For all of the time that I stood there watching him, he never slowed. It took him only about one second per cycle. He'd pick up two eggs, crack them into the tub, and drop the shells into the garbage can. He never missed. He was still doing it, machine-like, when I left with the box lunches. I suspect that it's men like him who keep the Navy functioning.

In the subsequent years, I've become increasingly annoyed by the feminists. I eventually realized that their agenda never had anything to do with equal rights, job opportunities, fair treatment, or any other such thing. It was always about finding ways to dominate and control men. Mostly, it's tolerably harmful. However, I have a different

## Outward Bound

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opinion about military matters. It isn't the job of the military to reflect or to represent the composition of the civilian population. It's the job of the military to protect the civilian population. If the presence of women, or homosexuals, or members of any other special interest group diminishes the ability of the military to do that job, then those people should not be permitted in the military.

For years after I left the Naval Reserve, I had distressing dreams about the experience. Usually, I was wandering around the hanger at Moffatt Field, lost. I couldn't find my squadron. After a while, I realized that they'd moved, that I'd forgotten to show up for so long a time that I hadn't found out about the move. Nobody had noticed that I'd been missing but I was terrified that somebody would notice. Then I'd realize that I'd forgotten to bring my cap and that I was out-of-uniform. I'd look for hats but all of the ones that I found were always the wrong kind. I always ended up hiding in some space where I ought not to have been, hoping that nobody would notice me, and terrified that somebody would kick me out of my hiding place. I haven't had any of those dreams for several years now. Maybe they're over. I don't know.

Ah well, that's enough of Naval Reserve stuff.

## The General Electric Company

This section has a lot of amusing things but part of it presents a lot of the material that's a little technical. That material deals with GE's operating procedures, and violations of them. Any reader who finds himself getting a little bored with that stuff is welcome to skip that part, or even to go directly to the section on J. R. Hodges.

### Advanced Fuel Design Unit

After I completed the initial active duty portion of my Naval Reserve "obligation", it was a little easier to find a job. However, my success at finding a job was almost a fluke. I'd been applying for jobs all over the place and not just in Nuclear Engineering. I went to one interview that was for a job in electronic circuit design. As I recall, the company designed and manufacture what is incorrectly called uninterruptible power supplies. Nothing is uninterruptible. They're properly called standby power supplies. When the interviewing manager asked me to explain his enormous circuit diagram to him, I didn't have any idea at all what most of it was. The only thing that I could recognize was the symbol for a little semiconductor amplifier. I don't remember after all of these years but I believe that the things were called Op Amps. However, the man must have been at least somewhat impressed with me. He told me that his next door neighbor worked in the personnel department at GE and that they were looking for people. He promised to mention me to the neighbor, which he did. Later, I received a call from the neighbor. I went through the normal application and interview process and in November of 1972 I was hired for the first time in my life as a full time, permanent employee. The job was with the Nuclear Energy Division of the General Electric Company, in San Jose, California.

My job was in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit. My boss was a nitwit named Dave Weiss. Another employee there, named Halvden Sathre, was from Norway. He never addressed Dave by his name. He always called him Boss. He claimed that, in Norwegian, *boss* means *garbage*. Dave didn't think that anything ought to be done correctly, just quickly. His management style was to come galloping into the office waving his arms and foaming at the mouth, as we used to say, and to demand that somebody drop everything and work on some new emergency instead. Everything was an emergency or else it didn't need to be done at all. That's where I encountered the motto, "There's never time to do it right but always time to do it over."

Dave's management style had resulted in what Larry Schnebly, one of my office mates, referred to as his Annular Ring Filing System. This is how Larry described it. Whenever Dave galloped into the office to give Larry a new emergency, Larry would push the current emergency out of the way on his desk and start working on the new emergency. That resulted in stuff on his desk being arranged in concentric arcs of abandoned work. The work that had been abandoned longer was further away toward the edges of the desk. If Larry needed to retrieve some previous emergency, then he knew approximately where to look for it on his desk, depending upon how long ago he'd abandoned it. If something got pushed far enough away to fall off of the edge of the desk, then it was safe to throw it in the trash. Dave couldn't remember emergencies from that long ago.

## Outward Bound

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My first experience with Dave's attitude was with regard to a memo that he wanted me to write. I don't remember anything about the memo except for his instruction that he didn't want anything elaborate, just a short memo. While I had the job at GE, I was still working as a Yeoman at Moffatt Field. In my position as a Yeoman, a memo was a specific kind of document, distinct from a letter. Naval Reserve memos were written on specific pre-printed memo forms. I assumed that, at GE, a memo must be a specific kind of document. I tried to get Dave to explain to me how to do a memo at GE and he acted like I was an idiot. He said just do a memo. I finally got some help from my office mates and wrote his damned memo for him. At GE, a memo was the same thing as a letter. However, it began our relationship with Dave assuming that I was an idiot and with me assuming that he was a meathead. He was wrong. I was right. I wasn't an idiot. He was a meathead.

Dave's approach to things was neatly summarized by three infamous statements that he made much later in our acquaintance. By then, I was well aware of his attitudes and I'd developed the standard practice of paying careful attention to him. When he made those particular three statements, I was listening carefully and I accurately recorded each statement for posterity, immediately after he made it. Here they are.

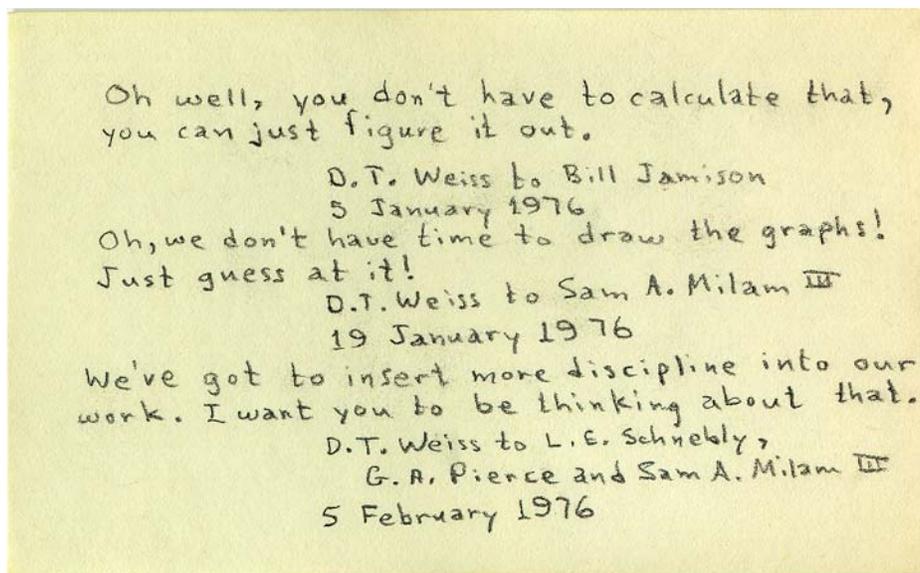
The first of his infamous statements was made to one of my office mates, Bill Jamison, on Monday, January 5, 1976. I don't know what problem Bill was trying to solve for Dave but it would have been related to nuclear fuel because Bill was our fuel man. Bill was at his desk, quietly working, when Dave came galloping into the office and demanded to know if the results were ready yet. Bill muttered, "I'm just calculating it now." Dave said, "Oh well, you don't have to calculate that, you can just figure it out." That's an exact quote. I quietly wrote it down, exactly as Dave said it, and dated it. After he left the office, I posted it on the wall beside by desk.

Not long after that, Dave assigned some task to me. I'd been gathering the data that I needed and, on Monday, January 19, 1976, I was walking down the hallway toward my office. Dave came galloping up behind me in the hallway and demanded to know if I had the answers ready for him. I told him that I was just on my way back to my office to draw the graphs. He said, "Oh, we don't have time to draw the graphs! Just guess at it!" That's an exact quote. Before I drew the graphs, I wrote down his statement exactly as he'd said it, dated it, and posted it on the wall under the previous quote.

He made the third of his infamous statements on Thursday, February 5, 1976. On that day, he was depressed. He came dragging into the office and gloomily requested that we all gather around. He said that he needed to talk to us about something. We rolled our chairs over to Larry's desk where Dave had parked himself. There were three of us: Larry Schnebly, Gerald (Garry) Pierce, and me. I don't know where Bill was at the time. Dave started rambling but when he actually got to his point, he said, "We've got to insert more discipline into our work. I want you to be thinking about that." Again, that's an exact quote. I kicked my office chair across the room, right in

the middle of his speech, wrote down his statement, and dated it. After he had left the office, I posted it under the other two.

Everybody got a chuckle out of the quotes that I'd posted because they were so typical of Dave. Several people came into the office just to see them. However, a few weeks later, Dave came into the office and inspected them himself. The way that he went straight to them, among all of the other stuff that I had posted on my walls, makes me suspect that somebody had tipped him off about them or that maybe he'd overheard a conversation about them from somebody's office, over a partition. He acted hurt and insulted. He tried to deny having made the statements but I insisted that I'd written them down immediately after he'd made them and that the quotes were accurate. Then, he whined that I'd taken them out of context. I told him that I didn't think so.



Oh well, you don't have to calculate that,  
you can just figure it out.  
D.T. Weiss to Bill Jamison  
5 January 1976  
Oh, we don't have time to draw the graphs!  
Just guess at it!  
D.T. Weiss to Sam A. Milam III  
19 January 1976  
We've got to insert more discipline into our  
work. I want you to be thinking about that.  
D.T. Weiss to L.E. Schnebly,  
G.A. Pience and Sam A. Milam III  
5 February 1976

Naturally, nobody else in the office came to my assistance. They all pretended to be concentrating on their own work. Dave demanded that I remove the statements from the wall. However, I wasn't quite as easily intimidated as I'd been when I was dealing with Earl Feinour, back at the NRTS. Consequently, there were two main differences between the outcome of the situation with Dave and the outcome of the situation with Earl. One difference was that I didn't leave the room after the disagreement. Dave did. The second difference was that I no longer felt like an idiot. I was right, he was wrong, and I knew it. I removed the quotes from the wall but I kept them. Eventually, I transferred the statements onto a single 3x5 piece of paper. The original quotations, on that piece of paper, are now a part of the original collection of 3x5 cards that eventually became *Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom*.

Dave's demands for quick and careless work were dangerous. He shouldn't have been a manager in a nuclear engineering design organization. He wasn't fit even to be the manager of a washing machine factory, where a leak wouldn't have been a big deal. He repeatedly assured us that we didn't need to actually do any calculations or that, if we did, then we didn't need to be careful about them or to document our sources. The

## Outward Bound

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assurances were outright lies. I learned to be careful regardless of his demands and assurances.

One day, Dave came galloping into the office and demanded that I “figure out” for him the amount of coal and oil that would be the equivalent in energy content of one nuclear fuel pellet. He said that he wanted just a quick estimate, nothing precise. He galloped back out of the office.

I went to GE’s technical library and got some source information. I tried to calculate credible average heating values for coal and for oil. Using those numbers, I estimated the energy equivalence between nuclear fuel, coal, and fuel oil. I made a record of my sources and filed my calculations where I could find them. I gave the results to Dave and hoped that it would end there. About four months later, I walked into my office and found on my chair the September 11, 1975 (Number 15) issue of *Management News*. The publication announced a full-scale national advertising campaign, including a glossy 8 1/2 x 11 graphic image. The campaign was intended to tout the virtues and advantages of nuclear fuel. The advertisement was based, in part, on my numbers. Scrawled on the page was a little note from Dave saying, “Sam! You’re famous!”

Typically, they got it wrong. I’d calculated that one nuclear fuel pellet would be equivalent to 130 gallons of fuel oil. In the advertisement, they claimed that three nuclear fuel pellets would be equivalent to 330 gallons of fuel oil. It should have been 390 gallons of fuel oil. I suppose that, if you’re in advertising, you don’t need to know how to do arithmetic. In the advertisement, they didn’t mention the equivalent quantity of coal that I had calculated. The company planned to present the information in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Money*, and *Reader’s Digest*. I’ve included a copy of that issue of *Management News*, and of the glossy 8 1/2 x 11 picture, at the end of this section. I don’t know if the advertisement was ever actually printed.

GE also printed my numbers in a little manual called *Nuclear Power Quick Reference*. The manual went through at least three editions. The pages shown later in this section are from the first edition. In the manual, the equivalent quantity of coal that I’d calculated is shown correctly. They also managed to cite the same number as the one that I’d used for the weight of the fuel pellet. For fuel oil, I’d calculated the equivalent quantity as 130 gallons. The quantity shown in the manual is 3.1 barrels. I never bothered to verify that number and see if they made the conversion correctly. My numbers appeared in the manuals with footnotes citing me as the source. At least in the glossy 8 1/2 x 11 picture, the numbers had been anonymous.

During my time as an underling of Dave Weiss, I tried hard to be a good engineer. I don’t think that I did a very good job. I believe that my engineering skills were not as good as they should have been. I know that my confidence and self-esteem were low. I can recall thinking on more than one occasion that if they were willing to pay me for the little that I was doing for them then I should be happy to accept the payment. In retrospect, I perceive my work as being marginally acceptable but at least I tried to do honest and valid work.

I think that I might have done better as a scientist than I did as an engineer because my greatest potential was my ideas. One example was glass fuel channels. During that first position at GE, I worked with people who were trying to predict the useful lifetime of fuel channels. The effort was complicated by the number of variables involved in the lifetime predictions, and by the uncertainty of the assumptions that we were making with regard to those variables. I recall overhearing a comment that Larry made one day. He was talking to somebody on the telephone and said, "We don't have any hard limits on that, just different degrees of nervousness." As had become normal for me, I stopped what I was doing and wrote down the statement, exactly, and dated it.<sup>12</sup> The statement made it into *Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom*, along with various other things that I overheard and recorded. The people around whom I worked never did understand that I was always listening, however intent on something else I appeared to be. I also observed them to be only marginally imaginative. It seems to me that, most of the time, engineers aren't very creative. If something isn't working very well then the typical engineering approach to solving the problem will be to make it thicker or to use a bigger bolt. Creative solutions don't seem to be common.

One variable in our fuel channel lifetime calculations was the corrosion rate of the Zircaloy, of which the fuel channels were fabricated. Zircaloy is an alloy of Zirconium and a few other things. I no longer remember the list of elements. Anyway, for a while I was working with the corrosion rate of Zircaloy. One day I was leaned back in my chair trying to think of some better material than Zircaloy that we could use to build fuel channels. I wanted something with a lower corrosion rate. As I pondered, I recalled a science fiction story by Stanley G. Weinbaum that I'd read years earlier. The story was called *A Martian Odyssey* and was included in a collection, *The Pocket Book of Science-Fiction*, edited by Donald A. Wollheim and published in 1943 by Pocket Books Inc., of New York. It was actually my mother's book but I took it with me when I left home. I still have it in my collection.

In the story, the leading character had encountered what turned out to be the droppings of a creature that he called a Pyramid Being. It was a silicon based creature that excreted silicon dioxide as a waste product. The excrement deteriorated in the environment **very** slowly. From the degree of deterioration of its droppings, the character in the story estimated that the Pyramid Being was about 500,000 years old. That was just what I needed.

"Hey Larry!" I said, "Why don't we make our fuel channels out of glass?"

Larry said, "That's a stupid idea."

I asked, "Why?"

Larry thought about it for a few seconds and then said, "Well, I don't know. Go ask Dave". So I did.

Dave said, "That's a stupid idea."

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<sup>12</sup> Wednesday, April 21, 1976

- One nuclear fuel pellet weighing 0.29 ounce (8.1 grams) produces the same amount of thermal energy as 3.1 barrels of fuel oil, or 1600 pounds (0.7 metric ton) of coal. It creates enough heat to generate 1760 kwh of electricity—28.1 times more than the electrical energy required to produce it.<sup>4,5</sup>
- A nuclear power plant pays back the energy investment made to construct and fuel it in 2.3 to 25.8 months—an average of 12 months—depending on which of four recent studies is cited.<sup>6</sup>
- The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission permits four alternative ways of decommissioning a nuclear plant... mothballing, entombment, dismantling, or refitting. In 1974 dollars, the costs of decommissioning range from \$3 to \$45 million.<sup>7</sup>
- It is predicted that the U.S. Gross National Product could drop 3 to 21 percent in 1985 if a *total* moratorium were placed on nuclear power, and as much as 14 percent in 1985 with a moratorium on *new* nuclear power plants beginning in 1977.<sup>8</sup>
- A nationwide nuclear moratorium would cost the U.S. about \$300 billion—about \$1500 per person—in higher electricity costs and higher prices for goods and services dependent on electricity.<sup>9</sup>
- A ban on nuclear power would increase the average cost of electricity in the year 2000 from \$24 to \$38 (in 1975 dollars) per 1000 kwh.<sup>10</sup>
- The U.S. imported 6.6 million barrels of oil per day in 1974, and is conservatively expected to import 10 million barrels of oil per day in 1990. A ban on nuclear

14

would likely cause imports to soar to 17 million barrels per day.<sup>11,12</sup>

- The estimated total man-days required to construct a 1200 MWe nuclear power plant is 3,225,000, which is equivalent to an average of 2550 jobs for a five-year period.<sup>13</sup>

### 1985 - 95 Total U.S. Electric Generating Cost Projections<sup>14</sup>

<i>Plant Location</i>	<i>¢/kwh</i>
Nuclear	3.5
Midwest Coal	3.8
Eastern Coal	5.9

### 1985 - 2015 Total Electric Generating Cost Projections<sup>14</sup>

<i>Plant Location</i>	<i>¢/kwh</i>
Nuclear	6.7
Midwest Coal	9.6
Eastern Coal	14.9

- The U.S. Energy Resources Council estimates there are sufficient domestic uranium resources to meet the lifetime fuel requirements of all U.S. nuclear power plants placed in service by 1990.<sup>15</sup>
- A rise of \$25 per pound in the price of uranium is equivalent to a \$1 per barrel increase in the price of oil.<sup>16</sup>

## References

1. "INFO 92," Atomic Industrial Forum, Washington, D.C. (March 1976).
2. "INFO 78," Atomic Industrial Forum, New York, New York (January 1975).
3. "Reliability of Nuclear Power," *Background INFO*, Atomic Industrial Forum, Washington, D.C. (March 1976).
4. Calculated by S. A. Milam III, General

15

I asked, "Why?"

Dave thought about it for a few seconds and then said, "I don't know. Go over to the library and check it out." So I did.

I compared some relevant characteristics of Zircaloy to the same characteristics of a standard glass that I found included in a materials handbook. For every characteristic that I checked, the standard glass was equal to or superior to Zircaloy. I was comparing Zircaloy, that had been specifically designed to perform in a nuclear environment, to a standard glass that hadn't been specifically designed for any particular environment at all. Even so, the glass compared very favorably to the Zircaloy. A glass that had been specifically designed for the purpose would probably be signifi-

cantly better than Zircaloy. I submitted the idea to the GE patent board. They thought that it was a stupid idea. Today, I have the idea posted on my personal website. See the References Section. I've declared the idea to be public domain. It's available for free to anybody who has the good sense to use it.

I had at least one other creative idea with regard to increasing the useful lifetime of the fuel channels. One thing that reduced that lifetime was that the channels bulged while they were in use. That was because there was a greater flow restriction inside of the fuel channels than outside of them. Thus, when water was pumped through the core, the flow restriction inside of the channels caused a pressure gradient to exist along the length of the channels. Because of the pressure gradient, the pressure inside of the channels was greater than the pressure outside of the channels, at least near the bottom of the channels. The pressure difference across the channel wall caused the channel walls to bulge outward, because the channels had an approximately square cross section. We couldn't reduce the flow restriction inside of the channels but I wondered if we could increase the flow restriction outside of them, to cause a flow-induced pressure gradient on the outside that would match the one on the inside. I asked Larry if he thought that it might work. He wanted to know how I planned to create a flow-induced pressure gradient outside of the channels. I suggested that we make the exterior surfaces of the channels very rough. That would cause turbulent flow. I thought that the increased flow resistance might cause a pressure gradient. Larry told me to do a calculation and see if it would work. I did the calculation and discovered that it wouldn't work. My calculation indicated that, in order to get a sufficiently large flow-induced pressure gradient on the outside of the channels, the exterior surface roughness would have to be greater than the space between the channels. However, the important thing is that while the other engineers were talking about making the channel walls thicker by a few thousandths of an inch, I was trying to find a way to address the actual source of the problem.

Many years after I left GE, sometime during the year 2000, I thought of a radically different nuclear reactor design. A reactor built according to my design would seldom need to be shut down. All fuel processing and refueling activities could be accomplished during normal reactor operation. Fuel could be loaded or withdrawn in any quantity and at any time. All necessary reactor management operations could be performed far more simply and reliably than in a conventional reactor. Structurally, such a reactor would be far simpler than a conventional reactor. It would be cheaper to design, build, and operate. It would be inherently more stable, reliable, and safe. It would have an essentially unlimited life expectancy and would be far easier to repair and maintain. Although the design might lend itself to lower power levels than conventional reactors, I believe that, in the long run, the political and bureaucratic advantages of having many small facilities rather than a few large ones will easily offset the so-called economies of scale that are usually used to justify monster facilities. Also, it doesn't have fuel channels. The idea is posted on my personal website and is public domain. All that I want is to be acknowledged as the originator of the idea. I suggest the maximum possible use of glass in the design.

## Outward Bound

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To Dave, nothing was important until it was an emergency. One time, I used that attitude against him for my own amusement and for the amusement of my office mates. I had a big poster on the wall of my corner of the office. I don't remember what it was but it probably had a nude woman somewhere in the picture. I used to buy art posters with nudes in them and hang them on my walls. One of my favorite artists was John William Waterhouse. For a while, I had his *Hylas and the Nymphs*. Anyway, since it was art, people couldn't complain about the nudes. I attached the posters to the walls by rolling masking tape into little circles with the sticky side out, thereby creating little cylinders of double-sided tape. Then, I stuck the little cylinders of tape to the backs of the posters and then stuck the posters to the walls. Eventually, the particular poster about which I'm writing started to come loose at one of the top corners. The result was that it began to curve over and hang down over itself. Gradually, one piece of tape after another failed and more and more of the poster hung over. Dave kept glancing at it whenever he galloped through the office. I could tell that it annoyed him so I left it hanging there. Eventually, he pointed out to me that my poster was falling off of the wall. Without looking up from my work, I muttered absent-mindedly, "Don't worry, Dave. It ain't an emergency yet," and continued working on whatever emergency he'd most recently assigned to me. Larry and Garry tried not to laugh. Dave looked scornful and galloped out of the office.

Mention of nudes reminds me of one incident that didn't have anything at all to do with my work but which was amusing. I had a small desk model Playboy calendar on my desk. One of the female engineers wandered into the office one day and spotted the calendar. "Oh," she chirped, "One of the girls this year has a body that looks **just like mine!**" I opened the little flap on the back of the calendar and removed the pictures. I started going through the pictures while the female engineer watched me uncertainly. After shuffling through a few of the pictures, I said, "It's this one." I showed her the picture. She was outraged and demanded to know how I knew the appearance of her naked body. She even suggested that I'd been spying on her at home. I explained that there aren't any secrets. Clothes don't hide much. After a man has seen a certain number of naked women, it's easy to interpolate within the known data. Every woman is completely naked under her clothes and there isn't a damned thing that any woman can do about it. Remember that old phrase "undressing her with his eyes"? If that kind of thing bothers a women then I suggest that she should avoid the presence of men. I'd come a long way, by then, since the days of being embarrassed by Mr. Bayne. Sorry, ladies, I should have warned you about these two paragraphs.

One of my early assignments in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, probably my first assignment although I don't remember for sure, was to enter a large amount of data into the GE computer. Larry gave me the assignment. He told me to go over to the computer room and use a time-share terminal. I'd never used a time-share terminal before. I'd never even seen a time-share terminal before. In college, all of my computer use had been with punched cards. He told me to just ask anybody who was using one of the terminals and I'd be told how to do it. Such job assignments without any instruction at all turned out to be the normal way of doing things at GE. I spent

a lot of time at GE learning how to do things by doing them wrong. So did everybody else.

I went to the computer room. It turned out to be a cubicle from which most of the normal office furniture had been removed. All that remained were some telephones, some chairs, some waste baskets, and some time-share terminals. I asked somebody how to use one of the terminals and he showed me. You turned the machine on with a switch, dialed the number (there was a piece of tape on the telephone with a telephone number on it), and listened to the telephone. When you heard a tone, then you plugged the handset into a thing that was sitting on the desk beside the time-share terminal. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever seen an acoustic coupler, the precursor of the modems of later years. The unknown instructor made sure that I knew which end of the handset went into which end of the acoustic coupler. After that, I was presumed to be an expert. So, I dialed the number and connected the handset to the acoustic coupler. I got a prompt on the screen and I started typing in the data. I worked all morning and I was almost finished by lunch time. I turned off the machine and went to lunch.

After lunch, I went back to complete the job. I turned on the time-share terminal, dialed the number, plugged the handset into the acoustic coupler, and waited for my data to appear. I got a prompt. I asked somebody how to find my data. He wanted to know what filename I'd used when I'd saved it. Filename? Saved it? He acted like I was an idiot and showed me how to save data. I was supposed to have used the save command, *save:filename*. After learning how to save a file, I was presumed to be an expert.

I spent all afternoon typing in the same data that I'd lost when I'd turned off the machine before lunch without saving the data. By quitting time, I was nearly done. I was careful to use the save command, *save:filename*. I turned off the machine and went home.

The next morning, I turned on the time-share terminal, dialed the number, plugged the handset into the acoustic coupler, and asked somebody how to find my data. He showed me how to use the open file command, *open:filename*. There was my data. I really was an expert. I spent 20 minutes or so typing in the remainder of the data and then carefully used the save command again, *save:filename*. Job done.

A few days later, Larry had some additional data for me to add to the file. I went to the computer room, turned on the time-share terminal, dialed the number, plugged the handset into the acoustic coupler, and accessed the file. I was greatly puzzled to discover that most of the data weren't there. The only data remaining in the file were the data that I'd typed in during the last 20 minutes, the second morning. The data that I'd typed in twice, on the first day, weren't there. I started asking questions and learned what had happened. The *save:filename* command replaced the previous contents of the file with the new data, the data typed during the current session. If I wanted to add the new data to the existing data, without erasing the existing data, then I had to use the resave command, *resave:filename*. Damn. Nobody'd told me that. So, I spent another four hours typing in the data that I'd already typed in twice

## Outward Bound

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and lost twice. I added the new data. I was getting faster and I got it all done in one session. I carefully used the *save:filename* command. I was well on my way to becoming a computer guru. I will say that, before I left the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, I knew more about using the computer than anybody else in the unit. Of course, that isn't saying much.

There was at least one good reason why the people in my unit didn't know anything about using the computer. Dave Weiss wouldn't buy computer manuals. Several times during my time in that unit, I asked him for a computer manual. He invariably instructed me to search around the building until I found somebody who already had one, borrow it, take it to a copy machine, and copy it. I eventually suggested to him that the amount of engineering time that I spent doing that sort of thing would amount to a lot more than the cost of buying a manual. He said that he'd already hired me and that he didn't have to justify my time. In order to buy a computer manual, he'd have to justify it on a purchase order. It was easier to waste my time than to buy a manual.

