

# BOBOLINGS NOV '88

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My vacations usually are taken over Labor Day weekend. In the twenty-plus years since my first convention, there ~~have~~ been a few exceptions, such as a mid-summer honeymoon, a couple of summer weeks to paint the house (that's a vacation?), and a week each in two different winters for skiing. But, normally, the big vacation is over Labor Day weekend, with maybe a week before and two weeks after.

This year turned out differently. We entered the summer with plans for a vacation over Labor Day, but a series of events caused a change. We had planned to go to the Baycon, but the more we learned about it, the less we wanted to go. I don't know what the final blow was, but there were many--the isolation of the hotel (not so bad for us, but far less desirable with 2½-year-old Kathy in tow), the estrangement between the con and the fashion show, the dealings with the art show (remember Progress Report # 2?), the awesome size to which the con was growing (We both still prefer smaller cons. Though this element is largely out of the hands of the committee the fact that the con did seem to be attracting a large audience made it less attractive to us), and other matters. A telephone call at work also didn't help matters. The Secretary of the Treasury wanted his report out early this year. A full five weeks was chopped off the normal time that I have to prepare the Internal Revenue material for inclusion in the Secretary's report. There were only two places to find the time--considerable overtime work just prior to the con and an early return from the con, or a delayed vacation. Since we had to visit both New Mexico and Nebraska, as well as the con, and the rapid return would completely wreck any "vacation" aspect of the trip, it was quite easy to decide to cancel the convention trip and defer the vacation.

On September 26th, after a hectic month at the office, Peggy, Kathy and I boarded the plane for Denver. It was a good flight, with Kathy being far less of a pest than we had feared. The only real difficulty was that Peggy chose chicken for her entree. The chicken was good enough, but as later events prove it was the wrong choice.

We'd reserved a Hertz compact for our arrival in Denver, and Hertz came through in #1 style. They didn't have any compacts, but they did have quite a number of intermediates. Ours turned out to be a Mercury, power steering and brakes, air conditioned. At compact rates, since that was what we'd reserved. Less 20%, since when they asked who I worked for I replied IRS, and apparently the government has a reduced-rate contract with Hertz.

It was just starting to get dark, so we saw only a little of Denver on our way to our first stop, my Uncle Emil and Aunt Lil Englert. We liked what little we saw.

Friday, and Saturday were spent doing typical family and vacation activities. Revisiting the western goods store I'd discovered in Denver in 1962 or so. Visiting Buffalo Bill's grave on Lookout Mountain (Peggy stayed in town to visit more stores, and we never did get back to the one she wanted me to see.) Meeting relatives (cousin Claudia and her husband Art, Uncle Henry, cousin Ed and his wife Edna, cousin Virginia and cousin Jack - the Englert's children - and Jack's wife Elaine and youngsters Butch and Timmy). Seeing Cinderella City--a new shopping center in Englewood, just outside of Denver--reputedly (and I can believe it) the largest in the world. Visiting the gravel quarry where Uncle Emil presently works at times (though past 80, he's not yet ready to retire). They even allowed us on the boat at the gravel quarry. I never before knew that some sand was manufactured from gravel, and here I discovered that they just grind the gravel to the size needed to meet their orders.

Saturday night we attended a meeting of the Denver club. They meet every Saturday, always at Chuck Hansen's house, and if our Saturday was any criterion the meetings are spirited. We met Roy Hunt (a name out of the past for me), Emil Greenleaf and his wife Kay (last time I saw Emil was at a 1961 Midwestcon), Norm Metcalf, and two others whose names now escape me. We swapped fannish gossip, joined in the rather vigorous discussions about what a con should be between Chuck and Norm, helped consume copious quantities of Chuck's liquor, and generally had a most excellent evening. Aunt Lil, bless her, was our baby-sitter that night, which contributed no end to our enjoyment. Naturally we tried to convince Denver to vote for the Discon. We also tried to talk them into bidding sometime--though apparently the idea of Denver bidding sometime had already occurred to them. There seems, however, to be some doubts about when "sometime" might be. One of their minor questions seemed to be which zone Denver was in. Chuck, it's in the western zone. The easternmost states of the western zone are Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.

We had a big steak dinner at cousin Jack's on Sunday, and then Peggy, Kathy and I departed Denver for Sunol, Nebraska, a little (population 100) town in southwestern Nebraska where my Uncle Dick lives and where I was born.

The last time I took that trip from Denver to Sunol was probably about 1933, when I was 7 years old. I'd forgotten the way the land looked. There's one stretch of Colorado 113/Nebraska 19 where you're driving through sandstone badlands, rolling mile after mile of them, and then you crest a hill no different from any of the past fifty hills--except that you're out of the badlands. It's completely startling when you're not expecting it. Twenty feet past the crest, looking back, you can't expect the forthcoming change in the scenery. I found in the next few days that there are a number of sudden land changes of the same nature in western Nebraska, but nothing paralleling that abrupt switch from one world to another.

Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday we spent in and around Sunol. As I mentioned above, I was born there. The family left Sunol in 1935, when I was 9, and I'd returned there once--for a couple of hours in 1958 on my way home from the Solacon--since that time. The town hasn't really changed. The house where I was born is now a part-time

beauty salon; dad's store, once converted to a home, is vacant; the post-office is now in Caldwell's store (it used to be in dad's); the bank, which closed in 1933-1935, has never re-opened, and my best friend Ray Wilt no longer lives in town. The streets, however, are still unpaved--they're the same sand I shuffled through when I was a barefoot boy with overalls. The school building is still there, even though the high-school kids are now bussed to Sidney, 12 miles away, instead of sharing the school. Mrs. Caldwell, one of my teachers, still runs Caldwell's store, same as she did when I carried her notes 33 and more years ago. And "our house" is still recognizeable, with the little added ell on one side where the bathroom was added to make the outhouse obsolete back at the time I was born. (The outhouse was still standing when I was a youngster. I could find no trace of it this trip.)

So much the same. And yet so different. I remembered the plains. Sunol is in a valley. Flat, many miles wide, but still a valley. The horizon wasn't quite what I'd warned Peggy to expect, because there were hills to both the north and south. Not the rounded hills of the east, but a ridge--something to block the range of the eye.

An old trouble came back in Sunol. I have a sense of direction. It works reasonably well, here as well as there. But in 1935, when we came east, I found that I suffered a 180° disorientation. North was south and east was west. In the east, I finally learned to adjust, within limits. If I pause before I point east, I'll point in the right direction. If I point by instinct, I'll be 180 degrees off. Well, in Nebraska (and New Mexico) my eastern North is South, and West is East. I simply can't reason it out of my head. I know which way is which, but it violates my sense of direction. Maybe Peggy's right--maybe I'd be better off without a sense of direction which is subject to confusion.

I wouldn't want to live in Nebraska. It couldn't be my home again. But I love the land. It drove Peggy to distraction, I'm sure that she disliked it much more than she's told me. But there's something about the everchanging sameness that is utterly comfortable to me. This hill is not that hill, even though there's no difference between the two. Infinite variation within a restricted pattern. It's like Tensleep Canyon in Wyoming--always the same, always different. A rock, a plant, a fence. A reason to look at where you are. A reason to wonder what's a few feet or a few miles further on.

Uncle Dick, also in his eighties (dad was the youngest of 14), was feeling reasonably good, and he did all the driving while we were there. We visited Ash Hollow, on the old Oregon Trail, and Scotts Bluff, also on the trail. I enjoyed it.

Wednesday morning, the second of October, Peggy, Kathy and I took up our travels again. We got a fairly early start heading for Cheyenne, Wyoming, where we planned to have lunch. Had a fair lunch there, gassed up, and drove south toward Boulder, Colorado, soon running out of the rain and sleet that had bothered us near Cheyenne. I'd wanted to drive through Rocky Mountain National Park, but a check with the police at Estes Park indicated that Trail Ridge Drive through the park was closed.

Peggy Rae, girl navigator, decided we should drive the few miles further south to Boulder, through town, and then south and west on 119, 6, 9, 285, 17, 285 again, and so on to Albuquerque.

We liked Boulder. "Nice town. Wish we could spend some time here." And then route 119, into the mountains. "That's pretty." "Look, there!" "Slow down!" "Oh, Kathy, LOOK!" My wife's a kook. If the weather's the least bit cool I'm reminded that I'm freezing her out by having the car window open. This time she not only failed to remind me, but kept her own window rolled all the way down. We gawked at the aspens--unbelievable--the stream, the rocks, the houses, the wonderland of 119 in the fall at the just right time of year and day. We stopped and Kathy wrestled rocks out of the freezing cold water of the stream and we disturbed the couple petting by the stream-side (later making up for it by turning out the lights he'd left burning in his car) and we enjoyed. It was our kind of a place.

By nightfall we'd managed to reach Breckinridge, in the heart of the high Rockies, where we found an excellent condominium for the night. \$14 for two bedrooms and kitchen facilities, complete with minimal supplies. It was nice sleeping, with a creek gurgling outside and the wonderful air. Particularly wonderful for Peggy, who finds that her allergies disappear in Colorado. They'd first started leaving in Denver, came back mildly in Nebraska (due, probably, to typical Nebraska dust), and left again south of Cheyenne.

We left Breckinridge somewhat after noon on Thursday. By nightfall we were in Santa Fe, New Mexico, ready and willing for Mexican food. We found it, the best of the trip, at Maria's-- a homely place we'd never have stopped at except for the recommendation of a service station operator who said the food was somewhat less hot than that of the other "best" place in Santa Fe. I'm glad we didn't try the "hot" place. No complaints, mind, but quite enough heat for our eastern palate.