I eventually became the one and only computer guru in our unit. I even got my own time-share terminal and my own acoustic coupler, right there at my desk. Dave didn't get it for me. He got it for the unit, because it made him look good if his unit had a time-share terminal. I got to have the terminal at my desk because I was the only one in the unit who knew how to use it and because nobody else was interested in learning to use it. I made little paper ears for the acoustic coupler, causing it to resemble the face of a mouse. The secretary was amused.

I learned all kinds of things that nobody else in the unit knew. For example, I discovered how to make the terminal beep. Then, I wrote a little set of commands that automatically executed every time that I logged out of the mainframe. The commands caused the terminal to beep my name in Morse Code. I eventually had control of all of our computer files. That led me onto a path that, had I continued in that job, would eventually have turned me into a genuine hacker. It happened because of a policy of the computer center. According to that policy, any file that wasn't accessed for six months would be automatically deleted, without notice. Arrogant bastards. We could easily go longer than six months before we updated a reactor operating history file but they didn't give a damn about our convenience. They just shrugged their collective shoulders and told me to access the files every week, as if they were the only people in the entire company who had anything to do with their time. For that reason, I had to keep accessing files just to keep them from being erased. I was beginning to develop a dislike for policies that were used against me.

It turned out that the GE computer could be accessed in either batch mode, with punched cards, or in the time-share mode, from a time-share terminal. I no longer remember which different features and capabilities were available in which of the two modes but they were distinctly different. That is, there were things that could be done in one mode but not in the other mode. As I gradually did really become an expert, not just a presumed expert, I learned about those differences and about those capabilities. One set of capabilities was that either mode could be used to spawn a program

into the other mode, if you knew how to do it. When working in the time-share mode, the batch job was spawned by creating virtual punched cards and submitting the job remotely. Some analogous process existed for using a batch job to spawn a job in the time-share mode. I started learning how to use the two modes.

Eventually, I began a project of my own about which I didn't tell anybody. So far as I can recall, this is the first time that I've ever revealed it to anybody in any way whatsoever. I began to create a collection of computer programs, using batch mode or time share mode, as appropriate. I intended that the first program in my combination of computer programs would have a designated future run date. That is, you could submit a program that wouldn't run until the designated run date in one or the other of the modes, if you knew how. When my program ran, it would scan my unit's directory for my files, identify their existence, and make a list of them. That scanning and listing process could be done in one mode but not in the other mode. The program would then spawn another program into the other mode. That program would include the list of my files. The second program would access the files. They could be scanned only in one mode but accessed only in the other mode. Different programs were required because the two different processes had to be done in different modes, one in batch mode and one in time-share mode. After the files were accessed, protecting them from being deleted, that program would spawn a new version of the first program into the other mode, and schedule it to run a month later. The collection of programs was intended to be self-replicating and run forever without further human intervention. I intended to be the only human being alive who even knew that the programs existed.

The computer center had another policy. Whenever they upgraded their operating system, they always transferred all existing files and programs to the new system. Back then, system changes were downwardly compatible. Thus, my programs would continue to run even under new versions of the operating system, even if I wasn't there any more. I was well on my way to completing the project when I left the Advanced Fuel Design Unit. Had I completed the project, then who knows? The programs might still be running silently today. Sadly, I left the job before the project was completed. My future jobs at GE didn't include any significant use of the computer so I fell out-of-touch with the developing computer world. Sadly, I never became a hacker. That's a shame because there are a lot of things that I'd like to do, today, if I was a hacker.

In spite of my use of the computer, I didn't have much direct interaction with the computer center people because the mainframe was located at the Curtner facility and I worked at the 10th Street facility. Eventually, they established a little help desk at 10th Street. We could turn in batch jobs, pick up printout, and ask questions. One time, I tried to use their mainframe to do some kind of a channel lifetime calculation and the program failed. I took the printout to the help desk and asked what was wrong. The man at the help desk said that their computer couldn't recognize such a small number. There were too many decimal places. I fondly patted the programmable HP-25 calculator that was hanging from my belt and said, "My calculator can. I'd be embarrassed if my great big computer couldn't even handle a number that can

## Outward Bound

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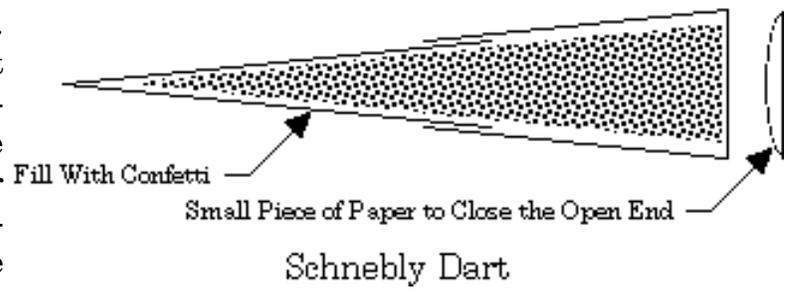
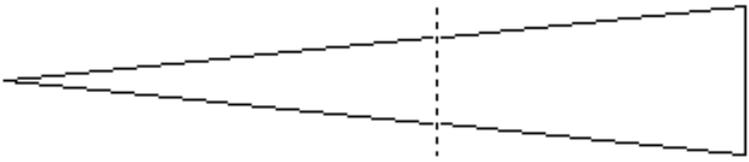
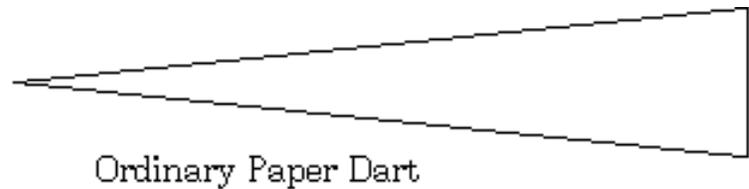
be handled by a little bitty calculator.” He didn’t have anything to say about that, turned back to whatever he’d been doing before I’d interrupted him, and proceeded to ignore me. After that, I did most of the channel lifetime calculations on my HP-25 calculator. However, we still stored our operating history data in the mainframe. Those were the files that I was trying to protect.

I didn’t pull many pranks while I was in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit. Mostly, I think that I was too unhappy and too insecure there to fool around very much. However, there were a few things that I did just for fun. I had a tendency to substitute funny names for the real names of the operating plants for which I managed the operating history data. Peach Bottom was Peachy bottom. Instead of Quad Cities, I logged it as Quad Titties. Brown’s Ferry was Brown an’ Furry. We also had a plant called Fuku and another one called Fuku II. I made such substitutions not just in our Design Record Files but also in the computer files that I alone maintained. After I left the unit, Larry went through all of my Design Record Files and changed the names back to the correct names. Several months later, I was talking to him on the telephone and he mentioned that they’d been embarrassed in front of an auditor who wanted to look at the computer files. Larry had corrected the names in the Design Record Files but he’d forgotten to change the names in the computer files. He’d printed the files right there in front of the auditor, funny names and all. Of course, you always blame things like that on the guy who most recently left the job.

Another completely useless thing on which we all wasted some otherwise useful time was our old channel sayings. That began after Bill Jamison was hired into our unit. We worked on fuel channel lifetime predictions. Bill worked on fuel calculations. He had a good sense of humor and would sometimes sneer at us from the lofty heights of his fuel calculations, saying, “Ahh, if you’ve seen one channel you’ve seen ’em all!” It just naturally followed that we started substituting *channel* into every old saying that we’d ever heard. There were dozens of them. A fool and his channels are soon parted. There’s a channel born every minute. You get the idea. Very early in that particular game, I started writing them down every time that somebody would offer a new one. It became common for somebody to be working like Wild Man Yakovitz and then suddenly stick his head up and offer yet another old channel saying. My list got to be several pages long. Several months after I left the job, Larry sent me an update. It was a list of new old channel sayings that they’d invented after I’d moved out. I still have the lists somewhere. If I ever find them then maybe I’ll add them to this memoir.

Another common pastime was making paper darts and shooting them through short pieces of Zircaloy fuel cladding. I still have my piece of cladding. I keep it sitting in a corner and use it’s pale blue glow of Cerenkov radiation as a night light. Naw, I’m just kidding. It was never irradiated and, anyway, even if it had been it wouldn’t emit Cerenkov radiation. That was just a joke. I still have the length of cladding somewhere but, at the moment, I don’t remember where it is. Actually, I haven’t seen it for several years.

Anyway, Larry and I collaborated on the invention of what I called the Schnebly Dart. I'd make a normal dart and then cut it in half, perpendicular to its axis. Then, I'd insert the pointed front end into the opening at the back end of the rear section, fill it with confetti, and plug the opening with a small piece of paper.



The idea when using a Schnebly Dart was to aim it at a spot on the wall over your target. When the dart hit the wall, it would collapse. The rear section would telescope over the front section, blowing the paper plug loose and scattering confetti around the area. The time-share terminals had a

tape-punch attachment that could be used to store information on paper tape. The little pieces of paper that resulted when the tape was punched were very small and very light. They drifted widely after a Schnebly Dart impact and made excellent confetti.

The 10th Street facility was in a large warehouse that had been converted into cubicles by the addition of partitions. A friend of mine, Gloria Ramos, once crept up the stairs to the unused mezzanine and looked down from above on the warehouse full of partitioned cubicles. She said that it looked like rats in a maze. The building had a very high ceiling that was covered with a layer of fiberglass insulation. The insulation had foil on its lower surface. A favorite method of testing darts was to shoot them straight up. That way, they'd fall straight down and we didn't lose darts by just testing them. At least, most of the time we didn't lose darts by just testing them. Eventually, it became easy to tell which engineers played with paper darts because the foil over those cubicles became littered with darts that had gone too high and stuck in the insulation.

Those clusters of darts in the ceiling were useful. I could stand up, look over the partitions, and see distant clusters of darts in the ceiling. By their locations, I knew the corresponding locations, below them, of other engineers who were dart aficionados. One such other engineer was a fellow named Jim Wiseman. He was very tall and very thin. He looked even taller than he actually was because he was so thin. His appearance was so remarkable that strangers would stop him on the street and ask him how tall he was. He liked to tell people that he was five foot nineteen.

## Outward Bound

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Jim's darts were better than mine. I watched him roll them and he didn't appear to do anything differently than I did. However, his darts were more accurate and had a longer range. One day, I stood up and shot a dart at the cluster of darts in the ceiling over his office. My aim was good and the dart performed properly. It fell, so far as I could judge, right on his desk. Within a couple of seconds, it began to rain darts in my office. I didn't know that it was possible to shoot them and reload the Zircaloy cladding so quickly. Jim must have shot his entire supply of darts at me within just a few seconds. I carefully collected the darts from all over my office and saved them. For a while, I had a supply of excellent darts.

I also flipped rubber bands. One time, my rubber band flipping got Dave into a little trouble with one of the secretaries. I'd figured out a way to load a rubber band onto the fingers of one hand and then fire it, one-handed, by bending the appropriate finger. I'd load a rubber band before I left the office with an armload of books or papers and then fire the rubber band at any handy secretary that I encountered along the way. Since most people presumed that it took two hands to fire a rubber band and, since my arms were loaded with books, I was never a suspect.

One day, I was walking down the hallway behind Pat Maizie with a loaded hand and a double armload of books. I fired the rubber band at her just as I approached an intersection where I could immediately turn into the intersecting hallway and be out of sight by the time that she turned around to see who had flipped the rubber band. Sadly, Dave's door was right at that intersection and just as I fired the rubber band I saw, in my peripheral vision, that Dave was just stepping out his door. He walked into the hallway right behind me just as I turned the corner. Just as I stepped out of sight into the intersecting hallway, I saw the rubber band hit Pat Maizie on the back of one leg. When she turned around, there was Dave, right behind her, trying to look innocent. Dave always tried to maintain a reputation as a serious professional. I think that the event was a major dent in his stuffy reputation. He later suggested to me, with a kind of restrained anger, that I shouldn't be flipping rubber bands in the hallways. I don't know what Pat said to him or what he said in reply.

I wasn't happy during my time in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit. I didn't like Dave Weiss and I felt inadequate. I eventually decided that I didn't want to stay there. GE had an internal job posting system and I began to apply for other jobs in other parts of the company. I suspect that my reputation wasn't very good. I don't think that I got very good references. Near the end of my time in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, my Fairy God Mother woke up briefly and waved her magic wand. Maybe God lent a hand. Whatever the case, Dave Weiss found another job. It was a dream event that I'd pondered but for which I'd never actually dared to hope. He left and was replaced by a fellow named Wess Tamai, who was a far better manager than Dave. However, I didn't work for Wess long enough for him to convince me to stay in that job. Before that could happen, I succeeded in finding a job in a different part of the company. I moved out of the Advanced Fuel Design Unit and into Control Panel Design, at the Curtner facility.

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# MANAGEMENT NEWS

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D. T. WEISS

## NUCLEAR ENERGY DIVISIONS

September 11, 1975

No. 15

TO: All Managers & Supervisors  
NESD and NEPD California Components

SUBJECT: Corporate Advertisement

The value of substituting the enormous energy potential of nuclear power for our short supplies of gas and oil is the subject of the corporate advertisement, shown on the reverse side of this sheet.

It will carry this important message to a broad cross-section of the U.S. public. Appearances are scheduled for the September 22 issue of Time, October 13 Newsweek, October Money and for Readers' Digest early next year.

This example of Company support for nuclear power will help boost awareness at the "grass roots" level of the benefits and need for expanded nuclear generating capacity.

SOURCE: H.D. Hexamer, Manager  
NEMD Communication &  
Nuclear Power Information

(OVER)

Issued by Communication & Community Relations, Ext. 3634



# This thimble can hold enough fuel to run the average home for seven months.

One answer to our long-range energy needs is no bigger than your fingertip.

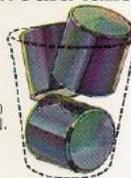
Nuclear fuel.

Put to work inside a General Electric reactor in a nuclear power plant, 3 pellets of uranium dioxide can produce enough steam to make nearly 48 hundred kilowatt-hours of electricity.

Enough to run the average home for about seven months.

It would take 330

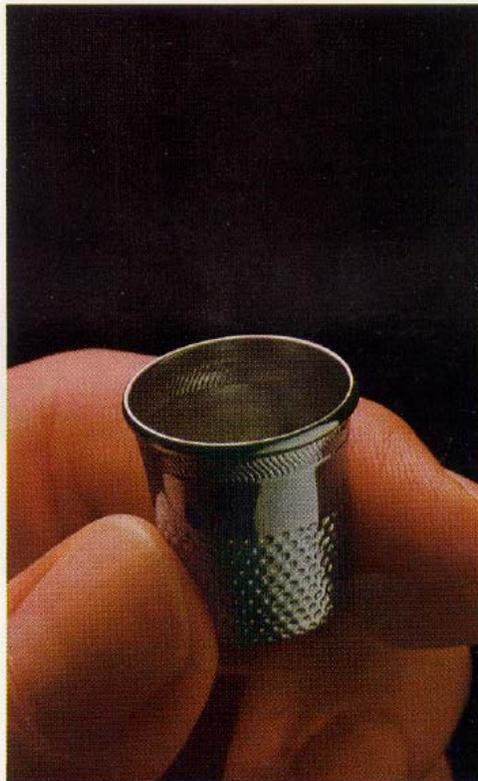
Three pellets equal 330 gallons of oil.



gallons of fuel oil to make the same amount of electricity. (About half the residual fuel oil consumed in this country is burned to make electricity.)

This is important.

Our need for electricity will double



in the next twelve years or so. With oil and natural gas in short supply, we are going to have to rely more and more on nuclear power. And also our ample supplies of coal.

Coal and nuclear fuel. We have good supplies of both.

Enough to provide hundreds of years of electricity. But no one fuel can do the job alone. We need to use all our

natural resources wisely and efficiently. And continue to look for new ways to make electricity.



Nuclear plants produce 8% of our electricity.

Because a country that runs on electricity simply can't afford to ever run out.

Progress  
for  
People.

GENERAL  ELECTRIC

### Control Panel Design

My new job was in the Control Panel Design Unit, at the Curtner Facility. My new manager was Chuck Hart.

In college, there hadn't been any hint that nuclear engineering was anything more than mechanics, chemistry, physics, thermodynamics, and calculations. Those are the sorts of things that we studied in college. The longer I stayed at GE the less of those kinds of things I did. So far as I could tell, the actual calculations were done mostly by engineering assistants, engineering trainees, exchange students, and computers. In the nuclear industry, most of the technical analysis and design work had been done years earlier, probably during the Manhattan Project or shortly thereafter. While I had worked in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, we did some calculations but we also did action plans, monthly highlights reports, charts for presentations, manpower estimates,<sup>13</sup> and long range forecasts for management. We hadn't studied those kinds of things in college.

When I started my new job in the Control Panel Design Unit, I learned that engineers also reviewed the engineering designs that came out of the Drafting Department. However, there wasn't much new in the new designs. They were largely revisions of previous designs. That isn't limited to the nuclear industry. Many years later, my second wife, Linda Sue Avants, told me a similar story. She was a chip designer. She designed the circuitry that's etched onto the silicon wafers during the manufacture of microchips. She said that a new design is always created by modifying a previous design. She also reported something else that we both considered to be worrisome. Circuitry not used in the new design isn't erased from the old drawings. It will be either not connected to the new circuitry or not connected to a power source. However, it stays on the drawings and is etched onto the wafers along with the new circuitry. Linda said that nobody knows what hidden capabilities and functions might have accumulated over the various design revisions and could be lurking in the microchips, just waiting to become active. All that's necessary is for a piece of idle circuitry to become connected somehow and the chip could turn into almost anything. When you consider the number of things in our society that are computer controlled, it's an ominous thought. It brings to mind such stories as *Colossus (The Forbin Project)*, by D. F. Jones.

I was disgruntled to learn that some aspects of the new designs that came out of the Drafting Department were largely under the control of drafting personnel. An engineer might be able to specify a system function but most of the actual nuts and bolts designing was done by draftsmen. That reminds me of Barbara Potts, the first ever female draftsman at GE. If she didn't want to be called a draftsman then she shouldn't have applied for the job. The job title was draftsman. She'd have done her stupid feminist movement a lot more good if she'd worked hard to be a good draftsman instead of whining and agitating to be called a draftsman.

Anyway, I was more than a little annoyed to discover that I, as an engineer, didn't have much control over those aspects of the designs that were under the control of

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<sup>13</sup> Manpower, ladies. Manpower.

## Outward Bound

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draftsmen. If I wanted something done in a way that was different from Drafting Department standard practice, then it was done according to Drafting Department standard practice. One small example was the fractional parts of inches that were shown on drawings. A few engineers wanted to be able to specify fractions as  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{1}{3}$ , and so forth. Drafting standard practice insisted that fractional parts of inches had to be specified as decimals. I don't care what their reasons were. We were the engineers. We had the ultimate design responsibility. We should also have had the ultimate design authority. We should have been able to specify what was on the drawings. It seldom happened that way. Drafting specified fractional parts of inches as decimals, ignoring our input. My job was to sign the paperwork because policy and legislation didn't allow draftsmen to bear the design responsibility. However, they had a lot more authority than they ought to have had.

After I moved to Control Panel Design, I began to discover another aspect of the nuclear industry that I hadn't previously suspected. I began to learn that there was a lot of legislation and other rules by which the industry was allegedly regulated. The only hint of such a thing that I'd ever encountered in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit was, sometime after I began work there, a new requirement that we had to start putting our calculations into Design Record Files. There weren't any particular rules about the Design Record Files except that we had to have them. As I recall, they were just three-ring binders with calculations in them. Only the engineer who'd done some particular calculation knew where to find it.

One of my first clues that there was more to it than that was given to me by a Systems Engineer named Ralph Balmer. At the time, I'd been in my new job in the Control Panel Design Unit for only a few weeks. I was (allegedly) verifying design changes for a new project and signing as the Responsible Verifying Engineer. Doesn't that sound important? Actually, what I was doing was comparing new drawings from the Drafting Department with mark-ups that somebody had made on the drawings of an older design. I didn't have the foggiest notion of how the systems worked, what they did, or what all of those device names meant. I didn't know what the changes on the drawings meant or how they would change the functioning of the reactor. I didn't know why the changes had been made. I didn't even know who'd made the markups. In fact, I wasn't verifying the design change at all. I was verifying the accuracy of the drawing made by the Drafting Department, as compared to the markups. My office mate, Russ Thompson, had just given me the drawings and told me to compare them to the markups and sign them. It was a job that the drafting checker had already done, and had done better than I could do, but that's what I was doing. The entire practice was fraudulent because it was being used to satisfy the requirement for a formal and independent design change verification process as required by GE procedures, by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), and by the Atomic Energy Act. It was actually nothing more than a drafting check. At the time, I'd never even heard of either the procedures, the CFR, or the Atomic Energy Act. I was utterly ignorant of the implications of what I was doing. I was in a new situation after having escaped from a bad situation. I was trying to have some hope for the future. I was just trying to do what the boss told me to do.

Ralph happened to be in the office visiting Russ on some other business and glanced at the drawings on my desk. “Oh,” he said. “That’s my system, Reactor Protection System. Why doesn’t it say Nuclear Safety Related at the top of the drawing?” My reaction was, basically, “Huh?” Nobody had even told me that some systems were safety related and others weren’t. Ralph explained that much to me and that was the first training or instruction that I received in my new job. It wasn’t much but it was a start. After that, I slowly began to realize that something was seriously wrong. I wasn’t aware of it at the time, but my professional career began to take a big, slow turn in a different direction.

Shortly after that incident, one of the two manufacturing engineers, Mark Durkton, went elsewhere. Chuck assigned me to a subdivision of the Control Panel Design Unit, the Panel Shop. That also included a new immediate boss, Lee Cobler. He reported to Chuck.

The Panel Shop was where GE built control panels like the ones that you see in control rooms on the news and in the movies. Those control panels actually do exist and they really are as big and as complicated as they appear to be on the TV and in the movies. At least, they were back then. I don’t have any idea what they’re like now. They’re probably worse.

The job in the Panel Shop was a completely different kind of job from the previous ones that I’d done. I was working with a product that was already designed (allegedly) and was actually being built. In some ways, it was a dream job. I was ideally suited to do it. I began to work with the Quality Assurance inspectors and the Assembly personnel, trying to resolve manufacturing problems.

The fact was that the engineering drawings contained so many errors that it was often impossible to build the panels according to the drawings. When I was assigned to that job, I began to correct the errors in the drawings for the control panels for which I was responsible. So far as the Assembly personnel and the Quality Assurance inspectors were concerned, it was an entirely new attitude for an engineer. Previously, the Assembly personnel had often been forced to devise bootleg fixes. Quality Assurance inspectors had been forced to approve them. They’d never before worked with an engineer who actually wanted to correct the engineering drawings. The people in Assembly and Quality Assurance came to admire me. Before long, all of them started coming to me with their problems. I didn’t play the stupid empire building games that engineering managers loved. I worked with whoever I needed to work with and I tried to solve the problems. If necessary, I personally carried Engineering Change Notices (ECNs) around the building, getting the necessary signatures. I could get them issued the same day. The Assembly personnel didn’t have to make bootleg changes any more. The Quality Assurance inspectors didn’t have to approve panels that weren’t made according to the drawings. One of the Leads<sup>14</sup> in the Panel Shop used to get a great big grin on his face every time that he saw me coming. He had two standard statements that he made every time that I walked past his desk in the Panel Shop. If there were women in the vicinity, then he’d say, “That Sammy

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14 A Lead was the supervisor of an Assembly team.

## Outward Bound

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Milam, he don't fool around!" Lacking women in the vicinity, he'd say "That Sammy Milam, he don't fuck around!" Either way, he greatly appreciated my work. I became very popular among the Assembly personnel and Quality Assurance inspectors. Okay, ladies, if you're still reading after this long, then you're on your own. I'm going to stop worrying about warning you about content that you might consider to be offensive. Either man up or get out.

I'll note in passing here a peculiarity of the Assembly teams. Each team usually consisted of people who were all of the same race. Some teams had only Anglos, some teams had only Mexicans, and some teams had only Vietnamese. I asked one of my friends in QA, Diane Taylor, about it. She said that it wasn't intended to be racial prejudice. The teams were arranged that way so that the people on a team could communicate with one another. I asked one of the Panel Shop managers why we didn't specify the ability to speak English as a job requirement. He was aghast. "That would be discrimination!" he exclaimed.

Most of the other engineers quietly respected my efforts to correct the design errors in the engineering drawings. However, I began to make some enemies within engineering management. William Barrentine, the department level engineering manager, three levels above me in the chain of command, once stopped me in the hallway and said, "Sam, you've demeaned yourself as an engineer by even talking to those QA pricks." That's an exact quote. I wasn't in a situation right then where I could write it down and put a date on it, and I forgot to do that later. Nevertheless, I remember it accurately. Such a statement, from that high up in management, tends to make a permanent impression. Even some of the engineers didn't like what I was doing. For example, the other manufacturing engineer, Bill Trader, had long been a thorn in the side of the Assembly people and the Quality Assurance inspectors. He had a list of nonsense answers from which he could select when he received a Corrective Action Request (CAR) from the Panel Shop or from Quality Assurance. Sometimes, he'd declare that the problem didn't affect form, fit, or function and that the panel should be built (or accepted by Quality Assurance) without any changes in the design documents. Sometimes he'd declare that the Assembly people or the Quality Assurance inspectors were using an old revision of the drawing and instruct them to get the current revision. Whatever nonsense answer he gave them, it enabled him to close the CAR. Then he'd go do some research and be ready with a better answer when they sent the same problem back to him on another CAR, two or three days later. When I received a CAR, I did the research and answered the CAR correctly the first time. Bill's method made him look good to engineering management. He answered twice as many CARs as I did in the same amount of time. His method was a constant annoyance to the Assembly people or to the Quality Assurance inspectors. They had to write twice as many CARs to him as they did to me to get a problem solved. It took longer. It gave them an incentive to not try to get the problems corrected at all.

I got tired of looking bad to management, so I went to talk to Lee Cobler about the problem. I told him what Bill was doing. During my entire little speech, Lee never even looked up at me, not even once. He stared at a piece of paper on his desk or at the pencil in his hand. When I was done, he said, "Thank you for telling me that,

Sam”. He was probably the one who taught Bill how to do it that way. I found out later that they were old fishin’ buddies.

The Assembly people and the Quality Assurance inspectors eventually began to ask me for help even on Bill’s panels. That was fine with him. He just sat on his ass while I did all of the work. I wasn’t willing to let him work on any of my panels, which could happen if a problem arose on one of them while I wasn’t there and he was. Therefore, I began to wear a beeper on my belt. Assembly people or Quality Assurance inspectors could call my beeper and, whatever I was doing, I’d stop doing it and go solve the problem for them. I did it for all three shifts. On more than one occasion I got up during the middle of the night or on Sunday morning and drove across town to GE, to help somebody in the Panel Shop.

I encountered a lot of problems that ought never to have existed. Dimensions were wrong. At least one such error was malicious. I know that for a fact because the dimension had been correct on the previous revision of the drawing. It was wrong on the current revision of the drawing. I looked at every ECN that had been issued for changes between the previous revision and the current revision. None of the ECNs specified a change anywhere on that part of the drawing. The draftsman had made a random and malicious change on a part of the drawing that wasn’t being changed by the ECNs. None of the drafting checkers or engineers had noticed it because nobody was verifying changes on that part of the drawing. There weren’t supposed to be any changes on that part of the drawing. I notified Lee Cobler and tried to get him to inform the management in the Drafting Department. He didn’t want to be bothered. He said, “Just fix it.”

There were a lot of other problems. For example, holes for switches were sometimes so close together that both switches couldn’t be inserted into the holes at the same time because they were in each other’s way. When that happened, I had to correct the drawing and then instruct the Assembly people to remove all of the installed devices from the panel and send it back to the Fab Shop. In the Fab Shop, they’d manually weld a patch into one or more holes and then cut new holes. The panels were fabricated from 1/4 inch thick steel plate so it wasn’t a light-duty job. It caused a considerable production delay for the panel. Engineering management hated me for doing that kind of thing.

On a few occasions, horizontal stiffeners were so close to the rows of holes for switches that the switch contacts shorted against the stiffeners during panel testing. On those occasions, I ordered that all installed wiring and devices had to be removed and the panel had to be sent back to the Fab Shop. I corrected the drawing, the stiffeners were removed, and new stiffeners were welded into place in the correct locations. Of course, the panels also had to be repainted. I once observed Bill Trader’s resolution of that same problem. He had them tape a piece of Mylar on the top of the stiffener. He didn’t even add tape and Mylar to the parts list. Such problems didn’t result from errors in the Fab Shop or in the Panel Shop. They resulted from errors in the engineering drawings. Engineering management didn’t like to acknowledge that and correcting an error on an engineering drawing was a form of acknowledgment.

## Outward Bound

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Many of the projects that we were building at the time were unit 2 of a plant for which we'd already built and shipped unit 1. The same design documents were used for both units. When it was clearly impossible to build unit 2 according to the design documents, and when we all knew that unit 1 had already been shipped, then we all knew that unit 1 had not been built according to the drawings. That's where I first encountered a comical a parody of compliance with Military Standards. It was a statement made by Virginia Woldow. Her attitude was that of an engineer, not that of the people in the Panel Shop or in Quality Assurance. Nevertheless, it was a funny comment. When faced with yet another example of something that wasn't made according to the drawing, she glumly commented, "Mil TP-41 applies." Mil TP-41 stands for "Make It Like The Print, For Once!" However, to give Virginia the credit that is justly due, she also said, "There would be nothing worse than if they actually built a panel exactly to print."<sup>15</sup>

Virginia Woldow was one of the rare few female engineers that I ever encountered who didn't turn everything into a feminist confrontation. She was a good example of how women could and should work around men. She didn't whine about so-called sexist terminology. She didn't try to get us fired for telling jokes. She didn't gasp in horror at pinups. She never made a big deal out of being female. She just did her job and did it well. I recall one incident that revealed her cool and level-headed acceptance of our masculine foibles. Russ Thompson and I were talking to some other engineer who was visiting us in our cubical and whose identity I've since forgotten. We were joking about something. We'd forgotten about Virginia, in the next cubical. I don't remember who said what but it had something to do with women. Suddenly Virginia laughed and said, over the cubical wall, "You guys make me feel like a den mother at a Cub Scout camp!" The other engineer went back to his cubical. Russ and I got back to work. Virginia Woldow was an unacknowledged example for the feminists.

Anyway, back to my story. When unit 2 couldn't be built according to the drawings it posed a dilemma for me. I had to find out what bootleg modification had been made on unit 1 so that I could change the drawings to match the actual as-shipped configuration of unit 1. Then, we could build unit 2 the same way. What I had to do was to call the site and ask somebody to go to the unit 1 control room and measure something for me, so that I could correct the drawing. I eventually discovered that our field engineering group, the engineers who corrected things at the plants, had more engineers in it than any other engineering group in the entire organization. As they say, it's a hell of a way to run a railroad.

Eventually, problems with change control prompted somebody somewhere in management to issue rubber stamps to those few engineers who had the authority to make changes during production. I'm not aware that there was ever a provision added to the Engineering Operating Procedures (EOP) to formalize the procedure. It was just another of those home-grown bootleg procedures that management kept inventing. Whatever the case, each stamp had a unique number. The ECNs were already signed by the engineer who'd made the change (per EOP) but some nitwit

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<sup>15</sup> Tuesday, September 12, 1978

thought that the unique numbers on the stamps would add some control to the change process. One day when I was working in my office, somebody came up from the production floor and told me that Lee Cobler wanted to borrow my stamp so that he could make a change to one of my panels. I had a stamp and he didn't. I was authorized to make such changes and he wasn't. I didn't know what change he wanted to make to one of my panels and I didn't particularly want to argue with him about it. The fact is that I didn't trust him with my panels. By then, there weren't very many people in engineering management that I did trust. If he used my stamp then it would appear that I'd made the change and I'd never be able to prove otherwise. I refused to loan the stamp to him. He was my immediate boss. He wasn't happy about it when I wouldn't loan him my stamp.

The engineering drawings weren't the only place where there were problems. The system of operating procedures was very complex and seldom followed. Problems with operating procedures were exacerbated by ignorant or arrogant managers who were more interested in their prerogatives than they were in following the operating procedures. Empire building is what we called it. A good example of empire building occurred at a meeting of the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, back at my previous position. I'll digress here, briefly, and describe what happened at that meeting.

One day while I was back in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit, Dave Weiss came galloping into the office and told us all to write for him a forecast of our projects for the next year. What a joke. We didn't know what he'd be telling us to do later the same day. Nevertheless, he wanted a complete list of our projects for the next year, including man-hour estimates. He said that he needed it for a resources forecast that his manager was requiring him to make. So, we all sat down and dreamed up some projects and the man-hours that we thought that it might take to complete them. The next day, we all filed obediently into Dave's office and sat down. He had each of us recite to him our anticipated projects and the estimated man-hours. He wrote them all on his blackboard and then added up the total manpower that the Advanced Fuel Design Unit would need for the coming year. When he saw the total, he gasped and said, "Oh no! That'll never do! That's what I already have!" Then he went back through the list of our projects that he'd written on the blackboard and "figured out" where a project would need more man-hours than we'd estimated. I think that he also dreamed up a few extra projects. Finally, he said, "There! That's enough! Now I can justify hiring another man!" We succeeded in not laughing at him until we were all back in our office. That's how he justified hiring Bill Jamison. Empire building. The more men you have under you, the bigger man you are. He was a big nitwit.

That incident reminds me of something that I saw Larry do once. As long as I've digressed anyway, I'll relate another mind-game from my days in the Advanced Fuel Design Unit. I surreptitiously observed a lot of such things when people didn't know that I was paying attention. This is one of those things. Larry had completed some calculation and had obtained a different answer than the one that he had expected. He was mostly muttering to himself but I was listening from across the cubical. He complained that the number was too small. So, he went through the calculation again, looking for an error. He found an error but it corrected the answer too much,

## Outward Bound

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making the number too large. He went back again, looking for another error. I quietly observed him from across the room as he continued to mutter about what he was doing. He kept looking for errors and correcting them until he got the answer that he wanted. When he had the answer that he wanted, he stopped looking for errors. His success at obtaining the expected answer didn't prove that he'd found all of the errors. It proved only that he'd found a combination of errors that, when corrected, gave him the expected answer. From that process, I wrote what I call *The Mistake Optimization Hypothesis*.

There always exists in any finished calculation some combination of undetected errors which, when discovered and corrected, will provide the desired answer.

—Friday, April 8, 1977

That's enough digression for now. I'll continue with my activities in the Control Panel Design Unit.

In the Panel Shop, I worked hard to correct the errors in the engineering drawings but, as an engineer, I had an almost instinctive aversion to written operating procedures. By golly, I knew how to do the job and I didn't need some bureaucrat to write an operating procedure to tell me how to do it. One day, my attitude toward written operating procedures took a sharp turn in a different direction. It was a consequence of the Internal Sheet on our ECNs. That Internal Sheet had a space for the signature of the engineer who was making a change to an engineering drawing. Engineers frequently forgot to sign on that particular line because there wasn't much on the Internal Sheet that we considered to be important. Consequently, we didn't pay a lot of attention to it. The drafting Checker, Mike Howley, delighted in catching that error and bringing an ECN back to the engineer who was responsible for it and getting him to sign that particular line.

One day I was in the office of Diane Taylor, the Quality Assurance inspector who I mentioned earlier, when Mike Howley tracked me down. He reminded me that I hadn't signed on the internal sheet of the ECN that he was processing. I signed it but I noticed that Diane was smirking behind his back. After Mike was gone, she said, "You know you don't really have to sign that."

"Why not?" I asked.

She said, "That signature's optional. It says so right in their own procedure." She took her copy of the Drafting Procedures Manual from her shelf and showed me. Before that, I hadn't even known that there was a Drafting Procedures Manual. However, right there in the manual was the notation "signature optional".

Diane was eventually transferred to the site support function, called Quality Assurance Site Support. I used to tease her by telling her that the acronym for her organization was Quality ASS and that she was the unit's mascot. She wasn't quite as cool as Virginia Woldow but she was still pretty level-headed about feminist crap. At least she didn't get me fired because of a joke.

The next time that I wrote an ECN I didn't sign the Internal Sheet. When Mike Howley brought the ECN back to me, I had a copy of his procedure ready to show

him. He backed down immediately. It changed my attitude toward written operating procedures. It revealed to me that I could use them in my own defense or for my own purposes. After that, I began to study them. It wasn't obvious to me at the time but it was just another part of that big change in the direction of my professional career that I mentioned earlier, in connection with Ralph Balmer's Reactor Protection System drawings.

Another feature of the Internal Sheet was the cost estimate. The engineer who issued an ECN was expected to estimate the cost of implementing the change. Nobody had even the remotest idea of what the cost of a particular change would be. As a consequence, we always put the same number in the space for the cost estimate. I asked several people about the number. Nobody knew much about it. The consensus was that somebody, somewhere, at some time in the past had figured out the number and that management had decreed that it should be consistently used. Also, nobody had any idea whether or not anybody actually used the number for anything after an ECN was issued. I couldn't discover the source of the number but I did figure out a way to test the system to see if anybody was actually using the information.

I had obtained, somewhere, a little plastic game called Waterful Water Works. The little game was about 8 inches tall, about six inches wide, and about 1 1/2 inches thick. It was a small transparent tank that could be filled with water. It had a little plunger at the bottom. The plunger operated a small pump at the bottom of the tank that squirted the water inside of the tank. Also inside of the tank there were two plastic spikes, pointing up, and some little colored plastic rings. The colored rings would be propelled upward toward the top of the tank when the little plunger was pushed and would then drift back down to the bottom of the tank. Sometimes, while drifting down, they'd randomly fall over the spikes. I arbitrarily assigned numbers to different colors of rings on different spikes. What it amounted to was a random number generator. I put a little label on the game that said Internal Sheet Cost Estimate Calculator. I left it sitting right out on my desk but very few people even noticed it. Diane did of course. She was very sharp about that kind of thing. For the remainder of my time in that job, I used the Waterful Water Works Internal Sheet Cost Estimate Calculator as my source of engineering cost estimates, to the cent. The size of the numbers that I put on the ECNs varied widely and randomly. Nobody ever asked me where I got the numbers. Nobody but Diane even cared. She was amused. I concluded that the numbers weren't ever used for anything and that nobody was even looking at them.

After my big change of opinion regarding written operating procedures, I began to read them. I learned that I'd been routinely violating the Atomic Energy Act, the Code of Federal Regulations, a good many industry standards, most of GE's written operating procedures, and various contracts with various customers. Nobody told me. I just learned it by reading. The violations were such a normal part of the standard practice of the organization that most people didn't even care. The secretaries didn't even have some of the required forms because nobody ever used them. The more I learned, the more intractable I became.

## Outward Bound

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At this point, I'd like to emphasize particular wording of Section 223(b) of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended. I've underlined some particularly important parts. The underlines are not a part of the actual Act. I'll also note for the record that this verbiage is from the version of the Act that was in effect at the time. I don't have any idea what the Act says today.

“Any individual director, officer, or employee of a firm constructing, or supplying the components of any utilization facility required to be licensed under sections 103 or 104 b. of this Act who by act or omission, in connection with such construction or supply, knowingly and willfully violates or causes to be violated, any section of this Act, any rule, regulation, or order issued thereunder, or any license condition, which violation results or if undetected could have resulted in a significant impairment of a basic component of such facility shall, upon conviction, be subject to a fine of not more than \$25,000 for each day of violation, or to imprisonment not to exceed two years, or both.”

I was such an employee. My name was on the dotted line for lots of engineering design changes. Remember those drawings that I was verifying when Ralph Balmer made me aware of the existence of safety related systems? The wording of the Atomic Energy Act can easily be construed to mean that I was liable not just for doing something wrong but also for failing to do something right. That is — knowingly and omission — knowingly omitting to correct an error in a design for which I had signed as the Responsible Design Engineer or as the Responsible Verifying Engineer. The Act also provides that my error didn't need to cause an accident. If my error made an accident possible, then that was a sufficient reason to punish me. That became a lot more important later, in my job in the Technical Licensing Support Unit. I'll write about that later in this memoir.

While I was learning to provide engineering support in the Panel Shop, Ralph Balmer left the company to go to work for one of those new little semiconductor startup companies, up the peninsula. Way back in the 70s, Ralph thought that the future was in semiconductor devices. Weird fellow. At GE, we were still using great big CR-2940 switches and huge clacking electromechanical relays. I remember being viewed askance when I casually mentioned the possibility of putting an entire control panel on a chip. Anyway, GE had some difficulty finding a qualified replacement for Ralph after he left the company. Eventually, they hired an Indian (turbans, not feathers) away from a company in southern California. By the time that he was on the job, I was beginning to work more closely with the Systems Engineers, learning about such things as nuclear safety related devices, essential codes on parts lists, and that sort of thing. It was administrative, not technical, but given the Atomic Energy Act, previously quoted, it was still important. Anyway, the fellow (I can't remember his name) stayed for only a few months and then he gave his termination notice. I'd thought that he was turning into a fine Systems Engineer and I hated to see him leave. I asked him if there wasn't something that the company could do to keep him, like maybe give him a pay raise or something. He shook his head sadly and said, “No Sam, it isn't the money. The problem is that there are things wrong with the designs and they won't let me fix them.” I should have left with him. The fines and penalties noted in the Atomic Energy Act, quoted above, were significant. Take a second look at the number of zeros in that fine per day of violation. I worked at GE for 10 years.

That's a lot of days. You can bet that I became a self-taught expert on the rules. I acquired my own copy of Title 10 of the Code of Federal Regulations. So far as I know, I was the only person in the company, engineer, manager, or otherwise, who had one. I also requested custodianship of the various controlled procedure stations in our area because they were all out-of-date and I was the only one who was interested in maintaining them. It also gave me the opportunity to read them.

I eventually became such a thorn in the side of engineering management that I was relocated to a new job. It was a very unusual situation and I was forewarned of it by Sophia Renda, one of my good friends among the Assembly people. She took me aside one day and quietly told me that she'd been in the hallway the previous day and had heard my boss, Lee Cobler, arranging with another manager, Bob Reghitto, to place me in an open position that the other manager was preparing to post in the company's job posting system. They completely sidestepped the entire job posting system and arranged the transfer for me. I didn't even apply for the job. Lee Cobler just called me into his office the next day and suggested that it would be a good career move for me to accept the offer. At the time, it seemed more like a threat than a suggestion.

### Technical Licensing Support Unit

They made a big mistake. The job to which they transferred me was in the Technical Licensing Support Unit, which I've already mentioned a few paragraphs back. Engineers in that unit interfaced with GE's Licensing Department and, thereby, indirectly did a lot of work for both the customers and for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). For example, we verified the content of the Preliminary Safety Analysis Reports (PSARs) and the Final Safety Analysis Reports (FSARs) for various projects. That involved comparing the claims and statements in those documents with the actual design drawings to make sure that the design drawings actually specified and provided what was proclaimed in the PSARs and the FSARs. We also responded to questions from both customers and from the NRC.

My first boss in that position was George Stramback, who reported to Bob Reghitto. Bob Reghitto reported to Dave Reigel. Dave Reigel reported to William Barrentine. William Barrentine already didn't like me. You might recall that I mentioned him a few paragraphs back. He thought that I'd demeaned myself as an engineer by even talking to the QA people, to whom he referred in his statement as "pricks". The new job was still in hostile territory.

During my very first meeting with George Stramback, he explained to me about our job of responding to questions from customers and from the NRC. He explained that the process wasn't called Q&As, for Questions and Answers. It was called Q&Rs, for Questions and Responses. The reason, he explained, was because the response probably wasn't really the answer. He was completely unapologetic about it. His attitude seemed very similar to that of Bill Trader, in the Panel Shop, who routinely dodged CARs with phony answers. You might begin to suspect that obfuscation was a common part of GE's corporate culture. You might be right.

## Outward Bound

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In an ethical company, the Technical Licensing Support Unit would have been an excellent job for me. I was already well versed in the various regulations and procedures by which the company was allegedly regulated. In the new job, my expertise only increased. However, it wasn't an ethical company. It was GE's Nuclear Energy Division, in San Jose, California. I don't remember how long I worked in the Technical Licensing Support Unit but I became increasingly unwilling to participate in the violations of the written operating procedures, the lies, and the deceptions. Such unethical behavior was the standard for the entire engineering organization but the Technical Licensing Support Unit turned out to be the worst of the bunch. There were many instances of such misbehavior.

One example was the nimble way that GE management scrambled the responsibility for the verification of designs and design changes. Design change verification ought to have been independent of the original design verification. Also, design changes were required to receive a level of verification commensurate to that of the original design. Those requirements were embedded in GE's Engineering Operating Procedures (EOP) and originated in the Atomic Energy Act and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). In the Technical Licensing Support Unit, such things were avoided. Responsibility for designs was routinely but temporarily reassigned. There were times, in that job, when I was temporarily assigned responsibility for designs that contained errors that I wasn't permitted to correct. On one such occasion, I was temporarily assigned the design responsibility for the Recirculation Flow Control System. The EOP granted such Responsible Design Engineers the authority to select a verifier for their design work. However, I was required by letter, an uncontrolled and non-retrievable document, to use as my verifier the engineer who was designated in the letter. The letter was, itself, a violation of the EOP. That letter specified that the engineer that I was required to use was the man who ordinarily was the Responsible Design Engineer for the Recirculation Flow Control System. I wasn't permitted to select my own verifier, per EOP, and I couldn't get the designated verifier to sign the corrections that I wanted to make. He said, "Sure it's wrong but if we correct it for this plant then we'll have to correct it for all of them." It was from that incident that I formalized the statement, "Within any bureaucracy, it's safer to be consistently wrong than to be right some of the time." The statement is presently included in *Another Compendium of Wit and Wisdom*. In that assignment, as in others in the Technical Licensing Support Unit, I was unofficially instructed by the man who was normally the Responsible Design Engineer to make certain design changes. The instruction was, in effect, mandatory because I was required to use him as the verifier and he wouldn't verify any change other than the one that he wanted me to make. I was required to be the Responsible Design Engineer for those changes. The man who was normally the Responsible Design Engineer, and who had instructed me to make the changes, then signed as the Verifying Engineer. So the design changes were dictated by the engineer who was normally the Responsible Engineer, made by an engineer who didn't have any control over the changes, me, and verified by the engineer who dictated the changes, all under the authority of uncontrolled and non-retrievable letters, and in violation of the EOP and the CFR. It was a normal way of doing things in the Techni-

cal Licensing Support Unit. The process made a mockery of the concept of independent design verification, of the EOP, and of the CFR.

Another example that I recall was a home-grown document that we used in that unit. We called it an Engineering Change Memorandum (ECM). Those documents were written on the standard ECN form, which made them look authentic. However, we didn't issue them through the normal ECN issue cycle. We just informally gave them to other engineers, in other parts of the organization. Also, we had our own little home-grown system for numbering the things. The numbers made them look even more authentic. However, the numbers weren't issued by any controlling source. We just made them up as we needed them. There wasn't anything to guarantee that any ECM number was unique. Any number of different ECMs could theoretically have had the same number. They weren't revision controlled. They weren't authorized in any written operating procedure. There weren't any controls for either their issue cycle or for their disposition. They weren't retrievable from the Document Control System. They merely looked official. We just wrote them and gave them to the engineer who, presumably, would make the change. Nobody who received an ECM had any obligation at all to make the design change that was documented on it. As often as not, a responsible engineer in some other part of the engineering organization who received an ECM from us would simply sneer scornfully and throw it in the trash.

So what was the purpose of ECMs? Whenever we had a request for a design change from the NRC or from a customer, via the Licensing Department, we'd write an ECM and send a copy to Licensing. They'd transmit it to the NRC or to the customer, as appropriate, as proof that the change was being made. The behavior was flagrantly fraudulent. We were promising design changes that, as often as not, we didn't have any intention whatsoever of actually making. Near the end of my time at GE, I spoke over the telephone to one of the men in the Licensing Department. He was aghast when he learned the true nature of our ECMs. I was the first engineer who'd ever dared to tell the truth to anybody in Licensing. He and everybody in Licensing had believed that ECMs were controlled, retrievable documents. They'd believed that the changes documented on ECMs would surely happen. That's what they'd been telling the customers and the NRC. That man, whose name I no longer remember, wanted to start working covertly with me to solve the problem. I was delighted at the prospect. Sadly, I didn't stay in the company long enough to work with him.

The ECM situation was only one of many such problems. Undoubtedly the most notorious of such problems was deferred verifications. I eventually obtained from Diane Taylor, of QA, documentation showing that the attempts to solve that particular problem went back at least as far as July of 1976, at which time it was already an old problem. A copy of that documentation is included on pages 17 through 23 of my report *Deferred Verifications*. It revealed that, over the years, many people had tried unsuccessfully to solve the problem of deferred verifications.

The deferred verification problem followed from a requirement in the Code of Federal Regulations at 10 CFR 50 Appendix B. That provision required that design changes must receive verification commensurate with the verification that had been received

## Outward Bound

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by the original design. In fact, design changes didn't usually receive more than a cursory verification. I've already mentioned, a few paragraphs back, one method of minimizing the verification of design changes. In some cases, design changes didn't receive any verification at all. For those cases, a process called Deferred Verification had evolved. That process was addressed, at least in part, in EOP 42-6.00, paragraph 4.1.2. A copy of that page of the EOP is shown in the report *Deferred Verifications*. By the process of Deferred Verification, the claim was made that the design change would eventually be verified. The procedure and a controlled tracking system specified in the EOP might have been used by people in other parts of GE but it was never used by anybody in Engineering. Indeed, when I discovered the requirement, the other engineers were completely unaware of it. There was a required form, the Design Verification Status Change Notice (DVSCN), that the secretaries in Engineering didn't even have. Nobody in Engineering had ever asked for one. I had to copy the required form directly from the procedures manual because the forms weren't otherwise available.

I began to use the DVSCN form. I began to use the tracking system. Fortunately, that tracking system was maintained by another department. If it had resided in Engineering, then it wouldn't have been operational at all. The people at the 10th Street facility, who ran the tracking system, were surprised when they began to receive DVSCNs from Engineering. When I discussed the situation with them, they were delighted at what I was doing.

Whenever I made a design change, I usually took input from other design documents. After doing some research, I learned how to determine if such source documents had deferred verifications in their change history. The method that I developed was to request a copy of every ECN that had ever been issued for every change that had ever been made to any document that I was using as a source of information for the change that I was making. In almost every case, there would be, in the change history of each document, at least one ECN with a deferred verification that had never been resolved. That alerted me to the fact that, somewhere in that document, there was information that was unverified. In every such case, I declared my design change to be unverifiable, due to unverified input. That revealed and identified the old unverified documents. It also created pressure to verify them, because I was causing the number of unverified documents in the previously unused tracking system to snowball. Since I was putting the information into the tracking system where it was visible to auditors, it couldn't be ignored. I was becoming a real pain in the ass for Engineering management.

One fascinating thing that I learned was that it was usually impossible to verify the old design changes. That was true because the required information had been lost. Sometimes the people who'd been involved in the unverified design changes didn't even work at GE any more. Sometimes nobody even remembered them. I was making a lot of design changes that were unverified and, indeed, unverifiable. I had the tacit support of some of the people within the ranks of Engineering and the open support of almost everybody outside of Engineering. However, Engineering management became really annoyed with me.

My efforts to correct the many procedural problems caused a problem with my yearly performance appraisal that year. I don't remember for sure, but I believe that I didn't last long enough in that position to receive a second yearly performance appraisal. Anyway, the appraisal form had a location in which the manager could note any areas in which his employee needed improvement. George Stramback had noted in that section that I should be a little more casual in my approach to things. He accused me of being "accurate in the extreme", an inappropriate criticism of a nuclear engineer. I looked him right in the eyes and said, "If you want me to work to your quality standard then you'll have to sign my work. As long as I have to sign my own work then I'll work to my own quality standard." He didn't make a reply but his face got red and he changed the subject. Some time after that, he left the unit to go to another position somewhere and Arnie Kozlow, one of the unit's engineers, became the acting manager.

In March of 1982, I submitted my final design task. Of course, I didn't know at the time that it was my final design task. It was in compliance with all of the various rules. It included the required DVSCN, declaring that the design change was unverified due to unverified input. I was no longer as naive as I had once been so I kept track of the design change package at those locations where it became visible to me as it proceeded through the issue cycle. Since I had friends within the ranks, I was often covertly notified of things that I needed to know. One of those friends was Mike Howley, the Checker in the Drafting Department. A few years earlier, he'd been one of my adversaries. That was when I was still a dyed-in-the-wool engineer. As I'd spent more time working with Assembly people and Quality Assurance inspectors in my job in the Panel Shop, and more time learning about the written operating procedures, my attitude toward the Drafting Department had changed. In response, the attitudes toward me of the people in the Drafting Department had also changed. So, when my design task arrived at Mike Howley's desk in the Drafting Department, I became aware of some changes that had been made to it. They were serious changes and constituted a falsification of controlled documents. The changes claimed the existence of verification records that didn't exist in the Design Record Files (DRF) where those verification records were claimed to be. The required DVSCN, the formal record that verification was being deferred, had been completely removed from the design change package. The changes were violations of 10CFR50 Appendix B and of various written operating procedures, primarily the EOP, by which we were all allegedly governed. The changes had been made without my knowledge or consent. They'd been made over my signature, making me responsible for them. Such falsification of my work wasn't the exception. It was the rule. That's why I'd started watching my paperwork so carefully. I'd complained several years earlier to Lee Cobler that my ECNs were being changed after my signature and without my knowledge or consent. He refused to do anything about it. Subsequently, I accumulated an entire three-ring binder full of "before and after" copies of my changed ECNs. Nobody cared. Nobody would even look at them. I couldn't get anything done about it.

When I learned of the changes to that design package, I retrieved it and thanked my good friend Mike Howley. I removed the false references to the DRF, wrote a new

## Outward Bound

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DVSCN, and re-submitted the job. Again, it was changed. Again, I became aware of the changes. Again, I retrieved the design change package and thanked my good friend Mike Howley. Again I corrected it. However, I didn't re-submit it. I misfiled it in my file cabinet and waited.