At 11:30 we arrived at Rio Rancho Estates, about 11 miles north of Albuquerque, where we had some business. By 3:30 the next day we'd rejected an option we had on some land, and moved to a downtown motel for what we planned to be the remainder of our vacation.

It didn't work out that way.

I can give facts and figures on Albuquerque's growth over the past two decades. It's a growing city, and will be a grown city one day. Today, however, it's in a cultural cul-de-sac. Its Main Street is Central Avenue, but the faces are the same.

Albuquerque must not want us. It went out of its way to estrange us. At 8pm I wanted a pint of milk for Kathy. They don't know about small stores for items like milk with evening hours in Albuquerque. We paid 33¢ a pint at restaurants for Kathy's milk. On Monday I wanted a haircut. Barber shops aren't open on Mondays. One evening I wanted a stock market report. The evening final had 2:00 pm prices, despite the fact that Albuquerque is two hours behind New York. In D.C. I can pick up a 5:00 p.m. paper with closing (4pm) prices. I'm used to big town services. Albuquerque is small town.

We did enjoy several aspects of Albuquerque, however. We had a great time at the Albuquerque club's Sunday afternoon get-together, attended by such people as Jack Speer, Roy Tackett, Bob Vardeman, three different Mike's, Woody Wolfe, and others. It was a nicely smooth organization, with interesting people to chatter to, and a genuine interest in science fiction. While some of the spark of Denver's marvelous-to-behold arguments was missing, it wasn't missed. Peggy and I were sufficiently impressed that we also talked up the idea that they should bid for a world con. Reaction was somewhat the same as in Denver. They basically agreed that they should--someday. Albuquerque is also in the Western zone. Albuquerque is presently building facilities that would handle a worldcon, so hopefully Woody and Bob and Roy and Jack and others will be gearing up to putting in a bid. If memory serves, Jack and Roy, the plans for Tucker's Con Hotel appear in a FAPA mailing around # 72. You might want to dig this out and turn it over to the convention-site-building group.

We spent some time and a fair amount of money in Old Town, Albuquerque, which features western artifacts ranging from polished rocks and Zia pottery to Zuni inlays and Hopi pottery and Navajo rugs. I went ape over some of the Hopi pottery, though I didn't buy any, while Peggy fell for a Zuni roadrunner, which we did buy.

I enjoyed the countryside, and we both found the Sandia range interesting though not a potential settling down place. I like Colorado better.

I'd looked forward quite a bit to spotting some game on our travels. At Rio Rancho, we spotted a coyote; in Colorado Peggy spotted a deer; there were a few protected bison at one place in Nebraska; and I saw my first Western Jay in New Mexico. That was all--unless you want to count the small trout near Breckenridge. It's a good thing we weren't dependent upon wildlife for eats.

We saw the Speers a couple of times--very enjoyable times--but Peggy and I kept thinking of Boulder, and route 119. On Thursday, October 10th, (make that Wednesday, the 9th) we loaded up the Mercury and headed north. From Taos east to Raton I found the country much more to my liking, but Peg was sleeping, and we had a destination, so I didn't stop to savor the country. Some year, when time permits, I'll spend a little time in Northeastern New Mexico. Wednesday night we spent in Raton, and late Thursday we arrived in Boulder. It turned out that Peggy's sleepiness the day before had been caused by a virus. Thankfully she recovered promptly, for by Thursday noon I was out with it. We had an excellent Italian dinner in Boulder Thursday night (home made spaghetti yet), but on Friday the virus was back for both of us, and we were getting no benefits from being on vacation. I called Denver airport at about 11:00 a.m., got reservations on a flight that afternoon, and we were back in DC before midnight Friday.

Bits and pieces are left from that vacation. Those set in typewriter imprints on wax above, and those engraved on memory, but not in print. Like, Just outside of Albuquerque a police cruiser pulled me over, having singled me out from a crowd, checked my driver's license and registration, asked when and where I was returning the car, and then waved me on. Why? Like, Peggy asking me if the Speer

listed in the Albuquerque directory as "John Batty Speer" would be the one we wanted--and the discovery that yes, it was. Only the listing was "Speer, John B. atty." (Jack, when told of this, said that he'd always known there must be some good reason that he preferred to be listed as "lawyer.") There are more, but these memories can remain unrecorded. The good ones will linger with Peggy, or with me, or maybe even with Kathy--who still remembers telling the mountain to go away, and then having it go away (a low cloud came in). A good vacation is an inner enjoyment. I enjoyed this vacation, in the fall of the year for once, and in the proper part of the country. Peggy, I think, discovered a beauty she hadn't known before. No more than that is needed.