On Wednesday of that week my boss, acting manager Arnie Kozlow, asked me if the design change package had been issued. I told him that it had not been issued. He asked when it would be issued. I told him that I didn't intend to issue it at all. He asked why and I told him about the changes. He reminded me that the package was due on Friday. I reminded him that it had taken me several months to do the job. I suggested that they could start over with a different engineer and try to finish it from scratch in two days or they could let me issue it correctly. He went away puzzled about my attitude. On Friday, Arnie agreed to let me do it my way. On the first of the next month, I received a letter dated April 1, 1982 notifying me that I was being laid off due to lack of work, effective on April 30, 1982. The excess work being farmed out to subcontractors at the time was all outside of my areas of expertise, which had become rather limited. I was qualified only for work that was in compliance with all of the various regulations and written operating procedures. There wasn't much of that kind of work being done at GE.

Just about the time that I received my layoff notice, acting manager Arnie Kozlow was replaced with a new, permanent manager. His name was Tom Wortham. He seemed to have much better management skills than most of the other managers in the place. Most GE managers were former engineers who'd been promoted to management positions from within the ranks. They might have been good engineers but they were lousy managers. The company hadn't been able to find anybody internally who'd take the job when George Stramback had gone away, so Tom Wortham had been hired from the outside. The difficulty of finding a qualified and willing candidate from within the ranks was the reason that Arnie had been acting as manager. By the way, nobody asked me to take the job.

Before I left the premises for the last time, Tom Wortham took me aside and circumspectly confided something to me. He said that, since he'd taken over the job, a period of about 30 days, every engineer in the unit, without exception, had come to him privately and urged him to try to get the layoff action canceled. Each and every engineer, he told me, was of the opinion that I was a valuable employee, that what I was trying to do was important, and that the company needed me. He said that he'd tried and that it just couldn't be done. "Somebody," he said, "has convinced Barrentine that we don't need you and there's nothing that I can do to change his mind."

I know who was the culprit. It was Arnie Kozlow's manager, Bob Reghitto. He reported, through Dave Reigel, to William Barrentine. A year or so earlier, Bob Reghitto become my arch enemy as a result of an incautious guess that I made in his presence that turned out to be exactly accurate. I'd been complaining about one of our local procedures that was in conflict with the higher-level EOP. I ventured an opinion. I said that, based on the wording of the local procedure and on my experience with such things, it appeared to me that GE had been dinged on an audit at some time in the

past for a violation of the EOP. It appeared, I speculated, that some idiot had written the local procedure to placate the auditors, without having sense enough to just change the EOP. I noticed, when I made the comment, that Bob Reghitto's lips got thin and his face turned red. I found out later, from somebody in our training department, that my guess was exactly correct and that Bob Reghitto was the idiot who'd written the local procedure.

The fact is that I ran afoul of Bob Reghitto several times after that. He was the one who was changing my work on that last assignment, the work that I retrieved and misfiled. He was the one who'd added the false DRF reference and thrown my DVSCN into the trash, twice. When Arnie Kozlow couldn't get me to issue the job, he took the problem to Bob Reghitto, his immediate manager. It was Bob Reghitto who talked to Barrentine, probably directly, bypassing Dave Reigel. William Barrentine already thought that I'd demeaned my self as an engineer by working with the QA people. Barrentine became convinced that I had to go. At a subsequent exit interview with Bob Reghitto, I asked him if my layoff had anything to do with deferred verifications. He looked me right in the eye and, with a perfectly straight face, he told me no. He said that the company just didn't have enough work to justify keeping me.

Regarding all of those lowly engineers who implored Tom Wortham to find a way to keep me, it's nice that they all recognized the value of what I was trying to do. I'm supposed to be grateful for their concern, right? No. They just cowered behind their desks and watched from a safe distance to see if I could accomplish anything alone. Yes, I got some encouragement and even a little help from people who worked outside of engineering. The only help or encouragement that I ever got from anybody who worked for Barrentine was a private comment by Vern Blanchette. He commented once, "Sam, the difference is that other people read with their eyes. You read with your brain". They were a bunch of wimps and yes-men, even the women. If I'd received some help, then maybe we could have fixed things and maybe I wouldn't have lost my job. Grateful for their concern? Not a chance.

I notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and got involved with some lawyers from the Institute for Policy Studies, a division of the Government Accountability Project. I eventually had an investigative interview with the NRC. Some time later, I received a draft version of the transcript of that interview.<sup>16</sup> I never received a final version. I also wrote a report and submitted it to the NRC.<sup>17</sup>

The lawyers did their thing and the NRC launched an investigation. After a while, I began to notice how busy everybody was and how much job security they all had, mostly due to my allegations. I also noticed that I was the only one who was laid off. Nobody was doing anything to try to get my job back for me. Eventually, I realized that there weren't any corrections being made at GE. It finally occurred to me that if the problems were ever solved, then most of those guys would be out of work. I started to view the ongoing investigations, responses, reviews, letters, audit reports,

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16 *United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, In the Matter of: Investigative Interview of Sam A. Milam III*, Location: San Jose, California, Date: Wednesday, April 16, 1986

17 *Deferred Verifications*, July 11, 1983

## Outward Bound

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charges, and counter-charges with a growing degree of skepticism. I realized that, at GE, confusing the auditors is their most important product. Eventually, I completely lost interest in the process. By the way, my experiences at GE were one of the main motivations for my essay, *Liability, Ltd.: Corpus Corporatum and Corpus Delicti*.

There's one last interesting comment to the story of my efforts to correct the rampant unethical practices at GE. Several years later, I was having a problem with my new Macintosh computer and I located another Mac user in the San Jose area who was reputed to be an expert. I don't remember his name. He gave me the help that I needed and, after a few conversations over the telephone, he mentioned that he worked at GE. I told him that I'd previously worked there but that I'd been laid off. He exclaimed in surprise, "What? You mean your THAT Milam?!?" I admitted that I was. He said, "They still talk about you here." It turned out that, in certain circles, I'd become a bit of a folk hero. I'd tried to vanquish the evil forces, I'd been defeated, and I'd been sent into exile. Who knows? Maybe some people even hoped that some day I'd return riding a great white charger, clad in shining armor, and brandishing a mighty sword. Disappointment springs eternal in the human breast. Anyway, he informed me that a lot of people were aware of the problems that I'd tried to solve, that they all wished that I'd succeeded, and that nothing had changed. He confirmed my suspicion that everything that had been wrong before was still wrong. "They're still doing everything just the same as before," he said.

There's one interesting item that doesn't have anything at all to do with my work at GE. It was while I was working in the GE Panel Shop that I met a machinist who claimed to have had a free lunch. I don't remember his name but he was a lathe operator in the GE machine shop. I met him in connection with my efforts to obtain a lathe for the machine shop that I hoped to own myself, some day. Here's the story as the man told it to me.

One day, just as he was shutting down his lathe for lunch, his boss was being taken to lunch by a salesman. As the boss and the salesman walked past the machinist and his lathe, the salesman invited the man to join them for lunch. The boss didn't seem to object so the machinist accepted the invitation. Later, he tried to find some hidden cost in the incident. He didn't have any authority to make a decision regarding what the salesman was trying to sell, so he didn't acquire any obligation as a consequence of the favor. He didn't have to spend any time on the lunch that he wouldn't have had to spend on lunch anyway, since he'd planned to go somewhere for lunch. Transportation was provided. Search as he might, he couldn't find any price, of any kind whatsoever, that he'd paid for the lunch. It appeared to be a genuine instance of a free lunch.

While I worked at GE, there was one non job-related situation by which I recall being annoyed. It didn't seem to be of great significance at the time but, unknown to me at the time, it was a harbinger of my future. It foreshadowed the escalating intrusion of government policy and corporate policy into my personal affairs. It was, probably, a more significant indicator of my future than any of the work-related problems with which I dealt while I was at GE. I just didn't realize it at the time. That particular incident happened sometime during early 1977. It was a financial disclosure form

that GE circulated to all employees on which we were all required to disclose any, each, and every business interest that we had. Such business interests included investments, other employment, or other associations, gifts or favors, and other activities. I thought that it was an offensive intrusion by GE into matters that I considered to be nobody's business but my own. For a while, I refused to complete the form, as did various other employees. However, we were all assured that we'd be fired if we refused to cooperate. In fact, I recall a letter to all employees which included a list of the names of all of the people who hadn't yet completed the questionnaire. It was my first real job. I'd been raised all of my life to work hard and to do as I was told. I'd been taught to work within the system. I didn't like the questionnaire but I didn't know what to do. I had a wife, a mortgage payment, a cat, and so forth. Eventually, I completed the questionnaire. However, I wasn't completely submissive, even then. I accompanied the questionnaire with a memo, shown on the next page.

For many years after I left GE, I had distressing dreams about the job. Sometimes, in a dream, I'd suddenly remember that I had forgotten to go to work for the past six months. I'd hurry to work and, when I get there, nobody had noticed that I was gone. Usually, I couldn't find my desk or even my office. Everything had been moved. All of the personal property that I'd taken to work had been appropriated by other people who thought that it was company property. I couldn't even find the people in my group. I couldn't even remember who they were. I'd been receiving paychecks right along and I wondered why. The dream always deteriorated into a hopeless and aimless episode of wandering around the halls in the 10<sup>th</sup> Street facility, looking into cubicles, seeing strangers who ignored me. I haven't had the dream in a long time. Maybe it's gone. I hope so. I used to wake up from it trembling.

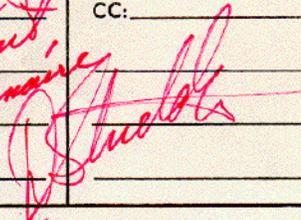
GENERAL ELECTRIC

TO Survey  
M/C 300  
(San Jose)

DATE 1 March 1977

CC:

*May I remind you -  
You wasted ten times as  
much time composing  
this letter as you  
"wasted" filling out  
the questionnaire.*



SUBJECT Outside Business Interests

Reference: Acknowledgement of Policy 4.2 and Questionnaire on Employees' Outside Business Interests.

This letter is an additional response to the referenced questionnaire, which I consider to be a typical example of how bureaucracies waste everybody's time. If (as is stated in the form) my actions are governed by loyalty and integrity, then I can be trusted to point out conflicts of interest on my own, as soon as they occur. In this case the questionnaire is to no purpose. If, on the other hand, my actions are not governed by loyalty and integrity, I will simply answer "no" in all of the appropriate places and no one will be the wiser. (I have, in fact, answered "no" in all the appropriate places. You may worry about it if you wish.) The only people who benefit from forms such as the referenced questionnaire are our competitors, who may joyfully contemplate the hours that we waste on nonsense, and possibly a few politicians whose images are bettered at our expense by the sad fiction of legislated integrity.

Sam A. Milam III

M/C 155

56140

SIGN YOUR NAME PLAINLY

COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS

PHONE/DIAL COMM.

FN-316-A (2-74) Rev.

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**J. R. Hodges**

Concurrently with my early years at GE, I had hopes of building a small machine shop in my garage. I intended to do one-of-a-kind specialty jobs and charge a lot for them. In pursuance of that plan, I gradually acquired various tools. One of those tools was a 12x36 engine lathe that I bought from J. R. Hodges. The lathe was a Suncon lathe, made in Taiwan. The metal was acceptable but the lathe had so many electrical problems that I went repeatedly back to J. R. because of them.



Suncon Lathe

He was a good salesman but not always a good judge of machine tools. He wasn't a repairman of machine tools. His business was, at that time, a one-man operation. He couldn't repair the lathe himself and he didn't have a repairman working for him. So, he just bought the necessary parts at Grainger Electronics and I repaired the lathe. He soon got tired of going to Grainger Electronics. I was doing the repairs myself anyway so he started giving me checks. Each time, I took the check to Grainger Electronics, got the part, and did the repair. Then, J. R. got tired of figuring out in advance how much to write on the checks. After that, he gave me signed, blank checks made payable to Grainger Electronics, and sent me for the parts. By the time that I got my lathe working properly, he was so impressed with my work and, presumably, with my honesty, that he offered to pay me \$30 per hour, cash-under-the-table, including travel time, to go make warranty repairs on equipment that he'd sold to other customers. At the time, \$30 per hour was a good wage.

I did repairs all over the local area. I recall one job in particular, that I did right there in his warehouse. I did it for him one Saturday morning. He called early and he was kind of excited. He'd just sold a big lathe but it wouldn't start. The customer was ready to come get the lathe but he wouldn't take it until the repair was done. I rushed right over. There it sat, right out in the middle of the floor, ready to be loaded onto a truck. J. R. had run a long extension cord out to it. I pushed the handle and, sure enough, it wouldn't start. With J. R. watching nervously, I unplugged the lathe, removed the cover from the pedestal, and discovered that the entire pedestal was packed with mysterious components. I didn't have any idea what they were.

I asked J. R. for the schematic and he told me that he didn't have one. So, I got out a pencil and some paper and started tracing wires and drawing a schematic. J. R. watched for a few minutes and then wandered back into his office. After a while, I knew where the electricity flowed through all of those gizmos, although I still didn't know what the gizmos did. While I'd been tracing the wires, I'd noticed that the connections to most of the gizmos were accessible only from the back side of the panel on

## Outward Bound

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which they were all mounted. To reach those connections would have been a major disassembly project. However, the connections to one of the gizmos were accessible from the front. On a whim, I reconnected the wires to bypass that particular gizmo. I plugged in the lathe, pushed the handle, and the lathe started. J. R. came running out of his office with a big smile on his face. He was delighted. "You fixed it!" he yelled. I insisted on showing him what I'd done but he didn't seem interested. I cautioned him that the gizmo might be important, maybe some sort of a safety device. He didn't seem to care. I told him to make sure to tell the customer what I'd done and to get a new part so that I could install it and reconnect it properly. He promised that he would. I never saw that lathe again. I hope that my repair didn't cause any problems for the customer.

I worked for J. R. for a while. I don't remember how long. However, that job coincided with my job in the GE Panel Shop. As I worked increasingly long hours at the Panel Shop, there came a time when I couldn't do both jobs. I made another mistake, similar to the mistake that I'd made by not going back to Grainger Associates after I'd finished boot camp. I quit working for J. R. so that I could work overtime at my regular job at GE. By the way, Grainger Electronics, the company where I bought the parts for the lathe, was a different company than Grainger Associates. Only the names were similar.

During the next several months, J. R. called me several times to ask for help but I just didn't have the time for him. Once, he offered to pay me my old wage if I'd come in and teach his new repairman how to do what I did. I told him that I didn't know how to teach that. I told him that I just tinkered with a machine until I got it working. Within a year of losing my services, J. R. went out of business. The last that I heard of him, he was trying to make a living by selling Bibles out of the trunk of his car. Hopefully, he had a better warranty arrangement with God than the one that he'd had with Suncon. To this day, I'm sorry for what I did. With my help, he might have stayed in business. Without it, his business failed. He never said an unkind word to me but, instead, accepted my decision gracefully and without complaint. I hope that he did well with his Bible sales. He was a gentle and courteous man.

Eventually, after Elaine's stupid divorce and my divestment of all of my connections to the government, my hopes for having a machine shop faded. I gradually sold most of my shop tools, including the lathe.

## Teledyne MEC

After I was laid off by GE, it didn't take me long to find another job. In May of 1982, I was offered employment by Teledyne MEC, in Mountain View, California. The pay was considerably better than what I'd been getting at GE. Diane, the friend in QA that I've mentioned a few times, told me that she gloated about it to her acquaintances in engineering.

Teledyne MEC designed and manufactured electronic countermeasures (ECM) systems, radar jamming stuff. I had the impression that they'd sell it to anybody who wanted to buy it. My immediate supervisor's boss, George Brecht, once bragged that our equipment had been on both sides of more than one military conflict in the world. Shortly after I got the job, I asked several people what the MEC in Teledyne MEC stood for. Nobody knew. It's interesting that MEC is an anagram of ECM. Maybe the name of the company was the result of a typo.

I worked for Teledyne MEC for a couple of years. It was an interesting and challenging job. I was the company's only Senior Manufacturing Engineer. I solved problems that arose in the manufacturing area. One interesting example was the potting molds. The hardware was usually designed to remain operational in harsh environments and, to that end, electronic assemblies were often encased in resin. That was accomplished by placing the completed electronic assemblies into potting molds and filling the molds with liquid resin that hardened, encasing the assemblies in a protective block of rigid material. The potting molds consisted of aluminum plates that were assembled with screws so that the molds could be disassembled and removed from the assembly after the resin hardened. What was left was the electronic assembly encased in hardened resin. Connectors and fasteners were available at the surface of the block of resin.

One particular assembly presented a persistent problem. About half of the time, a particular threaded fastener that was embedded in the block of resin was just slightly out of alignment with the mating hole in the adjoining assembly. Each time that happened, the entire assembly was unusable and had to be discarded. Why so many units were defective was a mystery. Fifty percent is a very high failure rate. Also, why would it be wrong some of the time and correct some of the time? Nothing was being changed so the assembly should have always been the same.

I compared the relevant drawings to one another and the dimensions were correct. The holes ought to have been properly aligned, every time. I got to looking more carefully at the design and noticed that the threaded fastener that was often out of alignment wasn't centered in the surface of the assembly. It was off-center by a small fraction of an inch. Indeed, the amount off-center was similar to the amount of the recurring error in placement. I was immediately suspicious. I went to the potting shop the next time that one of those assemblies was scheduled to be potted, to observe the process. Watching, I saw the reason for the problem. The plate of the potting mold that held that particular threaded fastener in place during the potting process had mounting holes that were symmetrically arranged. Thus, when the potting mold was being assembled, that particular plate could be installed either inside out or

## Outward Bound

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right side out. It would fit the adjoining plates either way. Since the hole for the threaded fastener was almost centered, the difference wasn't obvious to the man who assembled the potting mold. He didn't know anything about the rest of the assembly process and he didn't know to check for the position of that particular hole. If the plate was installed right side out, then the threaded fastener would come out in the right location. If the plate was installed inside out, then the threaded fastener would come out in the wrong location. The difference was small enough that it wasn't noticed until it was time to attach the assembly to the adjoining assembly. The man who assembled the potting mold had exactly a fifty-fifty chance of doing it wrong.

I considered various options, such as labeling the outside of the plate. My past experience with assembly instructions suggested to me that an assembly instruction wasn't the way to solve the problem. Eventually, I redesigned the potting mold so that all of its assembly holes were asymmetrically positioned. After that, the potting mold would go together only one way. It wasn't possible to assemble it with a plate in the wrong place or with any plate inside-out. I then made the same kind of change to all of the other potting molds, just in case. While I was working on that project, the people who worked in the potting shop asked me if there was anything that I could do to extend the useful life of the potting mold plates. They told me that the mold release compound wasn't very effective. When a potting operation was complete and it was time to remove the potting mold plates from the potted assembly, they usually had to knock the plates off with hammers. Since the plates were made of aluminum, it wasn't long before they were so damaged that they had to be replaced. I talked to various people and decided to change the material specification from aluminum to stainless steel. I checked with the people at the subcontractor where the plates were manufactured and somebody there asked me to use a specific series of magnetic stainless steel. That would simplify the manufacturing process because, while the plates were being machined, they could be held in place with a magnetic chuck instead of with clamps. Thus, not only did I solve the problem of the threaded fastener hole that was out of alignment, I reduced the cost of the potting molds by increasing their useful life, and made friends in both the potting shop and at the subcontractor. It's a good thing for an engineer to have friends.

Another interesting project at Teledyne was an operating procedure that I wrote. The company had recently purchased some new piece of assembly equipment. I no longer remember what it did but, with my long experience with written procedures, I was the obvious man to write an operating procedure for the assembly people to follow when they used the new piece of equipment. I studied the scant instructions that had come with the machine and figured out how to use the thing. Then, I wrote an operating procedure. What I did next was unusual. It was probably the first time in the known history of human society that such a thing has ever happened. I asked both my supervisor and the assembly supervisor if I could borrow somebody from the assembly area, have him use the machine by following my written procedure, and watch over his shoulder to see where he had problems. The answers from both my supervisor and the assembly supervisor were "yes". So I watched the man fumble through my procedure and discovered several places where the procedure had to be clarified.

I recall one disagreement that I had with my immediate supervisor, Jim Hayes. Since I dealt with manufacturing problems, I frequently called suppliers of various things for information. I also made some personal calls. One day, my supervisor scolded me for using so much time and so much of the company's funds on telephone calls. I suppose that, by then, I was getting tired of managers pushing me around. I got the telephone company to supply me with a detailed listing of all of the calls that I'd made, including the identity of the parties that I'd called. I analyzed the list and, with the list and my analysis in hand, I marched into the supervisor's office. Right there in front of his boss, George Brecht, I dressed him down. Waving my list as evidence, I declared the number of dollars that I'd spent on personal calls. It was a small amount compared to the total for all calls and I challenged him to bill me for it if he thought that it was so damned important. I also declared that the total amount of time that I'd spent on personal calls came to a few minutes per day. Since I could legitimately claim a 15 minute break during every four hours and since I often worked through lunch, I told him that I didn't see what he was whining about. Neither he nor his supervisor had anything to say. I marched back out of his office. In spite of that little tirade, Teledyne MEC was the only company in my career as a full-time engineer from which I was **not** laid off as a consequence of my attitude.

Sadly, Teledyne came upon hard times. Contracts became scarce. At Teledyne, engineers were assigned to specific contracts and used those contract numbers as charge numbers for payroll purposes. Since I was the Senior Manufacturing Engineer and resolved problems in the manufacturing area, I wasn't assigned to a specific contract. Instead, I worked across all contracts. Thus, I used an overhead charge number. There came a time when I just didn't have any work to do. I recall that it was a Wednesday morning. I sat and stared at my desk and realized that there just wasn't anything to do. I'd completed every project that I could find. My desk was completely clean. The manufacturing people, when I asked them, didn't have anything for me. Most of them were idle. Nothing was being manufactured. I asked my immediate supervisor, and his boss, and his boss. That caused a problem. My supervisor and his boss got annoyed with me for going to their boss, looking for work. It probably wouldn't have mattered anyway. When the funding dwindled, I was one of the first two engineers to go. The other was the Standards Engineer. His job was to specify things like standard hardware. Like me, he worked across all contracts and didn't have specific charge numbers. That was the end of my time at Teledyne MEC.

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## Camino Camper

After I was laid off by Teledyne MEC, I had difficulty finding another job. I sent out a lot of letters and résumés but I couldn't find a job. Since Elaine was still working at GE, I became a househusband. The longer I looked for work, the more I lowered my expectations. I still kept applying for professional jobs but I also began to apply at other places, like fast food restaurants, gas stations, and so forth. I developed the practice of always asking for a job at every place that I went. That included hardware stores, food stores, appliance parts places, and so forth. Since I was the househusband, I sometimes took Catherine with me. That depended on the time-of-day, since she attended a so-called day-care center.

I'll digress briefly. When Elaine and I had decided to adopt a child, we'd agreed that Elaine would stay at home and be a wife and mother. It would be her job to raise the child. Within months of the adoption, she enrolled Catherine in a "day-care center" and went back to work. Typical. She was never very good at doing what she said she was going to do. The same thing was true of our marriage. When it came time for her stupid divorce, she never gave a good reason for it. She just couldn't keep her commitment. See my memoir *Glenna Elaine Cole*.

Getting back to my story, on one shopping trip in January of 1984, I bought whatever it was that I needed to buy and then I took Catherine by the hand and began to walk around the business district where we happened to be. Elaine and I made a careful practice of always holding Catherine's hand whenever we were in public with her. We kept very close track of where she was and what she was doing. We didn't want her to be kidnapped, to wander away and get lost, to wander into some hazardous situation, or any other such thing. So, on that particular day, I took her by the hand and walked from door to door, entered every business in the vicinity, and asked for a job. Catherine was about six years old at the time and didn't have much to say. I discovered, however, that she was paying attention. We went into Camino Camper and I asked to speak to the manager. Somebody told me that his name was Jack Rudolph. We waited until he was available and when he finally appeared he seemed to be thinking about a lot of other things and not really paying much attention to me. I made my usual pitch and he said that he didn't really need to hire anybody right then. Catherine, who was standing right beside me and holding my hand, just had all that she could take. She stomped her little foot really hard and yelled, "Why won't anybody give my daddy a job!?" It was as if Jack had suddenly awakened. The character of his face changed. The glaze left his eyes. He looked intently at Catherine and then at me. "Wait a minute," he said, "maybe I do need somebody. Come back tomorrow and we'll talk about it." I thanked him and left. I went back the next day and he hired me to be his Special Orders Parts Clerk.

Camino Camper was on Stevens Creek Boulevard in, I think, Santa Clara, California. They sold and serviced recreational vehicles. The service shop was a large structure shaped like a chicken coop, open along one side, and divided into supersized stalls. They worked on the RVs in the stalls. My office was the stall on the left end. It had been separated from the adjacent stall, top-to-bottom and front-to-back, with chain-link fence fabric. The front of the stall was enclosed by wood and sheet metal and

## Outward Bound

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served as a small office. The main part of the stall, behind my little office, housed shelves containing the special-order parts that had been received but not installed. My job included various things. I had to know where the parts were so that I could give them to the mechanics who needed to install them. Naturally, when I first arrived, the place was a disorganized mess. Nobody knew what parts had arrived or where they were. I had to organize everything and figure out what was there, which I did. I had to notify customers when their parts arrived so that they could bring in the RVs to have the parts installed. I had to return parts that were not the right parts.

It was kind of nice to be back among hourly folks again after about 12 years of professional employment. For one thing, the sense of humor is different. One mechanic used to spend his lunch break listening to his radio and playing his air guitar. I turned that into a running gag. I found him doing all kinds of air things that I could mention. One day he had an RV jacked up with a wheel removed. With the brake drum visible, I commented that he'd installed a really good looking air wheel. I joked with him about various air things but I finally decided that enough was enough when he was tightening lug nuts with a pneumatic wrench and I commented that it looked like a really good air wrench. He looked pained and I decided that I'd used all of the humor that was available in that particular running gag.

An ongoing point of contention in the shop area was the radio. Some people wanted rock and roll. Some people wanted country music. The result was that they alternated stations every day. One day, while a mournful cryin' in yer beer piece of country music was playing, someone, presumably a rock and roll advocate, howled like a wolf. He was down at the other end of the shop and I didn't know who he was. I howled back at him. Thus immediately began a common practice. For the remainder of my time at Camino Camper, me and the unknown mechanic howled at each other. There wasn't any kind of schedule. Whenever one of us felt like it, he'd howl. The other of us would howl back. Nobody even commented about it. Everybody there just took it in stride as being a normal part of the work day. I never found out who he was.

I've known at least two other people who howled occasionally, just because it feels good to howl. I wonder if maybe our civilized scruples have sometimes repressed the wrong things. I suspect that maybe we'd all feel better if we'd howl from time to time. We could start howling clubs and have howling parties. Maybe you could just go out into the back yard at night and howl. With all of the damned dogs that are always barking and howling all the time, who'd notice? Try it and see if you like it.

Meanwhile, I continued to apply for so-called good jobs. In February of 1984, I received an offer from Advanced Micro Devices, in Sunnyvale, California. I accepted the offer and gave my notice at Camino Camper. It was goodbye to the hourly folks and back to the professionals. No more howling at work, I suppose.

One last thing happened before I left Camino Camper and it involved Elaine and her mother. Elaine's birthday was in late February. Shortly after I told Elaine about my job offer from Advanced Micro Devices, her mother called me and proposed that we have a surprise birthday party for Elaine. It seemed like a good idea to me so we planned it for the next evening. Elaine always left for work before I did so it wasn't

any problem for me to decorate the kitchen with balloons and a happy birthday sign before I left for work. I already had some gifts, which I left on the kitchen table. That day, I asked my boss at Camino Camper if I could leave work early because I needed to be home early for the surprise birthday party. He was a married man and he thought that it was a good idea.

I got home and, shortly thereafter, Elaine's mother, Elaine's father-in-law, and Elaine's brother's girlfriend arrived. They were the only ones who arrived but I didn't give it much thought at the time. I was happily anticipating the surprise. Elaine was late but she eventually got home. When she walked in the back door, adjacent to the kitchen, I took a couple of pictures of her and we did the normal "surprise!" thing. She acted surprised. She sat down at the



table and opened her gifts. Then, she said, "Well, I went out and bought myself a birthday present. I spent about a thousand dollars." I gulped and said, "Well, that was a little more than I'd intended to spend." She said, "I bought myself a divorce." Then I learned that the entire idea for the party had been so that she could have her mother there when she made the announcement. They spent the next three hours berating me and accusing me of every possible fault. A more detailed account of the insulting and malicious event is available in my memoir *Glenna Elaine Cole*, previously mentioned. The only reason that I put it here was because of what happened the next day at Camino Camper. That morning, my boss walked in with a happy smile on his face and asked me how the surprise birthday party had gone. I looked at him, gulped, tried to say something, and then to the amazement of us both, I started crying, right there in front of him. I explained what had happened. He went away and I suppose that he must have instructed everybody else to leave me alone. I didn't have any interruptions or visitors all day, not a single one, all day.

Just for the record, here's another aspect of her stupid divorce. She announced the divorce after I'd received my job offer from AMD. If she'd done it while I was working for Camino Camper, then the required child support payment would have been much less. She might even have been required to pay alimony. Prior to the time that I told her about my new job offer, she didn't give me the slightest hint that she was planning a divorce. On the contrary, she circled like a vulture until I had a better-paying job and then she pounced.

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## Advanced Micro Devices

I began work at AMD in March of 1984. My job was that of a Quality Assurance Technical Auditor. I audited in various manufacturing areas, such as Burn-In Areas, Test Areas, and Mark-and-Pack Areas. I also audited the Documentation Department and the Calibration Lab. I audited both military product and commercial product. I audited for compliance with AMD's internal operating procedures and for compliance with applicable Military Specifications.

Unlike at GE or Teledyne MEC, I actually received a little on-the-job training. That is, before I actually conducted an audit, I accompanied an experienced auditor, Daniel Tan, on one of his audits, as an observer. That was all of the on-the-job training that I got but it was better than what had been provided at GE. However, I just fit right into the job. I seemed to have exactly the right set of skills and attitudes for it. At the first weekly staff meeting after I'd submitted my first audit report, Jim Eick, my boss, commented on my audit report to the entire membership of the audit group. He said that my audit, and the resulting report, were the kind that he dreamed about. He said that he wanted everybody to start doing it that way. I felt a little bit like sliding down in my chair and hiding under the table, but I never noticed that anybody held a grudge against me.

Jim Eick was among the best managers that I ever had. He gave me assignments, he gave me support when I needed it and, other than that, he left me alone to do my job. A good example was my first audit of the Calibration Lab. Actually, it was the first time that anybody had ever audited the Calibration Lab. The people in the Calibration Lab usually audited equipment calibration and electrostatic discharge (ESD) arrangements in other work areas. They weren't used to being audited themselves. Nevertheless, there were operating procedures that governed their operations and the management of Quality Assurance decided that they should be audited against those procedures.

I prepared for the audit in the standard way that I'd developed prior to my first audit, and that was being adopted by the other auditors in accordance with the statement by Jim Eick at the staff meeting that I previously mentioned. That is, I accessed the master document list and acquired a list of the applicable operating procedures for the area that I intended to audit. I read the operating procedures and made a checklist, based on the requirements contained in those procedures. That way, I audited for compliance with the applicable requirements without requiring things out of my own imagination. That avoided one of the common complaints about the auditors. That complaint was that we wrote CARs based on our opinions about how things should be done, rather than on the actual controlling procedures. That was particularly true of an auditor named Ron Hart who, apparently, wanted all of the areas to run his way. I stuck strictly to the area's operating procedures and didn't impose any requirements of my own.

So, when I went to the Calibration Lab, I had with me a copy of their operating procedure and an extra copy of the checklist that I'd made from it. I gave the extra copy to the supervisor who'd been assigned to host the audit. I began asking her, item by

## Outward Bound

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item, how they complied with the things on the list. She got miffed and called her manager, Cynthia Sullivan, into the office. Cynthia looked at the checklist and got miffed. She left the office, taking the supervisor's copy of the checklist with her. Meanwhile, the supervisor and I sat and waited. A few minutes later Cynthia returned, handed the checklist back to the supervisor, and told her to answer the questions. I found out later that Cynthia had called Jim Eick, described the checklist to him, and asked him what the Hell I thought I was doing. Jim had told her that it sounded to him like I was doing my job. He told her that they should answer my questions.

There's an amusing footnote to the story of the Calibration Lab audits. After I'd audited the Calibration Lab several times, I pondered the fact that some of the technical standards that were used by the Calibration Lab to establish standards for the various work areas were traceable to the National Bureau of Standards. I asked Jim if he knew for sure that the National Bureau of Standards was operating properly. He said that he'd never thought about it. I asked him if he thought that maybe we should audit the National Bureau of Standards. I was half joking but he looked like he actually considered it for a few seconds. Then he said no, he didn't think that would be a good idea. Shucks. That would have been a fun audit.

I also audited facilities in Austin, Texas and San Antonio, Texas. I traveled to those areas about two or three times a year. During my first few visits, I wasn't particularly welcome. I was the corporate auditor from the main office in California. However, after a few audits I gained acceptance. Many of the problems that I found in the Texas facilities were not the fault of the people at the Texas facilities. The problems were the result of poorly written operating procedures. Those operating procedures were written by engineers at the main office in California and issued by the Documentation Department at the main office in California. There was an ongoing power struggle between the people at the Texas facilities and the people in California. When I began trying to get the operating procedures corrected, the people at the facilities in Texas became my good friends. It's a good thing for an auditor to have friends.

The people at the Texas facilities were all trying hard to do a good job and I was trying hard to help them. I traveled around the company to many different work areas. I saw different examples of the same kinds of work areas. Before long, I began to develop a certain gentleman's agreement with some of the managers in some of the work areas that I audited. For example, if the manager of a Test Area in Austin had a problem that was puzzling him, then he might ask me about it when I showed up to audit his area. I'd audited similar Test Areas in San Antonio and in Sunnyvale so he hoped that I'd have some suggestions. I'd try to suggest something useful, based on what I'd seen in the other Test Areas. Our gentleman's agreement was that I wouldn't find that particular problem during the audit and, when I came back for the next audit, that problem would be solved. It worked a lot better than writing CARs. I called myself a User-Friendly Auditor.

Occasionally, amusing things happened on the audits. I periodically audited a Mark-and-Pack Area in Sunnyvale and, after several audits, they were mostly in compliance with the procedures. During one audit, the supervisor who was hosting the audit was actually enjoying herself. Her area was in compliance with all of the requirements. It was functioning efficiently. Then, an unexpected snag appeared.

One of the functions of a Mark-and-Pack Area was to test the durability of the marking on the electronic devices. There were several tests. One test was to immerse the device into a specified solution, blow it dry, and then scrub it to see if the marking was permanent. A technician was demonstrating how they did the test but she went straight from the solution to the scrub. I stopped her and remarked that, according to the procedure, they had to blow the device dry before they scrubbed it. At that point, I learned that we'd been putting on a show and that everybody within sight had been covertly watching. Panic ensued. Maybe they'd all been planning a party to celebrate a perfect audit. I don't know. However, people began running in circles to find some way to avoid getting a CAR. One lady volunteered to run home and get her hair dryer and let them use it. Somebody else ran off to see if she could order one of the air guns normally used for that sort of thing. Somebody else went to see if the Facilities Department has something that would do. They wanted to solve the problem right there in front of me. The supervisor stayed cool. To this day, I admire her. She asked me if she could look at my copy of her area's operating procedure. It's to my credit that she expected me to have a copy of the procedure to which I was auditing. I'd achieved a high level of credibility as an auditor and the people that I audited expected the highest standards from me. I sorted through my arm-full of papers, found the procedure, and handed it to her. While panic reigned around her, she quietly read the requirement. Then she picked up the device, laid it carefully on the palm of her hand, and said, "Well, what if we....?" and then she blew on it. Suddenly, you could have heard a pin drop. I took the procedure back from her and read the requirement. "Well," I replied, "All it says is that you have to blow it dry. It doesn't say that you have to use a machine to do it." She said, "Then that's what we'll do from now on." I put a check mark on the audit list, everybody breathed a sigh of relief, and the audit continued. They got a perfect audit. They had an excellent supervisor. It's people like her who keep the world working.

Not all Mark-and-Pack audits went that smoothly. Some product was military product and was manufacture according to Mil Specs. Naturally, I had to audit military product to Mil Specs. The requirements were more strict. A few of them were more stupid. One of those was, again, in the mark permanency test. The requirement was that when the part was scrubbed, after being immersed in the solvent and then blown dry, it had to be scrubbed with a tooth brush having three rows of bristles. I had to count the rows of bristles. One time, in the same Mark-and-Pack Area that I mentioned in the previous paragraph, I found the technician using a brush that had the wrong number of rows of bristles. I had to have them correct the problem. I felt silly but that was the requirement. I don't know what they do nowadays. Some time ago, I checked my own toothbrush. It's an Oral-B toothbrush and it doesn't even have the same number of rows of bristles over its entire length. For most of its length, it has

## Outward Bound

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four rows. Near the end, it has three rows. At the very end, it has two rows. Mil Spec audits of mark permanency tests must be a nightmare nowadays.

As I mentioned earlier, many if not most of the problems in the various production areas resulted from poorly written operating procedures. That was just as true in Sunnyvale as it was in Texas. Probably because of my interest in such procedures and my long experience with such things, I was assigned to periodically audit the Documentation Department. They were even tougher than the Calibration Lab. Nevertheless, I persisted.

One good example of the kind of problem that I encountered in the Documentation Department was with one of the two Burn-In Areas in Sunnyvale. Originally, there'd been only one Burn-In Area in Sunnyvale. When the work load had exceeded the capacity of the one area, they'd build an additional area. However, both Burn-In Areas had continued to operate under the same operating procedure. When I conducted my first audit of one of the Burn-In Areas, I found a few violations. The hosting supervisor complained that the problems were in the operating procedure and that the procedure had been corrected after the most recent previous audit, during which the same problems had been discovered. I took the trouble to investigate, a rare action among auditors. I discovered the source of the problem. The two Burn-In Areas handled different product under different contracts. Thus it was reasonable that each Burn-In Area operated a little differently. When one area was audited and found to be in violation of the operating procedure, yet demonstrated that what it was doing was correct, then the procedure was revised accordingly. Later, when the other Burn-In Area was audited against the revised procedure and found to be in violation of the new revision of the procedure, the procedure was changed back again. So, the procedure just kept getting changed back and forth, according to which Burn-In Area had been most recently audited. The fools in the Documentation Department never told anybody. I suppose that all of the changes after each audit of a Burn-In Area were providing a lot of job security and work for the people in the Documentation Department. Maybe the changes even justified the acquisition of additional personnel. It could have been another instance of empire building. The more people that you have under you, the more important you are. The auditors weren't smart enough to figure out what was happening, or they were too lazy to bother, and they just kept writing CARs and getting the procedure changed back and forth. The poor folks in the Burn-In Areas just kept trying to do their jobs and just kept getting dinged on audits. I left the procedure as it existed at the time of the audit, which protected the other Burn-In Area from violations the next time that it was audited. Meanwhile, I wrote a new procedure for the lab that I had just audited, got it issued, and didn't have to bother them with CARs. I'm probably the only technical quality auditor in the known history of human society who ever went to so much trouble to help an area that he was auditing. However, we all worked for the same company. Empire building be damned.

Here's another example. While I was preparing for an audit of a Test Area, I checked the master document list, as usual, and got copies of all of the operating procedures that applied to the area. During the audit, a lot of problems began to emerge. It turned out that I was auditing them against an operating procedure that had been

superseded. However, it hadn't been canceled. It was still in the master document list. It was still referenced in other procedures. In theory, it still had legitimate authority over the area. Any outside auditor would have found it the same way that I had found it. Such an auditor would have expected the company to comply with the procedure. Technically speaking, the Test Area was obligated to comply with both procedures, a situation guaranteed to generate CARs.

I submitted a request to the Documentation Department to have the obsolete procedure canceled. The responsible engineer probably did the same thing when he wrote the new procedure. The request was rejected by the Documentation Department because there were about 21 other procedures that referred to the superseded procedure in their references sections. The Documentation Department refused to cancel the superseded procedure so long as other procedures still referred to it. I expect that the responsible engineer gave up at that point. There aren't many responsible engineers who are as determined as I am. Since nobody else would do it, I set about the task of redirecting the references on all of the other procedures. I had to remove all references to the superseded procedure and replace them with references to the procedure that had taken its place. Each and every change required that I had to convince an engineer to let me change his procedure. With all of the politics that was involved, it took me over a year to do it. When I finally had all of the references redirected and again requested that the superseded procedure be canceled, the Documentation Department told me that in the ensuing year six more procedures had been written that referred to the superseded procedure. The dumbshits knew what I was doing. They could have caught the problem, themselves, on each new procedure. They just didn't give a damn. I had to revise six more procedures before I could get the superseded one canceled. As I recall, it took me a total of about 18 months to get the job done. As I was working on this memoir, I thought of something that I didn't think of when I was trying to get the procedure cancelled. Maybe I could have just revised it to refer to the new procedure. I don't know if that would have worked and it's far too late now to find out.

Here's one final example of a problem with operating procedures. I was auditing a Test Area in San Antonio for about the third or fourth time. By then, we'd worked out most of the problems. The audit was more of a dog and pony show than an audit. Everything was perfect. I particularly remember how spotlessly clean the area was. The floors gleamed. The hosting manager was just leading me around and showing off his immaculate Test Area and I was just checking off items on my checklist. It looked like we'd all be able to leave early. Suddenly, a problem developed. The hosting manager showed me the great new calibration stickers that they were using on their equipment. Whoever had designed the new calibration stickers had done a fine job. They were beautiful and far better than those required by the procedure. I said, "wait a minute." I flipped through the operating procedure and sure enough, it said to use calibration stickers "... as shown at Figure Umptyleven". The hosting manager gulped, quivered, and turned white. "You mean," he asked in a plaintive voice, "that you're going to write us up for doing it better?" I shuffled my feet and said, "Well, lets just wait on that and I'll see what I can do." However, the merry mood was over. I

## Outward Bound

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finished the audit and went back to Sunnyvale without promising them a perfect audit, although we'd all been hoping for one.

I contacted the engineer who was responsible for the operating procedure. I explained to him that the calibration stickers being used in the Texas Test Area were actually better than required and provided useful information in addition to what was required. I asked him if he would revise the procedure to say "... as shown at Figure Ump-tyleven, **or equivalent.**" He was a corporate engineer. He worked in the main office in California. He didn't give a damn about the yokels in Texas except to keep them in line. They could just damned well use his procedure and the calibration stickers that he'd specified in it. He wasn't interested in helping them do a better job. I finally got him to agree to sign the change if I did all the work. So, I wrote the change and pushed it through the Documentation Department. He signed the form. The test area got its procedure corrected, got to use its improved calibration stickers, and got its perfect audit. I did all of the work. The responsible engineer sat on his butt.

The job at AMD, in and of itself, was a good one for which I was admirably suited. However, requirements that were not job-related began to be a problem, as foreshadowed by the financial disclosure form that I'd encountered at GE, several years earlier. The first such requirement to appear at AMD was a medical disclosure form. It didn't appear until after I'd accepted the job, terminated my job at Camino Camper, and reported to work at AMD. Sometime during the first few weeks, some company official sent me a medical disclosure form and informed me that I had to complete it. The form wasn't just some little thing with one or two general questions about my health. It was a full-blown, detailed medical questionnaire of the type that I'd expect to complete for a doctor, maybe prior to brain surgery or something of the sort. I objected and refused to complete the form. I was assured that my employment was still in the probationary phase and that it would be very easy to release me if I didn't complete the form. Nobody had mentioned a probationary phase before. I complained to Jim Eick. He said that he didn't see why I was upset. He said to just complete the form. I didn't seem to have many options. I completed the form. However, I was beginning to develop a grudge against corporate policies that were intrusive. It was especially annoying that the companies could force me to comply with their policies but I couldn't force the companies to comply with their own policies.

Some time later, I received a little notice with my pay check informing me that I'd been awarded ownership of a fractional share of AMD stock. By then, I was developing some firm opinions about currency, misuse of my Social Security number, the onerous nature of the banking and financial system, and that sort of thing. I'd made a principled decision to not own stock. I'd already sold the shares of stock that I'd acquired while I was working at GE. I was annoyed when AMD happily informed me that I owned stock again, as if it was some kind of a wonderful gift for which I ought to be humbly grateful.

I called somebody and argued about it. I told him that I didn't want to own the stock. He said that it was a benefit of employment. I asked him why it was mandatory. He said that it wasn't mandatory, just automatic. I asked him what was the difference if

I didn't have any choice in the matter. He said it was a benefit of working for the company. I told him to transfer the stock certificates to me so that I could sell them. He said that to do so would be a violation of company policy. The stock was being held for me and managed for my benefit by a third-party trustee. I said I didn't want somebody else to manage my stock for me. He said that it was company policy to do it that way. I asked him how a third-party could manage a financial matter for me without my Social Security number. He said that the third party had my Social Security number. I asked him how the third party had obtained my Social Security number. He said that AMD had given it to the third party so that the third party could manage my stock for my benefit. I objected that I hadn't given permission for AMD to give my Social Security number to anybody. He said that it was company policy to do so. I told him to have the third party sell my stock. He said that the stock had to remain in my name so long as I was working for the company. The only way that I could divest myself of the stock was to no longer be working for AMD. There wasn't anything that I could do about the stock. I was stuck with it, even though stock ownership was a violation of the values and political integrity that I was developing at that time in my life.<sup>18</sup>

For several years, I'd been going through a part of my life wherein I was achieving a better understanding of the nature of such things as money, corporations, jurisdiction, despotism, social contract, and sovereignty. Shortly after I began working at AMD, on June 13, 1984, I canceled my Social Security number. For those of you who don't believe that it's possible to cancel a Social Security number, see my essay *Cancellation of Social Security Number*. Thereafter, I refused to voluntarily use the old number for anything at all. The problem was that I couldn't keep other people from using it without my consent. That had gradually become a problem in the past. It was the basis for my cancellation of the number. However, it became a bigger problem at AMD.

My next problem with the no-longer-applicable Social Security number arose after a trip to the dentist. When I received the bill from the dentist, it was accompanied by a note informing me that he couldn't accept payment through my employment benefits program unless I put my Social Security number on his form. I refused. He objected that the Social Security number was my identification number in his billing system. I demanded to know how he even knew the alleged number. He said that he'd received it from AMD when I'd joined the benefits program.

Again, I called somebody at AMD and complained. The nitwit told me that it was company policy to give the Social Security number to medical service providers. He said that AMD just routinely sent such providers a copy of the form that I'd completed when I'd selected my benefits. I asked him how that complied with the confidentiality statement that appeared at the top of the benefits form. The form contained, in prominent letters across the top, a statement of confidentiality. I hope that I still have the form but I can't find it. I hope to put an exact quote of the confidentiality statement in a future revision of this memoir, if I can find the form. Anyway,

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18 See my essay *Liability, Ltd.: Corpus Corporatum and Corpus Delicti*.

## Outward Bound

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the nitwit said that giving copies of the form to benefits providers was the easiest way to transfer the information that they needed in order to provide benefits. He said that it was company policy to give the Social Security number to medical providers. I couldn't prevent AMD from doing it.

Oddly enough, I had an advantage in that particular dispute. I'd already received the work on my teeth so they couldn't force me to put the number on the form. Eventually, I received from the dentist a copy of the form with my alleged Social Security number written on it in somebody else's handwriting. A little note was attached, informing me that they'd found the number in their files and had put it on the form on my behalf. After I left AMD, I started to pay cash for dentist appointments. I used to have dental examinations twice a year but, eventually, I started going to the dentist only when I had a discernable problem. For a long time, I saved funds in an envelope so that, hopefully, I could pay for whatever treatment became necessary. It's something that I learned how to do during my younger days, back when I was saving funds so that I could ride the carnival rides at the county fair. Of course, dental treatment isn't nearly as rewarding as holding Aleta Rhodes in the Mad Mouse. Nowadays, I don't have that envelope any more. I no longer have a cash flow from which to take cash to put in the envelope, so why bother?. If I don't have the cash to pay for the dental work, then my teeth can just rot.<sup>19</sup>

On February 14, 1986, I formally rescinded my driver's license. That made my job at AMD a lot more difficult. Many of my audits were in Texas and, without the driver's license, I couldn't use rental cars any more on those audits. If I traveled alone, then I had to bum rides from the people whose areas I was auditing. That didn't seem quite kosher. It became necessary for the company to always send me as one of a pair of auditors. That made it a lot harder to schedule audits. It was a considerable inconvenience for everybody involved. Of course, nowadays I wouldn't be able to even get on the airplane.

Eventually, when I was laid off by AMD, I had a lot of difficulty selling the stock that had been a so-called benefit of my employment. I couldn't sell it because I didn't have the Social Security number any longer. I eventually was able to sell it to an AMD lawyer, under the table, for cash, without ID. I guess that he must have known who I was, somehow. Maybe he just bootlegged my erstwhile Social Security number from the company records and forged it onto the paperwork, after the fact. That would have been consistent with the way that they did things at AMD.

It's important to realize that I was going through a transition. I'd previously had a Social Security number. You can't stop something like that suddenly, even though my termination of the number was intended to be effective on a certain date. There were still entanglements that I had to sever. It took several years for me to totally divest myself of all involvement in things to which the Social Security number was attached. The last connection to be severed was the forced sale of Mere Keep, which happened early in 1997.<sup>20</sup> I'd used the number when I bought the property and the

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19 See my article *Good News, Bad News*, on page 3 of the July 2009 issue of the *Frontiersman*.

20 See *The Fall of Mere Keep*, later in this memoir.

number was associated with it. Also, it's impossible to buy or sell real estate without a Social Security number. The authoritarian bureaucrats who define and administer the procedures just refuse to do anything unless the number is there. Thus, the number had to appear on some forms. After that, I was completely free of any further obligations involving a Social Security number. I've tried to forget the number that was previously my number but, sadly, my memory has a firm grip on it. I suppose that I must have learned the number at too young an age, and that I remembered it for too many years, to be able to forget it.

The Social Security number wasn't the only problem that arose at AMD. One day, I was told to report to the office of an employee relations counselor, or advisor, or agent, or manager, or some such nonsense. I don't remember the witch's name or title. However, she informed me that I'd been accused of sexually harassing a female employee. I asked her who I'd allegedly harassed. She said that she couldn't reveal the name of the woebegone female whose life I'd ruined forever by some compliment regarding her hair, her clothing, or her sexual desirability. To tell me the abused victim's name would violate her privacy rights. Of course, the woefully violated victim didn't have any privacy rights but she was too ignorant, too brainwashed, or both, to know that. So was the witch, AKA manager. I asked the witch what I'd done that constituted sexual harassment. She said that she couldn't tell me because it might tend to reveal the identity of the violated female who'd made the complaint. I complained that, since I didn't know what statement or action in the presence of which female employee had caused the complaint, then I didn't dare say or do anything at all in the presence of any female employee, ever again. The witch said that was company policy. They expected me to behave in a way that we used to call being pussy-whipped. It was one of a good many incidents that will help to explain why I'm so opposed to working around women. It's bad enough to be pussy-whipped at home. It's unacceptable to have to put up with it at work.

I managed to survive, although with poor grace, the escalating corporate intrusions into my integrity. Eventually, however, my downfall was brought about by my efforts to correct the hundreds of problems in the operating procedures. The Documentation Department was very jealous of its prerogatives. The manager was JoAnn Shithead. Okay, I don't remember her last name but I damned sure never sexually harassed the old hag, or even told her that she was pretty, because she wasn't. Of course, she was still naked under her clothes, as are all women. Anyway, she didn't like a mere auditor continually finding errors in her documents. She kept complaining to her manager (I think that his name was Bob Turnbull, but I'm not sure) who kept complaining to his manager, Jim Lynch. That was the level at which our two chains of command came together so that Jim Lynch was in both my chain of command and in JoAnn Shithead's chain of command.

While I'm thinking about it, there's an interesting little story about Bob Turnbull. It isn't of much relevance except that it might provide a little insight into the mentalities of the kinds of people who become managers. Bob Turnbull was apparently an ass-kisser par excellence. I don't know that for a fact because I didn't have any contact with him myself, but I did hear the various comments and rumors. Anyway, one

## Outward Bound

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Monday morning the place was all abuzz with talk of his extravagant dinner party of the previous weekend. According to the chatter, he'd gone all-out. Apparently, the soiree was full-dress and complete with catering and a hired band. Rumor had it that Bob Turnbull and his wife had put great effort and expense into the thing. His engraved invitations had been sent out to only people who were above him in the company chain-of-command. Absolutely nobody showed up for the shindig.

Back to my story. Complaints by JoAnn Shithead weren't a problem for me, so long as Jim Eick was my manager. Jim Eick reported directly to Jim Lynch and Jim Eick defended me. However, he eventually found another job and was replaced by Jim Welch, one of our auditors. Jim Welch had been recently hired as one of our auditors and, shortly thereafter, had been promoted to the management position, when Jim Eick left. Jim Welch might have been a good auditor, or maybe not, but he wasn't a good manager. He didn't give me any support at all. He didn't even do much managing. He spent most of his time at the department's computer maintaining his wine lists and scheduling himself for all of the Singapore audits where he could enjoy all of the racy Singapore night life, at company expense. There were vague but persistent rumors about something called a sandwich, that presumably included two young girls — but I digress. Anyway, Jim Welch wouldn't give me any support regarding my audits of the Documentation Department. There must be some job requirement that upper level managers have a memory span that can be measured in weeks because management opinion at the department level began to turn against me. I went into Jim Welch's office one day and confronted him. I told him that they were complaining to Jim Lynch about me and that I needed for him to give me a little support. He said, "Sam, I'm just not interested enough in what you're trying to do to be willing to go to bat for you." I told him that if he wasn't going to support me then I wouldn't audit the Documentation Department any more.

When the next audit schedule arrived at my desk, I noticed right away that I was assigned to audit the Documentation Department. I immediately went into Jim's office and reminded him that I wasn't going to audit the Documentation Department any more. He said, "But you're the only one who knows how to do it." I told him that, since he wasn't willing to defend me against the complaints that JoAnn made after my audits of her department then I wasn't willing to audit the department. I left his office, cleaned my personal items out of my desk, and took them home with me that evening. The only mistake that I made was that I neglected to sneak my work record out of the office.

I was the next person to be laid off due to lack of work. I don't remember for sure but I believe that it happened late in October of 1986. My only regret is that I neglected to carry my work record home with me. I still have my work records from GE and from Teledyne MEC. I can prove what happened at those jobs. Sadly, I can't prove what happened at AMD. A few days after I was laid off, I asked one of the other auditors if he'd smuggle the work record out for me. He said that it was already gone.

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## Manpower and the EDD

After I was laid off by AMD, I alternated between being on unemployment and working for Manpower. I can't remember how I managed to get on unemployment or to work for Manpower without a Social Security number. I just don't remember. In retrospect, it seems impossible. Maybe I compromised my integrity and gave them the old number. Maybe I managed to finagle it somehow. As I said a few paragraphs back, I was in a transition. Maybe I wasn't as pure then as I am now. Purity increases with practice. I just don't remember.

I had several assignments with Manpower. One particular assignment sticks in my mind because of its consequences. I don't remember the company. It was one of those new little semiconductor startup companies, up the peninsula. It had turned out that the future was in semiconductor devices, just like Ralph Balmer, at GE, had predicted all of those years before. Weird. I'd signed on with that company, with the agreement of Manpower, to work a regular 40 hour week. I'd specified that I wouldn't work overtime. Manpower had consented to that and the hiring manager had agreed to it. When I reported for work, the hiring manager immediately informed me that the situation had changed and that I'd have to work full time plus weekends. I said, sorry, see ya, goodbye. Since he'd violated the agreement between me, him, and Manpower, I assumed that the deal was legitimately off without any fault on my part. I assumed that there weren't any complications. I went back on unemployment.

Meanwhile, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 went into effect. Everybody has a limit and that was mine. When Manpower sent me on my next job interview after the effective date of that Act, the witch-in-charge-of-interviews wouldn't even discuss my résumé with me until I'd completed her filthy INS form I-9. I told her that I'd starve first, and I left. That was my last ever formal job interview. I've been continuously unemployed ever since. I've also become increasingly pure. I recommend purity of position. It's worth a high price.

Somewhere during that general period of time, I escalated my efforts to build camouflage. For several years, I'd been getting more cagey about my identity and my home address. The escalation of my efforts was gradual and I don't know exactly when it began. However, over some period of time, I changed every record of my address that I could change. In each such case, I replaced the house address with the post office box address. I gave the post office the wrong home address. Some despotic institutions won't accept a post office box address. For those, I had to develop different tactics. I registered to vote at a false residence address. Then, just for the sake of their archives, I registered again, at a different false residence address. I made sure that they were actual addresses. I rode my bicycle across town, picked a nice looking place, and wrote down its address. After that, I never again registered to vote, leaving false residence addresses for my last two known addresses in their records. For other despotic institutions that required a residence address, such as utilities companies, I closed all of the accounts and opened new accounts, using pseudonyms. I used a different pseudonym for each account. Nowadays, they punish you for doing that sort of thing. If you use a pseudonym, then you're automatically deemed to be a terrorist, a cultist, a survivalist, or some other kind of slimy bastard that makes it permissible

## Outward Bound

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for the gestapo thugs in the SWAT teams to surround you, murder you, and seize everything that you owned, for their own profit. Back then, we still understood that, as long as you satisfied the obligations that you acquired under the pseudonym, then using the pseudonym wasn't, in and of itself, inherently fraudulent. And here's another consideration. There isn't any reason at all why a utility company needs to know the name of the person living in the house. The service is provided to the house. So long as somebody pays the bill, the name of the occupant of the house is irrelevant. If nobody pays the bill, then the utility company always has the option of terminating the service. The requirement of the name of a person is nothing more than a thinly-veiled aspect of the police state, whereby the government wants to know where everybody lives.

Anyway, I very carefully constructed some very good camouflage around myself. I even created a phony house address for my house. Here's how I did that. The lot beside my house was owned by the Lyndale School, on the other side of the block, but was permanently vacant because the entire lot was encumbered by an easement owned by the surrounding property owners, including me. The easement was for access to the properties, some of which lacked road frontage, and for the installation of utilities. I installed a second mail box next to mine and gave it the missing house number between my house and the house on the other side of the vacant lot. That's the number that would have been used by a house in the vacant lot if there had ever been a house there. I even bought house numbers and put them on both sides of a reversible board that I hung on the front of my house. By reversing the board, I could change my house number between the two different numbers. I still have the board. It's painted the exact color of the trim that was used on Mere Keep at the time. For a suitable sum, I might be willing to sell it. Make an offer. Initially, I used the empty address as the mailing address for the *Frontiersman*. I received mail there for years. Even after the fall of Mere Keep, Sir John the Generous<sup>21</sup> continued to drive across town and collect mail from the box for me until the new occupant of the erstwhile Mere Keep removed the box. During all of those years, the mail carrier never expressed any doubts at all about delivering mail to the empty address. I always wondered what the property tax thugs thought about it. I had some very good camouflage.

In June of 1987, the California Employment Development Department (EDD) accused me of willfully making false statements and of withholding relevant information for the purpose of receiving overpayment. The allegation was in connection with the job that I'd quit because the hiring manager had changed the conditions after I'd reported to work, demanding that I work weekends. The EDD ordered me to repay the alleged overpayment and threatened me with legal action if I failed to do so. They even imposed a penalty of \$99.60 just as if they were a real judge and jury and I was a real criminal. The only recourse that they allowed me was to appeal the decision to one of their administrative law judges. Actually, my criminal act had been a simple misunderstanding. It just hadn't occurred to me at the time that leaving the job was a violation of their rules. Like I previously stated, the hiring manager had violated the

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<sup>21</sup> See his website at <http://www.jwebster.com/>.

agreement that we had all made. If I'd realized that leaving would be construed as a violation, then maybe I'd have just failed to show up on weekends, until he fired me. I don't know. However, by then I was very tired of institutions trying to intimidate me.

As a part of my camouflage, I'd acquired access to an out-of-state address. Using that address, I denied the accusations and blamed the situation on Manpower. The EDD falsely construed my denial as an appeal, informed me that the appeal was being processed, and sent me some claim forms. I thanked them kindly for the claim forms but assured them that I'd already received sufficient payments from them and that I didn't need to claim any more unemployment payments.

They notified me of the date of my appeal hearing. I denied ever having made an appeal, accused them of fraudulently fabricating an appeal in my name, demanded to see the appeal that I'd allegedly made, and demanded that it be withdrawn. Then just for good measure, I denied ever having done anything that would have given them any jurisdiction over me. That probably wasn't a supportable claim. I don't remember the exact circumstances. However, since I'd been receiving unemployment payments from them I was probably within their jurisdiction. Back when I'd gone on unemployment, I still had some things to learn about purity of position. The EDD ignored me, held the appeal hearing, and ruled against me for failure to appear. I didn't fail to appear. I refused to appear. There's a difference.

I notified the administrative law judge that I had not made an appeal, that she didn't have any jurisdiction over me, that any decision that she made wasn't of any interest to me, and that I would refuse to recognize any such decision. I again demanded a copy of the fraudulent appeal that I'd allegedly made, since they hadn't yet sent it to me. For the record, they never did send me a copy. They did, however, inform me that I owed them lots and lots of money. I again denied everything and accused them of everything. The presiding administrative law judge finally sent me an apologetic letter in which she said, among other pointless things, that she just couldn't see how I'd been harmed. She claimed that the determination of the EDD was final. I sent her a letter containing the following:

"I was notified by the Employment Development Department (EDD), after the fact, that I had been accused of quitting a job without cause, that I had made willful false statements and withheld relevant information with the intent of obtaining overpayment. I was never informed of the identity of my accuser. The accusations were judged by some unidentified individual with (so far as I can tell) no participation by a judge or jury. At no time during the judgment process was I informed of my rights, allowed to face my accuser, shown any evidence against me, or even informed that any of this was happening. A judgment of guilty was made in my absence by some unidentified party, without my knowledge, and without any opportunity for me to seek counsel. After the verdict had been issued, I was as (sic) last informed."

There was more but you get the idea. In response, I received a payment reminder. I sent two more letters, but I wasn't getting responses from people anymore, just payment reminders generated by a computer. By then, I was busy writing essays. It was time to dump the clowns. I switched to an overseas address and sent their next payment reminder back to them torn into little pieces, accompanied by a cryptic note

## Outward Bound

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informing them that they were wasting their time. They conspired with a tougher gang of criminals, the California Franchise Tax Board, to steal my state tax refund that year but it was only about half of what they wanted. Somehow they failed to get their hands on the federal refund and for one reason or another I just never got around to sending it to them. That was the last year that I ever filed a tax return. I've been continuously unemployed ever since. I don't have any income, any tax refunds, or any bank accounts for them to steal. I guess that there isn't much that they can do about it. I haven't heard from them in years.

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## The Underground Economy

Without any hope of ever being employed again, I needed some other source of funds. In a way, I'd come full-circle. I was back to the sort of thing that my grandfather had probably had in mind when he gave me that shoe-shine kit, about 35 years earlier. Since I was divorced, and in sole possession of the house, I decided that it would do nicely as a resource. Without the picky constraints of a wife, I rearranged things. After a few changes, I ended up living in the garage. Catherine, my only daughter at the time, had to sleep on the sofa in the living room, during her visits. With the new arrangement, I was able to rent both bedrooms. I made sure that the renters understood that it was a cash-under-the-table deal. I wasn't going to report the income and they couldn't claim a renter's credit on their taxes. That was a permanent feature of my rentals for as long as they lasted. With the rental funds from the two bedrooms and with my expenses reduced to a tolerable minimum, I was surviving. I could spend all of my time at home studying, and writing essays.

I was sitting at home one day, writing essays, when an associate of mine, Bill Medina, called. He said that he had a friend who desperately needed a temporary employee. The fellow owned and operated a small auto and truck repair business and was temporarily unable to do mechanic kinds of things because he'd broken his leg. He needed a temporary, part-time mechanic, just until his leg healed sufficiently for him to resume his normal activities. Pay would be cash and strictly under-the-table. I agreed and went to work for Ellis Truck and Auto, owned and operated by Mike Ellis.

The situation at Ellis Truck and Auto is one that I've seen at least once more since then. I suspect that it might be more common than is usually recognized. Mike Ellis was a very good auto mechanic. He was a terrible businessman. He took jobs that he should never have taken, especially from friends looking for favors. He just couldn't make a profit on those jobs. A good businessman would have refused them or would have charged enough to either discourage them or make a profit. I wasn't a good mechanic. Mike had to spend way too much time coaching me on how to do the repairs. I would probably have been better than he was at running the business. He would have been much better than I was at doing the repairs. He was already having difficulties before he broke his leg. After he broke his leg and hired me, things got worse. If he'd done the repairs and used me to run the business, then we might still be there today.

Most of the work at Ellis Truck and Auto wasn't interesting enough to be worthy of mention here. However, there were a few interesting things that happened. That job was where I first encountered the term *sucker hole*. That was Mike's phrase for a clearing in the clouds that deceives a mechanic into believing that the rain is over. Then, the mechanic resumes work on the job out in the parking lot, which is urgent and which won't fit into the shop. As soon as he's inextricably intertwined into the job, the rain returns. I got real tired of being the sucker, of laying on a creeper under a truck out in the parking lot with my arms up in the air trying to turn bolts while greasy rain water ran down my collar and formed a pool inside of the back of my rain-gear.

## Outward Bound

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I had one stressful and frightening experience while I was working for Mike. He had repaired a dump truck. After it was driven away, it stalled about two blocks from the shop. The driver just left it there and it was up to us to bring it back to the shop and repair it again. I was the only helper at the time so I had to help. The dump truck, of course, was aimed away from the shop so we had to pull it backwards. Mike hooked his pickup truck to the back of the dump truck, using a big tow chain. My job was to sit in the truck and steer it. I couldn't see out the back. I had to use the mirrors. Getting it down the street was bad enough but then Mike made the sharp turn into the little industrial strip at the back end of which his shop was located. That turn was very bad, but I made it. I was so terrified of hitting something that I was almost in a trance. My mind was about half blank. I couldn't keep the truck going straight. I kept swerving it back and forth and all that I could see in the mirrors was things along the sides of the lane. I couldn't see behind me. As we were going along the narrow lane between the parked cars, heading toward the end of the industrial strip, I was swerving wildly back and forth trying to keep it in the lane without hitting anything. Mike was going much faster than I wanted to go, backward, and I kept using the brakes to try to slow us down. Mike stopped, jumped out of his pickup truck, climbed up to the window of the dump truck, and yelled in my face to leave the brakes alone because he couldn't go that slow and I was ruining the clutch in his pickup truck. So we made the remainder of the trip a lot faster than I wanted to go but, miraculously, I didn't hit any of the parked cars. There have been several times when God's Hand moved in my life, guided me, nudged me, or saved me. That must have been one of those times, because I was way beyond my own ability to handle the situation. When Mike had pulled the dump truck as far as he wanted to pull it, he just stopped. Of course, I couldn't see his pickup truck so I didn't know that he'd stopped until the dump truck slammed into the back of his pickup truck. It made a big dent in the tailgate but Mike didn't say anything to me about it. When I climbed down from the truck, I was shaking so hard that I could barely walk. Remember, I was unlicensed. I'd have been in a bad situation if I'd hit somebody's car while I was driving a dump truck and the little parking lot was lined with cars, on both sides.

Mostly, the time that I spent at Ellis Truck and Auto was enjoyable. For one thing, the hourly-employee style sense of humor frequently prevailed. I recall once when Rick Hammond, another temporary part-time employee, was out in the parking lot during a sucker hole. He was having difficulty installing a part. I wandered past Mike, who asked me how Rick was doing. "Not good," I said. Mike replied, "Tell him to hold his mouth like this," he said, and he made a grimace. I went out into the parking lot and said, "Hey, Rick!" He slid out from under the truck. "What?" he asked. I told him, "Mike says to hold your mouth like this!" I made a grimace. About 10 minutes later, Rick came into the shop with a big smile on his face. "It worked!" he declared. "The part went right on!"

Another funny incident that involved Rick happened when he was trying to use a large screw driver to pry an oil seal from the end of an axle tube. Sitting right under the end of the axle tube was the metal pan that contained the oil that he'd drained from the tube. I was walking past and stopped. "You know," I said, "that a mediocre

mechanic will drop the seal in the oil, a good mechanic will drop it on the floor beside the pan, and an expert mechanic will catch it on the screw driver.” At that instant, the oil seal popped loose and fell neatly onto the screw driver. Rick insisted that I had to repeat the entire story to everybody who’d listen.

Ellis Truck and Auto was where I learned the term *argulate*. Mike both explained it and demonstrated it. When you have to get a bolt or a nut as tight as it’s humanly possible to get it, then you have to argulate it. This is how you do it. You get the longest wrench that’s available and then you push harder and harder until, eventually, you involuntarily say “Arg!” Then, the bolt or the nut is argulated.

I don’t remember how long I worked there but the place eventually went out of business. I helped Mike move his possessions from his shop. His financial difficulties were such that he also had to vacate his house. I also helped move things out of the house. Mike received help from some other friends besides me. I recall one very strong man who went by the name of Animal. I never heard him called by any other name but I did see a convincing demonstration of why he was called Animal. He was a professional mover and he carried furniture for a living. While we were clearing the furnishings out of Mike’s house, I saw him walk up to a full-size, upright freezer, stretch his arms around it, lean over backward, and walk away holding it in front of him.

After I was finished at Ellis Truck and Auto, I went back to writing essays. I also resumed my old practice of asking for jobs everywhere that I went although, since the stupid divorce, I usually did it without Catherine. Meanwhile, since I lacked a driver’s license, I was doing all of my traveling on one bicycle or another. I owned several of them before I finally settled down with Crazy Horse. I’ll mention more about Crazy Horse later.

Because of the bicycles, I occasionally visited the local bike shop, called (imaginatively) the Bike Shop. The first time that I took a bicycle there to be repaired, the head bicycle mechanic, Ernie Marquez, asked me for some information for his form. I didn’t know where that form or the information on it would eventually go so, in keeping with my strategy of camouflage, I used one of my pseudonyms. I noted my name on the form as Nathan Burnette. Over a period of a year or so, I gradually got to know Ernie. One day, I realized that we were becoming good friends. I hadn’t intended for my pseudonyms to deceive my friends. The pseudonyms were for the bureaucracies. I worried about it for a while and then I went to the Bike Shop and confessed to Ernie. I told him that my real name was Sam and explained why I’d used a different name. He said, “That’s OK, Nathan. I understand”. So, I’m stuck with it. I’ll always be Nathan to him and there isn’t anything that I can do about it.

Shortly after that, I bought Crazy Horse from Marvin Pea, the owner of the Bike Shop. Crazy Horse is my bicycle. I named him Crazy Horse for two reasons. One reason is that, although he might be a crazy horse, he’s a good bicycle. The other reason is that Crazy Horse, the Oglala warrior, is one of my heroes. He killed a homicidal maniac who enjoyed rampaging through Indian villages and massacring Indian women, children, and old people. The maniac’s name was George Armstrong Custer.

## Outward Bound

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Crazy Horse is a Diamond Back Fleet Streak. I changed him a bit from his original configuration. He started out as a mountain bike but I eventually came to refer to him as a cargo bike. Ernie installed sealed bearings in the wheels and pedal crank. I rode him more than hub-deep in muddy river water during the 1997 Snake River Flood, in southeast Idaho, and he's never been any the worse for it. Ernie built wheels for Crazy Horse with Sun Mistral rims, and installed Bear Trap pedals. We installed BMX handlebars and a padded seat. Crazy Horse has fenders and a luggage rack. Fanatic bicyclists think that I'm crazy for riding such a bicycle. That's fine with me. I think that they have delusions of adequacy for insisting that we all have to ride on the right-hand side of the road, where the traffic comes at us from behind, instead of from in front, where we can see it coming, and maybe get out of the way..



I have a little trailer that I pulled behind Crazy Horse. That's how I carried things that were too big to fit in a backpack. I've had Crazy Horse for all of the years since then and I expect to keep him until the day that I die. Since I had to move to Georgia in March of 2008, I live too far from town to use Crazy Horse as my main transportation. Mostly, I have to bum rides from other people. However, if I ever again live closer to town, then Crazy Horse will again be my main means of transportation. He's never failed me yet, although he's thrown me a few times. So far, I've always been able to get back on and ride him again.

After I'd known Ernie for a while, he got me a job at the Bike Shop. I'd already asked Marvin for a job but he'd said that he didn't need me. Ernie kind of snuck me in by letting me start to work part-time when Marvin wasn't there. When Marvin became aware that I was working there, Ernie told him that he was using me for janitorial kinds of things. Once I was in the door, Ernie started teaching me how to repair the bicycles. By the time that Marvin realized what had happened he was also a good friend so I got to keep the job. As with Ellis Truck and Auto, it was strictly a cash-under-the-table arrangement.

The job at the Bike Shop was like Ellis Truck and Auto in another way besides being cash-under-the-table. Marvin had previously been the head bicycle mechanic under a previous owner. Marvin had bought the Bike Shop from that previous owner. Marvin was probably the best bicycle mechanic that I ever knew. He could do things that seemed impossible. I once saw him straighten a rim that had been twisted out of shape. He started by laying it against a curb so that one part of it was on the pavement and the other part was on the curb. Then, he jumped on the rim with his feet. He repositioned it and jumped on it again. He took the main bend out of it that way and then went to work on it with a hammer. Eventually, he laced spokes into it and adjusted them. You couldn't tell that it had ever been bent. There was a photograph on the wall of Marvin riding a bicycle along the top rail of a board fence. In that and in other ways, Marvin was a genius. He was a superlative bicycle mechanic but he was an unsuccessful businessman. I was never more than a mediocre bicycle mechanic but I might have been a good businessman. If I'd been instructed to run the business instead of repairing the bicycles and if Marvin had continued to repair the bicycles instead of trying to run the business, then the place might still be there today.

I worked at the Bike Shop for maybe a year or more. I don't really remember. Gradually, Marvin spent less and less time there. The other bicycle mechanic drifted away and Ernie and I gradually took over the day-to-day operation of the place. Eventually, Marvin stopped showing up at all. Ernie had a key, so he and I just kept going to work every day. We sold parts. We sold bicycles. We did repairs. That period of time at the Bike Shop with Ernie was one of the more pleasant work experiences of my entire life. We sang along with the radio and customers commented that we'd never be famous. We told jokes. Sometimes, I rode Crazy Horse down to Colonel Sanders' to get lunch for us. The erstwhile mechanic, the one who'd drifted away, had an uncanny knack for showing up about then. I occasionally went to the bakery next door for snacks. In general, we had a wonderful time.

Probably as a consequence of my happy frame of mind during that period of time, I did a few outrageous or comical things. Several of them involved a tall Negro policeman. For now, I can remember only two such incidents. If more of them come to mind, then maybe I'll add them to a later revision of this memoir. The first such incident happened while I was squatting on the floor behind a display case, putting things in the case. Ernie was at the display case, trying to sell a bicycle pump to the cop. I was just to Ernie's left. They weren't paying any attention to me but I was listening to them. The cop asked Ernie to explain the differences between the two bicycle pumps that he was considering. Ernie said, "This one's plastic and this one's steel." I said suddenly and in great excitement, in my best stage whisper, "Ernie! Don't say steal to a cop! Say ferrous metal!" They both looked at me like I was a worm. I continued to put parts into the display case. I don't remember which pump the cop bought.

There were one or two other occasions when I took the opportunity to say something funny in the presence of that policeman. The only other one that I can presently remember was the last such incident. It happened at the bakery next door to the Bike Shop. I'd gone there to get snacks for me and Ernie. There was one woman paying

## Outward Bound

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for something at the cash register when I walked in and I stood in line behind her. She finished paying for her purchase and turned away. I stepped up to the cash register just as the tall Negro policeman walked in and stepped up to the counter beside me. The woman behind the cash register looked at me and asked if she could help me. I looked up at the cop who was looking down at me. I turned to the woman at the cash register and said, "Well, I was gonna rob the place but I think I'll just buy some donuts." She laughed. The cop didn't. I never saw him again after that. Maybe he couldn't take it any more and asked for a transfer. I don't know.

One day, when one of Ernie's other friends was visiting and helping to repair bicycles, that friend over-inflated a tire. The tire exploded with a loud bang. Without hesitation, I instantly grabbed my chest, reeled around, and did a wonderfully over-blown, excessively theatrical dying act. I slid slowly down the edge of the work bench, gasping and grimacing, clutching my chest in anguish, and ended up on the floor with my tongue hanging out. Nobody paid the slightest attention to me.

One day, I was sitting on the floor in the middle of the show room, using the label tool to mark prices on some rims. Two people walked in the door and headed for the display case, where Ernie was waiting for them. As they passed me they looked down at me. I looked up at them and, holding up a rim and the label tool, I said, "I'm doing a rim-markable job!" The man said, "I'll bet you've been waiting all morning to say that to someone." I said, "Well spoke in."

We had two customers who were Mormon missionaries. One cold winter day, they came in to get something done to one of their bicycles. As they were walking toward us from the door, one of them shivered and said, "Pretty cold out there." I said, "Yeah, but it's Mormon up in here real fast."

Before we'd completely depleted the bicycle inventory, I used to assemble bicycles to put in the showroom. Once, I assembled a bicycle that was of an unusual design. It had a 26" rear wheel and a 24" front wheel. It was also a small bicycle, not nearly as long as most bicycles with 26" wheels. Normally, after I assembled a bicycle, I'd ride it slowly out of the work area, between the display cases, and out into the showroom. I'd turn right along the display case, turn left at the wall and ride along the left side of the show room as faced from the front door. At the front window, I'd turn left and ride halfway across the front of the showroom to the center aisle. Finally, I'd turn left into the center aisle and ride back to the gap between the display cases. Being inside, I always rode slowly and carefully. My purpose was simply to see if the bicycle worked, or if anything fell off of it.

On the day that I assembled the bicycle with the different sized wheels, Ernie was helping some customers near the front of the store. I made my slow circuit of the show room, testing the bicycle, and nobody paid any attention to me. As I neared the gap between the display cases, I applied the brakes and went completely over the handlebars. I rolled on the floor and the bicycle flipped sideways into the collection of lady's 10-speed Peugeots that we had for sale. It knocked all of them over. It made a lot of noise and attracted the attention of Ernie and the customers. It was very embarrassing.

I apologized for the commotion, assured everybody that I wasn't injured, and untangled the lady's 10-speed Peugeots. Then, I got back on the bicycle, rode it around the showroom again, and applied the brakes very gently. Again, I went over the handlebars. The bicycle had the most sensitive front brake that I'd ever experienced. It was extremely unstable.

One time, I did another embarrassing thing in front of Ernie. It happened on one of those unusual days when, for no obvious reason, we were swamped with customers. Ernie and I were both as busy as one-armed paper hangers and, due to our dwindling inventory, I was referring a customer to Reed's, a competing bicycle shop about a mile down the road. At the same time, I was trying to answer the telephone and, when I picked it up, my mind skipped a groove. I was already talking about Reeds to the customer and, speaking into the telephone, I said, "Reed's, may I —". Ernie looked at me with an expression of horror on his face and the customer across the counter looked at me in great perplexity. The fact is that I just can't function under stress. My mind sort of goes blank. I tried to simultaneously apologize to Ernie, to the person on the telephone, and to the perplexed customer. I felt like a complete idiot.

Life was good but, without Marvin, we couldn't restock our supplies because we couldn't pay the wholesale suppliers. We gradually sold most of the inventory. After we'd used up the supply of bicycle parts, we had to start buying parts retail from Reed's. Nevertheless, we made a heroic effort to keep the place going. One time, Ernie had to call Marvin to come in and deal with a representative from the power company who wanted to disconnect the power due to unpaid power bills. I don't know what Marvin told the man but the power didn't get turned off. The garbage company stopped emptying the dumpster because that bill hadn't been paid. However, Ernie and I were taking in enough cash to pay our own salaries and to buy parts retail from Reed's. We just kept working. One day, Marvin came in and said, "You guys gotta stop doin' this. I'm tryin' to go out of business!" Maybe that should have been obvious, but we hadn't realized it. After that, Marvin started coming back again. We locked the door and just worked on moving the remaining inventory into storage. Marvin supervised the process and paid us in parts, bicycles, tools, and so forth. I got one of the lady's 10-speed Peugeots for Catherine. I also got a bicycle work stand. I still have it. When we were done, I went back to writing essays.

I was happy to spend my time writing essays but, eventually, Bill Medina called me again with another job offer. By then, I was less interested in jobs. I was doing acceptably well with rent from the bedrooms and I was heavily involved in writing. I preferred not to do anything that would divert my personal resources away from the writing, which was becoming my real work in life. However, Bill was insistent. The people at J&J Trucking were desperate for temporary help. It was a local trucking company and they needed a part-time fuelboy to fuel their trucks. Their regular fuelboy was in jail and he wouldn't be out for probably about three days. They had a mechanic doing the job but they needed a temporary fuelboy until their regular fuelboy got out of jail. After that, I wouldn't have to do it any more. The owner of J&J Trucking was a good friend of Bill's and Bill had already made a tentative cash-under-the-table arrangement for me. After some arm-twisting, I reluctantly agreed. It was

## Outward Bound

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a six mile bicycle ride, each way. It involved walking back and forth across the parking lot, parking tractors after I fueled them, for 5 or 6 or 7 hours a night. I had to do it in fair weather or foul. I got diesel fuel on my clothes and on my shoes. I hated the job. By the time that their regular fuelboy returned, they liked my work so well that they decided to keep me instead of putting him back on the job. Instead of three days, I did the job for about three years.

Although the job was very distasteful to me, the hourly-style sense of humor was in vogue. One thing that I started doing was giving names to some of the people who worked there. One of the several hostlers who did that job during my time at J&J was a fellow named Daniel. A hostler uses a yard-goat to take trailers from where the drivers leave them and move them to the dock. He also takes them from the dock, connects tractors to them, and parks them for use the following day. A yard-goat is the little tractor that the hostler uses to move the trailers. So, the hostler named Daniel once neglected to securely attach a trailer to the yard-goat. As he was whizzing around one end of the dock, the trailer came loose, skidded across the lane, and dented somebody's pickup truck. Thereafter, I called him Daniel Trailerslider.

The hostler's job was very stressful and mostly thankless. Thus, there was a high rate of turnover among hostlers. A later hostler, named John, pulled a trailer over a big manhole hump in a vacant dirt lot across the street, snagged the trailer's landing gear on the hump, and bent the landing gear backwards. After that, he was John Gearfolder. One of the drivers came back with a large plastic tank tied to his flatbed trailer. Originally, the tank had been full of some kind of liquid. I don't remember what. The driver had gone across a big bump too fast, bounced is rig, and cracked the tank. By the time that he got back to J&J with it, the tank was completely empty. I don't remember his first name. The last name that I gave him was Tankdumper. There were several other such names that I bestowed but I can't recall any of them right now except for the one that I gave to myself.

Shortly after I began the job, I made a mistake that, as it turned out, was a fairly common mistake among fuelboys. Over the three or so years that I worked there, I made the same mistake about three or four times. The mistake was to drive a truck away from the pump with the fuel nozzle still inserted into the tank. When I did that, it would yank the pump around sideways on the dock and pump diesel fuel onto the pavement until I could get down out of the truck and turn off the pump. One of the times that I made that particular mistake, the snout broke off of the nozzle and fell into the fuel tank. I expect that truck number 22 still has that snout in its left fuel tank. When I broke a nozzle or spun the fuel pump around on the concrete, one of the mechanics would have to come out from the shop and repair the damage. While he worked on the pump, I'd hose all of that diesel fuel off of the concrete and onto the adjacent piece of property. Nobody ever reported a fuel spill to the environmental authorities. The mechanics never complained about the extra work. Everybody was just happy to have a fuelboy who showed up on time and who stayed out of jail. Anyway, the whole point of this paragraph was the name that I gave to myself. I was Sam Hoseyanker.

One night, during the job at J&J Trucking, I saw a cat do the funniest thing that I ever saw a cat do in my entire life. It was late at night. Work on the dock was complete and the dock workers had gone home. Work in the shop was complete and most of the mechanics had gone home. I think that maybe Lloyd Lilly was still there. Lloyd was an interesting fellow. He was in California temporarily while his wife was stationed there in the Navy. Lloyd liked to go camping. I once asked him what equipment and supplies he normally took with him when he went camping. He said, "A knife and a match." He seemed to be completely serious.

The night that I scared the cat, the place was mostly dark and very quiet. I had one last truck to fuel and it was at the far end of the parking lot, away from the light at my fuel pumps. I walked to the truck, got in, started the engine, put it in its lowest gear, and let out the clutch. I was tired, it was late, and I just sat there and let the big engine idle me across the parking lot. In the distance, I saw a cat strolling across the pavement, toward my fuel pumps. At about the time that I saw the cat, the cat became aware of the truck. It instantly went into a crouch, watching intently. The truck was still quite a distance from the cat, moving very slowly and quietly, with its headlights glaring. I put my hand on the cord for the air horn and thought to myself, "I don't want to wait too long. If I wait too long the cat will run. I want to get as close as possible, but I don't want to wait too long." The engine idled quietly, the truck crept along in low gear, the cat crouched, and I waited with my hand on the cord.

When I judged that the cat was about ready to run, I yanked the cord, once. Hoot! The cat shot straight up into the air, about two feet. So far as I could tell by looking, it didn't so much as move a muscle. It still seemed to be in the exactly same crouched position as it rose, just shooting straight up into the air. After it was about two feet up in the air, it spun around and around. It looked just like a cat in a cartoon. It was a ball-shaped blur with tails and feet sticking out in all directions. Then, back in its crouched position again, apparently having not moved a muscle, it dropped back to the ground, still crouched and staring at the truck. I suppose that it must have run away after that but I was laughing so hard that I didn't see what it did next. I laughed so hard that I had to stop the truck. I couldn't drive. I couldn't even keep my foot on the clutch so I ground it out of gear. After all of these years, I still laugh about it.

Another funny thing happened with the clutch on one of the big tractors. It was a cold and rainy night and I was soaked. My feet were extra slick with diesel fuel and water. The windows of the tractor were so fogged that I could barely see where I was going. I was trying to make a sharp right turn through an empty parking space in a line of parked cars, toward the dock, and then back along the dock in the opposite direction. I was about halfway through the turn, creeping along slowly, trying to see if there was any traffic coming along the lane into which I wanted to turn. Sure enough, there was a little pickup truck from some auto parts place, probably making a delivery to the shop. I jammed on the clutch and the brake as quickly as I could, to avoid driving out in front of the little pickup truck. My left foot was so slick that I couldn't keep it on the clutch. Every time that I pushed the clutch pedal down to the floor, my foot slipped off of the left side of the pedal and the clutch pedal popped back out. The truck was in its lowest gear and it had tremendous torque. That huge engine wasn't

## Outward Bound

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about to die. I had my right foot jammed as hard as I could jam it on the brake pedal. I was popping the clutch pedal in and out as fast as I could push it down and have my foot slip off of it. The tractor was bouncing up and down so hard that I think that the rear tires might actually have been coming off of the ground. The driver of the little pickup truck was impressed. She backed up along the entire length of the building and out of sight around the corner. After I finally got the tractor parked, I went looking for her to apologize but she was already gone. No doubt she had a tale to tell about a driver who could make a big rig perform like a pogo stick. I expect that even an East San Jose low-rider might not have done better.

J&J was occasionally host to long-distance truckers who stopped in for one reason or another. It didn't happen often but it did happen sometimes. Once, there was a long-distance big rig parked on the side street, next to the entrance to J&J. As I was walking around retrieving tractors, fueling them, and parking them, I had occasion to go near to it. I walked straight from there into the shop with news that just wouldn't wait. "Jesus!" I exclaimed to Jim and Lloyd, "I've heard of truckers traveling with wives or girlfriends before, but the guy who drives that rig out there must be crazy!" They wanted to know why. "Well," I commented, "All I can say is that she's a real dog!" Jim thought that it wasn't a very nice thing to say about the trucker's female traveling companion. I just shook my head and continued to insist that "this one is really a dog! Go see for yourself if you don't believe me." Eventually, Lloyd decided to go strolling past the rig on some pretext or another and away he went. He came back in a few minutes shaking his head. "Sam," he said, "it's a Collie." I told him, "I said it was a dog!" I went back to fueling trucks.

One evening while I was walking from my fuel pumps toward the next truck that I was going to fuel, I spotted a golf ball laying on the pavement. Without giving the matter much thought, I picked it up and shied it toward the shop. One of the mechanics, Jim, was working on one of the bobtails. The other bobtail was parked two spaces over so that Jim was standing in a sort of box canyon between the two bobtails with the wall of the shop forming the far end of the canyon. The open end of the box canyon, defined by the backs of the bobtails, faced me. At the time, I didn't realize how efficiently a golf ball moves through the air. I'd thrown it low and flat, like you'd throw a flat rock to skip it across the surface of a pond. I'd expected the golf ball to bounce about six times and then roll up to the shop at Jim's feet. Actually, it hit the ground only once and then took off like a rocket. When it got into the little box canyon between the bobtails, where Jim was standing, it looked just like those bullets that bounce around a room in a cartoon. I wasn't sure if it would ever stop bouncing back and forth between the bobtails and the shop. Jim dived under one of the bobtails. I turned and walked casually toward my truck, whistling in feigned innocence. Jim never did find out where the golf ball came from but the nearest golf course was miles away.

I developed a fairly congenial relationship with Jim and we joked about a lot of things. One evening while Jim was under a truck on a creeper I went running over, filled with excitement, and yelled, "Hey Jim!" "What?" he asked. "Guess what I just saw headed toward Moffatt Field!" "What?" he asked again. "It was a B-1-RD escorted by a flight

of GU-11s!” Jim shot out from under the truck with a look of amazement on his face and said, “They were wha....” then he figured out what I’d really seen. A BIRD and some GULLs. Without another word and with only a slightly disgusted expression on his face, he slid back under the truck.

One of my favorite jokes was to wait for a particularly grim night with lots of wind and rain, when Jim was laying on a creeper under a truck that wouldn’t fit into the shop, working with greasy water sluicing down his collar and I was so soaked with water and diesel fuel that I could barely stand up. Then I’d slither over to where he was working and yell with a huge grin and exaggerated, theatrical enthusiasm, “Hey Jim!” “What?” he’d ask. “These are the good times, Jim! This is as good as it gets! It just doesn’t get any better than this!” I always thought of Jim as a true gentleman. He never did throw anything at me. Of course, he didn’t know who’d thrown the golf ball at him.

I also developed a fairly cordial relationship with Marilyn, the secretary. Every Friday, the boss would pitch all of the pay envelopes, containing the pay checks, out onto the counter at the window between the hallway and the office. Each employee would come in at his convenience, shuffle through the envelopes, and take his own envelope. Since I was paid in cash, Marilyn took it upon herself to retrieve my envelope immediately and safeguard it for me in her desk. She always had it for me when I came for it, except for once. That was the last Friday before Christmas one year. She sadly told me that the boss had neglected to go to the bank for my cash and that he’d promised to have it for me the next day. The boss nodded his agreement and made an appointment with me for 9:30 the next morning. When I arrived at J&J at the appointed time the next morning, he wasn’t there. I had to wait in the rain for an extra half hour. Yes, of course it rained that Saturday morning so I made the entire 12 mile round trip in the rain. Shortly after Christmas, at a time when nobody else was in the office, Marilyn told me the truth. The boss really had obtained my cash for me but he’d decided to keep it and use it for his own Christmas shopping on the way home that Friday night. He’d replaced it on Saturday morning. Marilyn said that she thought that it was a very selfish and unkind thing for him to do to me.

Another Christmas season, I stormed into the office feigning extreme anger. Everybody knew me well enough to know that something was up because I never got openly hostile about anything. Not only that, my anger was entirely too theatrical to be real. I was waving my arms and bitching and complaining as loudly as I could about the bobtails. I wanted to know what the Hell was wrong with the company. The bobtails had lights. The bobtails had horns. Why the Hell didn’t they have bells? Bells? Everybody was puzzled. Yeah, I insisted everybody knows that they’re supposed to have bells. It got quiet. I waited, for effect, and then sang as loud as I could, in my best guttural voice with a snarl on my face, “Bells on Bobtails Ring, Making Spirits Bright!” They laughed. It was the Christmas season.

There’s another interesting thing that happened during the period of time that I was working for J&J Trucking. It didn’t have anything to do with the job except that it happened while I was on the way to the job and back home again one evening. Since I

## Outward Bound

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lived in a developed area and worked in a developed area, there were many possible routes through town that I could follow to work and back. I even found sufficient paths through schools, parks, along Permanente Creek, and so forth that I could, when I felt like it, make a large part of the trip without even riding on a road. It's a difficult thing to believe about riding from east San Jose to north San Jose and back but it's true. Normally, I rode the route that was the easiest. One day on that route, I rode past one of the schools along the way and, in the back corner of the large lot on which the school was located, I noticed a discolored circle in the grass. The circle was about 20 feet across its diameter and about 12 inches wide from its inner circumference to its outer circumference. That is, it was shaped like a large donut. So far as I could tell by looking, it was perfectly circular. The grass inside of the circle was the same color as the grass outside of the circle. The grass of the circle itself was a more pale shade of green, almost yellow. I'd been past that school many times and I couldn't remember that circle ever having been there before. I didn't recall any structure that had previously been there, and that might have been removed. I sat on Crazy Horse and looked at the circle for about 30 seconds. I was late for work so I didn't stay any longer but I did make a mental note. That night, I rode past the school on the way home. When I got to the vicinity of the circle, which was easily visible in the moonlight, I rode across the sidewalk, out onto the lawn, and into the circle. I stopped and waited in the center of the circle. My memory is of sitting there on Crazy Horse, in the circle, for about 5 minutes. So far as I can recall, nothing happened. Of course, who knows? So far as I can remember, the circle was gone the next day. I'm not as adventurous now as I was then. If I saw another such circle today, then I might be inclined to avoid that vicinity for a while. Fairies, you know.

The longer I did the job, the more I hated it. One November night I had to do it during a rain storm. I realized that the wet season was just about upon me again. I stood there in the rain, thinking about it. After a few minutes, I went into the boss's office and gave my two weeks notice. I got through the entire remaining two weeks without any further rain. My last night on the job was the last working day before Thanksgiving. I was particularly thankful, that year, to not be working at that job any more.

After I quit the job, I was talking to a family member who's identity I'll protect here. However, she declared that quitting the job was a bad decision. I suppose that her concern was genuine because she began to send me a small amount of cash each month, which she continued to do until she died. Even after her death, I still continued to get the payments, from a small fund that she left with another family member. That fund is now near to depletion, so I won't be getting those little payments for much longer. That's a bad thing. It was my only reliable source of cash.

After the Bike Shop went out of business and while I was working for J&J Trucking, Ernie and I considered the possibility of opening a bike shop of our own. We discovered that we couldn't afford to take over the Bike Shop's location. The rent on the building was way too expensive. We couldn't afford to rent a different place. They were all too expensive. We thought about using the patio of my house. We even made plans about how to rearrange my fence, to allow for customer parking. For some reason that I don't recall, that didn't work out. Ernie investigated the possibility

of running a business from his house. It turned out that there were some strange quirks and twists in the regulations. For example, he couldn't have a business in his house but he could have a business in his garage. He couldn't keep any inventory in his garage but he could keep inventory in his house. Such complications and the prospective costs of lawyers, fees, licenses and, I suspect, some comments from his wife, discouraged us. We eventually gave up the idea.

Meanwhile, Ernie had managed to get in touch with the local representative of one of the wholesale suppliers with which the Bike Shop had previously done business. He was able to make an under-the-table deal whereby he acquired a stock of bicycle parts. With that, we began going to the flea market every weekend. We did that for several years and did quite well at it. Ernie was able to pay me a percentage, restock his supply of bicycle parts, and make a profit. We sold a lot of tubes, tires, grips, seats, and various other things. We were buying wholesale and our only overhead was driving back and forth to the flea market, and renting the space there. We developed a reputation. People would come to the flea market and specifically look for us, for bicycle parts. Ernie was having some difficulties with his wife and, eventually, she persuaded him to end the flea market business. As you would expect, it didn't save the marriage. Once a woman decides to start looking for excuses to end a marriage, it isn't possible for a man to save it. No matter what complaints he resolves for her, she'll have two more complaints waiting for him.

I remember our last day. We were selling stuff at just pennies above our cost and we sold almost our entire inventory. I think that we brought in more than \$500 dollars that day. Ernie kept shaking his head and saying, "If I made as much money staying in business as I'm making going out of business, I'd stay in business!"

I went back to writing essays.

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## The Fall of Mere Keep

Eventually, I think that it was sometime in 1991 although I don't remember for sure, a former girlfriend, Lorita Ann Taylor, compromised my camouflage. She did that by giving my name and address to the gestapo thugs who worked at the District Attorney's office in Santa Clara County, California. I'd met Lorita at AMD, shortly after I went to work there and spent several years thereafter trying to get rid of her. My diary of that relationship is included in *The Rise and Fall of Mere Keep*, in *Pharos*.

The situation developed into a major confrontation with the DA's office and dragged on for several years. I utterly refused to cooperate with the thugs. On one occasion, I noticed a police car parked in the church parking lot, across the street. The cop was just sitting there and watching my house. When he saw me looking at him, he started his car and drove into the vacant lot beside my house. I went inside and made sure that the doors were locked. Eventually, he drove away. Several times during the long-drawn confrontation, I informed the thugs in no uncertain terms that if they attempted to enter my home, then I'd defend it with deadly force. I was completely serious. On one occasion, the Sheriff's thugs were prowling around my fence. They seemed to be looking for a way in. I put on a borrowed flack jacket, cocked my rifle, hid behind a chair, and watched the front door. I was waiting for it to come crashing in. I intended to kill at least the first thug in line, if I could. For some reason, they went away. Maybe it was the Hand of God again.

After several years of little progress by either me or by them, they waited until I went somewhere and then abducted me at gun point out on the street, where I was unarmed. I've always been suspicious about the circumstances of that incident. Maybe they staked out my house and waited for me to leave. On the other hand, it doesn't seem likely that I was sufficiently important for them to go to that much trouble. It's possible that, instead, a certain friend, whose name I won't mention here, might have cooperated with the thugs and arranged to have it done "for my own good". If he did, then I don't appreciate his help. I've never asked him. I don't want to know.

While I was in the county gulag, I realized that I wasn't going to be able to win the battle for Mere Keep. If I refused to sell the place, then the gestapo thugs were going to seize it and sell it themselves. My lawyer assured me that, if they did that, then I wouldn't receive any of the funds at all. He also assured me that, if I sold the place myself, then I'd receive some small pittance, whatever was left after the various blood-sucking bureaucrats had taken what they wanted. In either case, I couldn't prevent the sale. I began to plan my next stand. I determined to call the next stronghold Mjollnir Keep. It had a different objective than Mere Keep, giving it a different name.

Back when I'd established Mere Keep, I'd had a more scholarly objective in mind. The name *Mere Keep* had come straight out of a dictionary. In the distant past, a mere had been a boundary or a border. A keep had been a sanctuary for the protection of precious things. Thus, Mere Keep was a sanctuary for the protection of precious boundaries. The boundaries that I'd intended to protect at Mere Keep were the boundaries between ideas. I had in mind the boundaries between such ideas as citi-

## Outward Bound

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zanship and slavery, freedom and permission, rights and privileges, sin and crime, God and religion, diversity and complexity, law and legislation, and anarchy and chaos. Such boundaries are invisible. They exist only as the understanding of the differences between the ideas that they separate. It isn't surprising that such boundaries are fragile. The disappearance of such a boundary represents the loss of understanding of the things that ought to be separated by it but that are no longer perceived as being different from one another. Or, perhaps the distinction might never have been made and the boundary never noticed. Mere Keep was intended as a place for the discovery, exploration, and preservation of such boundaries.

The idea of Mjollnir Keep is very different. In ancient Norse mythology, Mjollnir was the name of Thor's hammer. It served well as a weapon and, when thrown, it never missed its target. Mjollnir broke large things into small pieces. Sometime during my studies, between the time that I founded Mere Keep and the time that I went into the county gulag, I decided to destroy the U.S. government. Some fool always asks, "Yeah, wul, what're ya gonna replace it with?" See my *Treaty for an Alliance of American States*. While I was in the gulag, I decided that Mjollnir was an appropriate name for the objective. Mjollnir Keep would be the place wherein the objective was protected and nurtured.

Once I was in the gulag, I didn't have any ability to oppose the authorities. They were threatening to keep me there essentially forever. My lawyer assured me that they could sentence me to one year in prison for every count of "failure" to make child support payments and that each month that I'd "failed" to pay represented one count. I didn't fail to make child support payments. I refused to make child support payments. There's a difference. Failure implies an obligation. There isn't any obligation under duress, even if there's a child involved. See *The Principles of Liberty*, in *Pharos*.

Anyway, each month that I'd refused to pay was one count. I'd refused to pay for many years. For example, four years of "failure" to pay adds up to 48 years in prison. The eventual result was that I was forced to "voluntarily" sell Mere Keep. Most of the funds from the sale were stolen by the various leeches and bloodsuckers, primarily the District Attorney's office, in Santa Clara County, California. They even forced me to sign a long document declaring repeatedly, in line items addressing every aspect of the situation, that everything that I was being forced to do was voluntary. It's in the collection of correspondence, in *Pharos*. In *Adventures and Misadventures*, go to *The Rise and Fall of Mere Keep*. At *Dealing With the District Attorney's Thugs*, click on *Documents for the Year 1997*.

Mere Keep had been my primary source of funds. I'd survived by renting the bedrooms and living in the garage. The loss of Mere Keep deprived me not only of a place to live but also of my only means to pay for another such place. I needed someplace to live. I had an old friend, Jan Mecham (Lady Jan the Voluptuous), who lived on a farm in Idaho. I'd known her from my time in Idaho as a co-op Student, while I was in college. Jan and I discussed my prospects at length on several occasions over the telephone, and we made an agreement. We agreed that I'd move to Idaho, live in a spare room in her house, and work for her and her husband for room and board. We

agreed that it would be a permanent, lifelong arrangement. I agreed that I'd bring with me whatever funds remained from the sale of Mere Keep, and use those funds to cover my own personal expenses for the rest of my life. That way, I wouldn't actually cost her and her husband anything except for food, for which I'd be working on the farm. I asked her at least twice if her husband, with whom I wasn't acquainted, would have any objection to the deal. She assured me that he wouldn't object. She also promised to find writing jobs for me such as résumés for students, and so forth. We agreed that I'd do the work and we'd split the cash between us. It seemed like a good arrangement and, after all, it was the only offer that I had.

After the gestapo thugs released me from the gulag, I started a yard sale at Mere Keep. I kept carrying things out of the house, in reverse order of their importance to me, and selling them. I kept accumulating funds and guessing at what it would cost me to move the dwindling remains to Idaho. When the numbers appeared to match, I closed the yard sale. Sir John the Generous rented a truck for me and drove me and my remaining possessions to Idaho. I still had renters at Mere Keep. That situation was managed for me by my friend Steve Strayer. However, I'd been banished from Mere Keep. For all practical purposes, Mere Keep fell near the end of October, 1996. I don't remember the exact date when I left. It's probably on a truck rental invoice somewhere but I'm not interested in trying to find it.

Since then, I occasionally have dreams in which, in the context of some very strange situation or another, I find myself back at Mere Keep. Usually, I'm returning after a long absence and discovering that my friends haven't been running the place very well. Nobody's been collecting rent, my stuff is scattered or gone, my hedge plants and trees are destroyed, but I'm back. I'm always very joyful about having Mere Keep back again, and I begin the long process of restoring the place to its previous condition. I'll probably be plagued with those dreams for the remainder of my life.

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Mecham's Farm

Sir John the Generous and I arrived at the farm just after sunset one evening in late October of 1996. Lady Jan was astonished when she looked into the back of the rental truck. She'd greatly underestimated the quantity of stuff that I'd be bringing with me and she didn't have enough space for all of it. We stacked most of it on her large back porch and hoped for clear weather. It was the end of October in southeast Idaho, but one can hope. I used several hundred dollars of my dwindling yard sale funds to buy a metal building. Lady Jan, Lamar (her husband), and I assembled it and rushed my stuff into it just barely ahead of a thunder storm. We made it, as Grandma used to say, just in the kernickle of time.

I began to repair sagging barn doors and gates, leaning fences, and so forth. The first time that Lamar saw a turnbuckle that I'd installed on a sagging gate, he muttered, "Wul Hell. I wonder why I never thought o' that." I began learning how to take care of the animals. I was embarrassed to discover that I didn't know that there's a difference between hay and straw. One evening I mistakenly fed straw to the animals. When Lamar saw the straw in the manger, he muttered, "Wul, are we feedin' 'em straw now?" I referred to rolled barley as rolled oats and was corrected. I never learned how to milk a goat. I couldn't get over my fear that squeezing her tits was painful to her. Besides that, my hands were too big. When I did get a little milk out of a tit, it usually squirted on my hand instead of into the bucket. I developed a fondness for the goats. When I finally left the farm, seven years later, I had to leave Honey, my favorite goat. I don't care much for cats but, while I was there, I was adopted by a cat. Whether I wanted a cat or not, he was my cat. I named him Sir Underfoot.

I'll digress briefly, about Sir Underfoot and Honey.

During the flood in 1997, we lived briefly with some friends, up the hill. While we were there, Jan acquired a newborn, abandoned kitten. Jan raised him. When he was partly grown, he escaped from the house. While we were trying to catch him, I threw a rock at him, intending to flush him from under a bush where he was hiding. I hit him right on the forehead, between his eyes. It almost killed him. For some reason, after that, he was my cat. Whenever he escaped, nobody else could catch him. He'd walk right up to me and I could just pick him up. He followed me around and watched everything that I did. He was always in the way. Thus the name, Sir Underfoot.

Jan bought the goat from another woman who also kept goats. The goat was very young, just recently weaned. When we went to get her, I picked her up and carried her around while Jan and the other woman talked. By the time they finally finished, my arms ached from holding the goat for so long. I put her on the floor of the truck, between my feet. All the way home, she stared up at me like I was the most wonderful thing that she'd ever seen. After that, she followed me around. She preferred to be with me instead of with the herd. She'd decided that she was my goat, no matter what. I named her Honey, because of her color and her sweet disposition.

Getting back to my story, Mere Keep was finally sold by my lawyer and my real estate agent. I didn't have any way to receive the payment. The escrow company wouldn't give me cash. I didn't have any bank accounts or any ID. There wasn't any

## Outward Bound

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way that I could cash a check for \$45,000 dollars, which was all that remained after the greedy leeches and blood sucking bureaucrats had taken what they wanted. So, I told the escrow company to deposit the funds into Sir John's bank account. I told him to use the funds as he pleased and to pay them back to me when he could. I specified that I didn't want any interest on the loan. I believe that interest is one of the reprehensible aspects of the present financial and banking system. See my essay *Interest-Bearing Transactions*. It's available in *Pharos*. Sir John, a convicted felon, was the man that I most trusted with my life savings on a hand-shake deal. What does that tell you about the so-called justice system in this country?

After I'd been there for several months, Lady Jan and Lamar separated. I don't know what was the point of disagreement between them but I do know that she threw a hissy fit over something. I retreated into my room and waited until it was over. She did a lot of yelling that was unintelligible to me through the walls. I didn't hear Lamar say anything. When it was over, Lamar packed some things and left. The next day, he and his brother Lonnie came back and moved a bunch of his stuff out of the house. It was kind of embarrassing to stand there with his wife, watching them remove Lamar's things. Nobody had much to say.

By the time that Lamar moved out, Sir John had begun sending me payments on the loan. It was maybe two or three years, I don't remember exactly, before Lamar and Lady Jan were actually legally divorced. During that time, Lamar didn't provide any financial support at all for her, although he did leave her in possession of the farm. During that time, I provided all of the financial support. I used the funds that I was receiving from Sir John to support Lady Jan and myself and to pay the operating expenses of the farm. Also, Lamar and Lady Jan had decided upon a fair price for his interest in the farm and I paid several thousand dollars to him against that debt. I also began paying a debt that Lady Jan owed to her sister, Susan, on which she hadn't made any payments for several years. My plan was to stay at the farm for the rest of my life. I accepted its obligations as my own. A few people have accused me of stupidity for making all of those payments. Those people don't know much about integrity and commitment.

Late in the year 1999, I tried to offer something for sale on eBay. Part of the way through their registration procedure, I encountered an obnoxious requirement that sellers must have a credit card number. Obviously, I couldn't sell on eBay. I found another internet auction that didn't require a credit card. I used that auction until they, too, added the credit card requirement. After that, I thought about if for a while and then decided to open an internet flea market. The operating procedure for a flea market is inherently simpler than that for an auction. I didn't need the software that would be necessary to accommodate a bidding process. All that I needed was an html editor to build the website, FTP software to upload it, a browser to visit the website, and email software to receive offers and negotiate sales. I already had all of that. I bought a cheap, used digital camera so that I could post pictures of the things that I wanted to sell. I began work on my first booth. On Tuesday, January 11, 2000, I established the Laissez Faire Flea Market. During the first year, I sold enough stuff to pay for the digital camera. Sometime during the latter part of 2009, I discovered that

eBay no longer had a credit card requirement for sellers. I don't know when they discarded the requirement. Anyway, I started to offer things for sale on eBay. I sold a few odds and ends. I was lucky if I got a few dollars per year. On Friday, January 3, 2014, I completed a major reorganization of my commercial websites and renamed the main website The Moonlight Flea Market. I'm lucky if I get as much as \$10 per year in sales. It won't buy food or pay rent. It doesn't even enable me to get rid of stuff faster than it accumulates. I keep doing it anyway. Earlier this year, 2021, I don't remember the exact month, eBay began to require sellers to provide a Social Security number. I no longer sell on eBay.

While I was living at Mecham's farm, my mother sent to me a couple of old life insurance policies that she and my father had bought when I was born. The policies had been paid in full for many years. My father, who was named as the beneficiary, had died in March of 1999. The policies each had some small cash value. I tried to cash the policies but the insurance companies wouldn't allow it unless I gave them a Social Security number. I objected that I hadn't had such a number when the policies were purchased and that there wasn't any such number associated with the policies. There never had been any such number associated with the policies. The lame brains at the insurance companies didn't care. It was their job to enforce tax regulations for the U.S. government and that's what they intended to do. They didn't care if I ever received the funds that were rightfully mine.

One of my associates, Carl Watner, with whom I'd been dealing on another matter, suggested that he might be able to find his way through the regulations and get the insurance policies cashed for me. I offered to give him half of whatever he could get for them. He agreed. I wrote a power-of-attorney document and sent it to him. Against all of the odds, he succeeded. I think that it took him about a year but he was able to find a way to circumvent the lack of a Social Security number. It involved allowing the insurance companies to withhold (steal) some portion of the payment for tax purposes. I'd be surprised if they ever turned it over to the government. Somebody in their office probably got it. Anyway, what was left was better than not getting any refund at all. I happily received half of what Carl had obtained from the thieves. He was as good as his word and sent it to me in cash.

The various conversations that came out of the arrangement with the insurance policies led Carl to ask me to write an article for him. He was interested in the various things that had contributed to my condition of permanent unemployment. He wanted to know how I dealt with the consequences of such things as my lack of a Social Security number and my confrontation, in the workplace, with arbitrary and intrusive policies and requirements. He said that he was interested in printing the story in his newsletter, the *Voluntaryist*. I agreed to write the article and on or about Sunday, December 29, 2002, I began work on it. By the time that I'd completed the first draft, it was already way too long for his newsletter. I decided to view it as an essay instead of an article, and to continue to work on it. Over the years, I changed the name of the essay several times. Originally, because it dealt with my work history and my permanent state of unemployment, I called it *Résumé in the Rear View Mirror*. I intended, by that title, to indicate that my career, as documented on my résumé, was a

## Outward Bound

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thing of the past. Eventually, I renamed it *Land of the Fee, Home of the Slave*. After that, I renamed it *One Degree Below Zero*. That reference, of course, was to the degree in Nuclear Engineering that I'd obtained in 1971. I'm proud of it. I worked hard for it. However, it's utterly useless to me, a degree below zero in value. Later, I changed the title of the essay to *Working at One Degree Below Zero*. That name stuck for a while. Some time later, as I was sitting and pondering the situations and events that are catalogued in the essay. I sighed morosely and muttered "I suppose that I've been outward bound for a long time now." I considered that thought and changed the name of the essay again, to *Outward Bound*. Some time later, I realized that it isn't an essay. It's a memoir. Maybe I'm finally through making changes to the name but I might keep updating the memoir occasionally. Of course, somebody else will have to add the final paragraph.

I was able to support Lady Jan and run the farm for a few years before my funds were nearly depleted. Once the end was in sight, Lady Jan went on disability, which she ought to have done as soon as Lamar moved out. With my funds mostly gone and her expenses being covered by her disability payments, she didn't need me there any more. After that, she began to insist that I had to leave. She also began to blame me for the situation, saying that Lamar had moved out because I'd "moved in and taken over". I'd agreed to work for room and board which is what I'd been trying to do. I was just trying to live up to my agreement, to repair things and maintain things. I wasn't trying to "take over". However, Lady Jan began to show the typical female characteristics of a selective memory and a talent for twisting every word and every situation in such a way as to use it against me. I'd previously believed that she was better than other women in that regard. I was wrong. During one argument, she said, "If you were a real man, you'd go out and get a job." She'd known when we made the deal that I was, and would remain, unemployed. Sadly, she turned out to be a typical female. Another illusion shattered.

I didn't have much of a cash flow. My only source of funds was the monthly stipend that was being given to me by the sympathetic family member that I mentioned earlier. It was far less than I needed to survive on my own. It wasn't even enough to buy groceries. It certainly wasn't enough to pay rent somewhere. Meanwhile, Lady Jan was threatening to have me thrown out. She even claimed that she had a standing arrangement with some friend of hers to forcibly haul me and all of my possessions into Idaho Falls and leave me and everything that I owned in a pile on the sidewalk. I got to where I was afraid to leave the place for fear that I'd come back and find all of my possessions sitting out by the road. Women are notorious for pulling that particular stunt. They can find a hundred ways to convince themselves that it isn't arrogant and malicious. I once declined an offer to go on a ride in the mountains with Lamar because I was suspicious that he was cooperating with her in a scheme to lure me away so that she could have my possessions moved out of the house.

I tried hard to find someplace else to live. I asked everybody that I knew. I asked people that I didn't know. I asked cashiers and stock boys at stores, attendants at gas stations, strangers, everybody. I advertised in *Pharos* and begged in the *Frontiersman*. The results were not encouraging. A family member offered to let me live

in a camp trailer in the front yard. An associate in California offered to let me live in a camper in his garage, except for when he wanted to use it to go camping. However, I needed at least 700 square feet of floor space in order to have room for my various possessions. I also needed donated accommodations because I didn't have the means to pay rent

I applied at two different communities, one Christian community in northern California and one Patriot community in northern Idaho. The Patriot community didn't have any place for me, although the lady's rejection of me was courteous. I didn't get any response at all from the Christian community. They were probably too busy re-searching different ways to be judgmental.

Lady Jan kept trying to force me to leave and I kept complaining about the funds that I'd spent on supporting her and on running the farm. I kept insisting that I wouldn't have done that except that I'd expected to stay there for the rest of my life. Since she'd taken the funds and then, as soon as they were gone, demanded that I had to leave, I accused her of crass dishonesty and of violating our agreement. I insisted on getting the funds back. We finally agreed that she'd pay back the amount of the funds that I'd brought with me from the sale of Mere Keep. We decided that the monthly stipend from the sympathetic relative, which I'd also spent on supporting Lady Jan and on running the farm, would best be viewed as rent. I agreed that she didn't have to repay that part. So, we agreed that she owed me \$45,000.

Lady Jan barely has enough funds to pay her own expenses. Her payment plan for me is to pay the monthly cost of printing the *Frontiersman*. I estimated some time ago that it'll take her about 94 years to complete the payments, assuming that she continues to make them at all. She doesn't have a good record for that sort of thing. Also, women are notorious for having selective memories. I expect that she'll modify her memory of the agreement just like she modified her memory of why Lamar left. She'll decide that she agreed to pay back only the funds that I gave to Lamar against his interest in the farm. She'll insist that she never agreed to pay back the entire amount that I brought with me from the sale of Mere Keep. Thus, she'll reduce her debt to me from \$45,000 to about \$12,000 without paying a cent. Wait and see. Mark my words. If she does continue to make the payments, and if she actually pays the entire agreed amount, then I'll be about 150 years old by the time that she finishes paying the debt. In either case, I'm keeping the record of payments. If I don't say anything to her about it and if she doesn't read this memoir, then maybe she'll just keep paying for the rest of my life and forget to ask me when she's paid back the amount that I gave to Lamar. I can only hope. All of that monthly cash flow, approximately a whopping \$20 per month, is a great comfort to me in my old age.

While I was living on the farm and trying to find someplace else to live, the only promising contact that I ever made was with James Majeski. He'd been sharing a residence with his mother, Lady Helen the Gracious. She died while I was looking for a new home. He couldn't afford to stay there alone. Thus he began looking for a new place to live. We discussed our needs and made an agreement. We'd both search for a place to live. I searched in southeast Idaho and he searched in northern California.

## Outward Bound

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We were looking for land that had two separate houses, or a duplex, or some such arrangement. I insisted that I didn't want to share space with him. Whatever kind of place we found, he agreed to provide room and board. I agreed to wash the dishes, wash the laundry, do the yard work, and pay half of the utilities.

What happened next was one of those times when God, or my Fairy God mother, gave me some help. James was looking for places in northern California. A house for sale in Arizona was, by way of a clerical error, advertised as being for sale in northern California. James contacted the real estate agent and they got serious about a sale. It wasn't until then that they discovered the error and James learned that the house was in Arizona. However, by then he was sufficiently interested in the place that he drove to Arizona to examine it. The place didn't exactly satisfy my requirements. It was a double-wide mobile home. However, we'd been looking for long enough to realize that we weren't likely to find a lot with two residences. So, we decided that the place in Arizona was the best that we were going to find. Shortly thereafter, he bought it.

Once I'd located a place to live, Lady Jan became trustworthy again, at least insofar as dumping my possessions out beside the road was concerned. However, I was very tired of putting up with her and I wanted to leave the farm as soon as possible. I decided to move out before my possessions were removed from her house. I packed everything into boxes and James made the necessary arrangements for the movers. I left it to Lady Jan to supervise the movers when they arrived at her place, to load my possessions. I sat aside a few necessary things to take with me when I left. James came to Idaho to give me a ride to Arizona.

I don't expect that I'll ever see the farm or Lady Jan again. Before we left, I went out to the fence to scratch Honey under the chin. She didn't know that I was leaving her forever, even though I told her so. She was only a few years old, and seemed to be healthy, but she died a few months after I left. Sir Underfoot also died within a few months. I'm getting along just fine without Lady Jan, but I still regret the fates of Honey and Sir Underfoot. I sold my rifle to Lamar for enough, in cash, that I was able to pay the expenses of the trip. James and I left the farm on October 29, 2003, almost exactly seven years after I arrived there.



Honey, Sir John the Generous, and Delme,  
Sir John's girlfriend



Sir Underfoot

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The James Majeski Living Distrust

The house in Arizona was just outside of Show Low, in a community called Fool's Hollow. James and I arrived there late in October of 2003. It was the nicest house in which I'd ever lived, up to that time. It was the most beautiful location in which I'd ever lived. Indeed, it was almost exactly the ideal for which I'd hoped and about which I'd dreamed, since I was a child. For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to live in the mountains, near a lake, in a Pine forest, near a national park or a national forest. The location was almost exactly what I'd always wanted. Lacking the clerical error, he'd never even have been aware of the place. I'd thought that Arizona was a desert.

When I arrived at the house in Fool's Hollow, there were six booths in the Laissez Faire Flea Market. Three of them were mine. In addition to maintaining my own booths, I was maintaining the other three booths for other people, for a share of sales. Sales were extremely low. Sales from all of the booths, including mine, amounted to only a few dollars per year, during a good year. There were years when I didn't sell anything at all. Today, the other booths are gone. Mine are the only booths in the flea market.

*Pharos* had expanded far beyond anything that I'd imagined when I started it. However, it completely failed to motivate contributions. I continued to publish the *Frontiersman* and I'd occasionally receive a few dollars or some stamps from the subscribers, if I was lucky. By the way, I don't get paid for subscriptions to the *Frontiersman*. They're free. I decided back during the middle 80s that I'd never become a Patriot for Profit. I don't sell my political writing or my ideas. They're free to anybody who's interested in them. Contributions are welcome.

I began to offer things for sale on craigslist and on Sell It Yourself Online. I never made any sales. I also continued to do a certain amount of correspondence. I'd written a few more essays and memoirs and I was in the middle of this one. I also had a whole collection of unfinished projects. I had more than enough work to keep me busy more than full time. None of it has earned me enough cash to enable me to pay my expenses.

Before James and I made the deal, he'd occupied most of a single-wide mobile home. Since he brought with him, in addition to his own possessions, most of the things that Lady Helen the Gracious had owned before she died, he had a lot of stuff. I brought everything that I'd taken from Mere Keep plus what little I'd accumulated during seven years at the farm. That accumulation was mostly some additional computers and some associated equipment. Between the two of us, James and I had more possessions than we could comfortably fit into the double-wide mobile home, back porch, and three metal buildings. Most of the house was filled with boxes. In some places, they were piled to the ceiling.

I decided to have a rummage sale. At first, I sat one tiny table out by the street. The wind blew it over and broke it. Within a few weeks, however, I'd cleared a big enough space that I could move the rummage sale indoors, out of the weather. Over the four years that I lived in that house, I brought in several hundred dollars with my rummage sale. Since almost everything for sale belonged to James, the funds were his.

## Outward Bound

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By the time that I moved out of that house, after living there for four years, about half of the living room was dedicated to the rummage sale. I didn't get a lot of funds from the rummage sale and I didn't get rid of our junk very quickly but everything that I sold was profit and a little more space available in the house. My plan had been to use the funds from the rummage sale to buy a propane heating system for the house. However, James frittered away most of the funds on nonsense. The funds were his, not mine, so it was his prerogative.

The arrangement at Mere Keep was supposed to have been permanent. The arrangement at the farm was supposed to have been permanent. Both times, the behavior of other people had forced me to leave. Various of my friends accused me of various kinds of stupidity for trusting people that way but, as La Rochefoucauld noted, "It is more ignominious to mistrust our friends than to be deceived by them.". Anyway, people kept telling me to get the arrangement in writing. While James and I were negotiating our deal, one of the things upon which I insisted was some form of legal arrangement whereby I'd be authorized to stay in his house for the rest of my life if he died before I did. Eventually, we decided to have a lawyer make a trust for us. Since I was going to be the beneficiary, I paid the lawyer. That expenditure used the last of my remaining funds from the sale of Mere Keep. Those funds were insufficient so I borrowed the difference from James. The lawyer gave us a document that seemed to have been assembled from about three different generic templates. The document didn't apply very well to our situation. We eventually decided that the lawyer knew less about trusts than we did. James and I worked on it for several months. Eventually, we completed it. The intent of the trust was to authorize me to stay in the house for the rest of my life if James died before I did. The trust didn't enable me to stay. It only authorized me to stay. I still had to figure out some way to pay the bills.

I wanted my friend Bob Hayton to be the first successor trustee. James insisted on Tom Majeski, his brother. Tom didn't like the trust and claimed that it was unenforceable. Also, I didn't trust Tom. I believed that he was far too greedy and dishonest. He once commented to me, "I'd sell my own sister into prostitution if I thought there was a profit in it". Another of my friends who knew them, Ernie Wolfe, commented once that if Tom got a chance, while James was gone somewhere, then he'd sell the house and James would return to find somebody else living in it. Nothing is ever simple.

Shortly after we moved into the house, I got an unintended warning from James. I was standing in the doorway to his room talking to him about something. I told him that I was going to wash the dishes and started to leave. Before I could even turn around, he said, "Well, take these with you and you can scout around the room here to see if there's any more that needs to be washed. Also, there's some dirty laundry on the floor in the bathroom that you can take." I refused, but it alerted me to be careful. After that, he never stopped trying to manipulate me into following him around, picking up after him, and waiting on him "hand and foot". I kept refusing to do so. When we'd originally made the agreement, I told him that I wouldn't be his 24-hour-a-day nursemaid.

In spite of my distaste for doing it, I ended up tending his legs. The difference was that he was capable of picking up after himself but he wasn't capable of taking care of his legs. So, I did that for him. He had diabetes and his legs were swollen. He kept them wrapped in Ace bandages. It became my job, three times per week, to unwrap them so that he could take a shower. Then, I had to smear medication on them and rewrap them. It was a distasteful job. The skin on his legs had a lot of open sores that would bleed when I unwrapped the legs. That was bad enough but I also had to wake him up when it was time to do the job because he was usually asleep. I'd have to wait while he took his shower, unable to leave the house until I'd finished rewrapping his legs. Sometimes, he'd finish his shower and go back to sleep, knowing that I was waiting for him.

Twice, I saved his life. In each case, he slept more and more of the time. Eventually, I couldn't wake him. Each time, I arranged for him to be transported to the local hospital. Each time, he was gone for several weeks before he was sufficiently healthy to come back home again. The information that he gave me was that, if I hadn't intervened, then he'd have sat in his chair and slept until he was dead. I don't know what the condition was but, apparently, it was a consequence of his diabetes.

Eventually, his attempts to manipulate me gradually escalated into threats and bullying. It got to the point that I wouldn't even go out into the shared part of the house when he was out of his room. I'd sneak around in my end of the house, being as quiet as possible. I'd listen for any noise that he might make that would alert me to his presence in the shared part of the house. I did the best that I could to go into that part of the house only when he was asleep or out of the house. The situation became difficult. He never did anything except try to accuse me of something, manipulate me into doing something, or bully me about something. He must have eventually realized that he couldn't control me. After almost exactly four years, and in spite of my position as the beneficiary in the Trust with a lifetime tenancy in the place, he told me that I had to leave. His intention, declared to me in writing, was to rent my rooms. He didn't have any intention of giving the income from my rooms to me. He didn't care if I lived under a bridge.

Sometime around August or September of 2007, my sister Betty and her husband Dewey visited me briefly. After observing the situation, they offered to buy a house for me in my local area. I quickly located a single wide mobile home that was ideal for me. I notified Betty, via email. I never received a reply. It wasn't until several years later that I learned that she seldom checked her email. I also learned that, so far as they were aware, they had never offered to buy a place for me. I don't know what she said when I heard her make that offer. After that, Betty told me that they'd kick out the man who was living in a granny apartment at her place and let me live there. Then, that plan went away.

Since I didn't have access to the courts, I didn't have any way to enforce the Trust. I needed to find someplace permanent to live. Again, as at the farm, I advertised in *Pharos* and begged in the *Frontiersman*. This ought to be a lesson to those people who

## Outward Bound

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previously criticized me for not getting the arrangement in writing. This time, I got it in writing and I still couldn't stay.

I talked, from time to time, about my situation to some nearby friends, Ernie and Claire Wolfe. Eventually, they offered me temporary accommodations in their house. For several months after that, I slept in their spare bedroom. I had to put up with their dogs but it was better than putting up with James. I was able to move many of my possessions out of James' house before he changed the locks. I did that by sneaking into the place at night, packing things quietly, and carrying the boxes next door where I stacked them on the back porch of a neighbor's house. Most of it had to sit there, exposed to the weather, all winter. I kept sneaking over to the neighbor's back porch to see if James was tampering with any of my stuff. A lot more of my stuff was in the back room of James' house and in two metal buildings behind James' house. After James changed the locks, I didn't have any access to that stuff at all.

I'd been refusing to talk to James. Instead, I sent him letters. It was kind of stupid to mail letters to somebody who lived right across the street but that's how distasteful it was for me to talk to him. Anyway, he gave me a deadline for getting my stuff moved out of his back room and the two metal buildings. He threatened to take it all to the dump if I didn't move it. So, I bought a big tarp and moved my possessions. Some of them went onto Ernie's front porch. Some of them went into his back room. Some of them went into his yard, under the tarp.

Eventually, as before, I was forced to make a move that I didn't want to make. Claire told me that I had to be out of her place by June of 2008. Dewey and Betty offered to let me use the garage and a spare bedroom in their house, and I accepted the offer. I didn't want to leave the forest in the White Mountains of Arizona but, as before, I didn't have any choice. I still wish that I could have stayed. Anyway, Dewey and his brother, Doug, came to get me. I got a lot of help from the local Mormons and we loaded my stuff into a truck. I don't remember the exact date when we left. It was in March of 2008.

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## NEAR Spacecraft

On Wednesday, February 12, 2001, NASA landed its NEAR Spacecraft on the Eros asteroid, and abandoned it there. I tried to buy the spacecraft. My efforts were unsuccessful.

Sometime during early 2005, I decided to claim the spacecraft. My intention was to establish and use a doctrine somewhat akin to the long-established principle that something can be claimed if it's abandoned or adrift at sea. Of course, different circumstances apply to an object in space than to an object adrift at sea. A different claim process would be appropriate. I invented a process, followed the process, and claimed the spacecraft. My acquisition of ownership of the NEAR Spacecraft is completely documented in *The Moonlight Flea Market*.

After I'd successfully acquired ownership of the NEAR Spacecraft, I offered it for sale, in my flea market, for \$6,000,000 plus all associated taxes, fees, and other expenses, as noted in the offer to sell. For a while, I also posted it on craigslist. Nitwits kept objecting that it was a bogus offer, and craigslist kept deleting the offer. I offered it again, several times. I didn't receive any serious offers, although I received several stupid ones. One woman, in reply to my offer, said that she loves me and that she wants to have my baby. Another nitwit claimed to own the International Space Station and offered to trade it for my NEAR Spacecraft. I inquired regarding his acquisition of ownership of the space station. I didn't hear from him again. Yet another clueless wag claimed to own the Eros asteroid and wanted me to pay landing fees and docking fees for parking my spacecraft on his asteroid. I inquired regarding his acquisition of ownership and, like the nitwit who wanted to trade the International Space Station, this one didn't reply. I eventually noticed a craigslist policy that restricts offer to only local items. After that, I ceased to offer it on craigslist. I still have the spacecraft offered for sale in *The Moonlight Flea Market*. Eventually, I raised my asking price to \$10,000,000 plus all associated taxes, fees, and other expenses, as noted in the offer to sell. Later, I raised my asking price to \$100,000,000 plus all associated taxes, fees, and other expenses, as noted in the offer to sell. If you're interested in buying it, hurry. I'm thinking about raising the asking price again.

Most people think that I'm crazy for offering the NEAR Spacecraft for sale. However, most of those same people buy lottery tickets, so they're crazier than they think that I am. I have a better chance of selling the NEAR Spacecraft than any one of them has of winning the lottery. Furthermore, I don't have to support government operated brainwashing schools in order to offer my spacecraft for sale. Most people believe that I don't really own the NEAR Spacecraft. However, most of those people believe that they own their houses and cars, so they're even more stupid than they think that I am. They don't own their houses or their cars. The government owns the houses and cars. I didn't have to get a license to buy the NEAR Spacecraft and I don't have to pay a "tax" on the ownership, at least not yet.

What the heck. Offering the NEAR Spacecraft for sale is less work than shining shoes. Also, the pay isn't much worse, it's more fun, the hours are better, I don't have to go anywhere to do it, and I don't have to look at people's feet. If I sell the space-

## Outward Bound

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craft, then there are a lot of things that I'll be able to do with the funds. I'll bet that lady that I mentioned above will love me even more after I sell the spacecraft than she does now. I'll wait until she's pregnant and sues me for child support before I tell her that I've had a vasectomy.

One last thing. Why didn't I claim the stuff on the Moon? Because the Moon isn't "international waters", in the sense of being outside of a national jurisdiction. The very first thing that the explorers did, when they arrived on the Moon, was to plant a flag. There's a long and well established tradition that explorers always do that. The legal consequence of planting a flag is to claim the place in the name of the nation whose flag is planted. The colonial explorers did the same thing when they started coming to this continent. Nobody has planted a flag on the Eros Asteroid and, if somebody eventually does, my claim of ownership of the NEAR spacecraft is Grandfathered.

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Georgia On My Mind

I arrived at my new location in Georgia in March of 2008. This is the fourth time in my life that I've lived somewhere that I thought would be a permanent arrangement. The arrangements at Mere Keep, at the farm, and in Arizona turned out to not be permanent. I'm not entirely confident that living here will be permanent, either. It never worked before. Why would I expect it to work this time?

I'm grateful for the help that I'm receiving here but, if I had my choice, then I'd prefer to be back in the White Mountains of Arizona. That was the most beautiful and desirable place that I ever lived. Georgia is too far east. The fallout from anything that happens on this continent will blow past here. There are way too many people in this part of the country. I don't like living in such a heavily populated region. I'd prefer to live at the end of a long gravel road, with the nearest neighbor a long distance away. I have a rule-of-thumb about that. If your neighbor is close enough that you can hear his wife yell or his dog bark, then he's too close.

If I ever get rich, then I suppose that I can go back to Arizona. It's far enough west to avoid most of the fallout from most of the things that might happen on this continent. It's far enough south of Yellowstone that I might be able to survive the explosion. Hopefully, it's far enough east to be well away from most of the West Coast fault lines. While I was there, I regarded it as the safest and most desirable place to live that I'd ever seen.

While I'm here, I'm mostly responsible for the care of this place. As of now, I have more work than I can do, which suits me fine. I can look all around me and see things that I've built or repaired. I have many ongoing projects. One such project is with regard to the long-term problem of soil erosion, mostly on the hill on the back of the property. It's been going on for a long time, and it's sufficiently bad that many of the tree roots are exposed and suffering serious damage. Some trees have blown over. I'm trying to restore the soil using mulch and compost. I'm trying to provide terraces, to eliminate future erosion.



Exposed, Damaged Tree Roots, October 21, 2017



Terraces, July 2, 2018

I also installed security lights around the house, built some sidewalks, repaired steps and stair railings, and so forth. I repaired the microwave oven. Some visiting rela-

## Outward Bound

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tives instantly and mindlessly advised, “just buy a new one.” The marketing swindlers have been very successful at mind conditioning. The relatives didn’t think about the matter at all, not even for a second. It wasn’t thought. It was conditioned response, like Pavlov’s dogs. Nevertheless, I fixed it.

Anyway, I have plenty of work here, for however much longer I stay.

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