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Chapter 5.1 – Discharge and reuniting with LaRue

I was discharged December 15, 1958 after four years, three months, and three days in the Air Force. I would be in the inactive Air Force Reserve until I accumulate eight years of obligation as required by law.

My parents were living in Guatemala and I was in no hurry to go there after just returning to the United States after three and a half years overseas.

I felt totally lost but free to do as I pleased.

I decided to fly to Salt Lake City and look up my old Air Force buddy in Scotland, Ed Smith. Then after a few days make my way to Salmon then to Patterson to pick up stuff and leave uniforms.

I got an airline ticket from Charleston, South Carolina to Salt Lake for \$152.74 and still have the carbon copy receipt. That was a lot of money in those days.

However, I was reimbursed the amount the train ticket would have cost. I flew to Midway Field in Chicago on National and changed to a United flight and arrived in Salt Lake in the early evening. I didn't have Ed's phone number or address so went to a phone book. There were a couple pages of Smiths. I had a vague memory that his phone number started with an IN prefix, but then most of them did. I was on about my eighth call when the lady who answered said she was Ed's mother and he was out for the evening. She would come and get me. I still have the list of names that I called and

checked off. Ed was surprised to see me when he got home.

We visited Ed's hangouts in the evenings, and I shopped for a car. I found a used gray and white 1956 four door Ford Fairlane that looked to be in good shape and low miles. It was one of the first cars to have seat belts. It was around \$1,200. I peeled off my per diem checks from Turkey and paid cash for it. The salesman was impressed.

The car dealer was in South Salt Lake and I had to take the car to the State Court house on the hill in North Salt Lake to get a temporary sticker on it. I had not driven in over three years. I was nervous about driving again, and my Idaho drivers license had expired. The salesman rode with me to help me get there.

In those days when you pulled into a service station an attendant pumped your gas, checked your oil, and washed your windshield. I liked the idea of having seat belts in the car and used them. However, before I pulled into a service station I would unhook my seatbelt and tuck it away. I didn't want them to think I was a wimp!

After a few days in Salt Lake I was ready to take off for Salmon. I headed north around December 20. I got to Salmon late and got a hotel room. The next morning I went to where I boarded in high school to see Olga and Clarence (Smitty) Smith. They took me right in.

I got my car registered with Idaho plates (2L1311) and a new driver's license. I took my car to the Ford garage to get it serviced and was told the tie rods were shot. I had them replaced and wondered how they could be that worn with the low mileage showing in the dash. It looked in good shape otherwise. Later, however, I began to wonder if the mileage had turned over after 100,000 miles. Much later I concluded this was probably the case. We drove it until 1962 and traded for a 1960 Ford Falcon station wagon in California.

About a month before I was to depart Samsun, I mailed a metal trunk of my stuff to the May Post Office. I drove to May and it was there. I took it to the house in Patterson. The folks had locked the door and left with everything in it. I sorted through my stuff and took what I wanted, which was civilian clothes, and my new slide projector and 35mm slides that I had sent in the trunk.

There were only two or three guys around Salmon that I knew and a night or two going around with them was enough. I ran into Pat Skinner, a friend and classmate of LaRue. We visited for a while, and she asked me if I was going to look up LaRue. I told her no even though I knew I was going to. I wanted to leave all options open.

It was a weekend I was talking to Olga and Clarence about my future plans. The subject came up about LaRue and they knew she was working in *California*. I told them I called her twice *when I got back to the*

states, but she was always out for the evening. So, I quit calling. Olga said, “it is now afternoon in California and you should go right in there and call her.” She was persistent. (Olga always thought we should be together and encouraged our first date in 1954 for the prom). I summoned up my courage and we finally connected. I had no idea what her commitments were but thought it would be fun to see her again. I told her I would be going to Guatemala to see my folks and I might drive down and fly from San Francisco. If I did I could pass through Walnut Creek and see her. I also had in the back of my mind that I would need a place to leave my car.

After few days in Salmon I was ready to hit the road and see my grandparents in Cambridge, and Aunt Mary and Uncle Donald on the Oregon Slope.

I arrived in Cambridge and knocked on the door of Grandma and Grandpa Hathhorn. There was no recognition by Grandpa when he answered the door. I told him I was an encyclopedia salesman and that got him flustered. Grandpa let me in then I told them who I was. They had no idea of my whereabouts and were surprised. I spent the night with them and visited Grandma Edmunson and then went to Uncle Donald and Aunt Mary’s on Christmas Eve.

My Reconnection with LaRue

I was restless Christmas day at Uncle Donald and Aunt Mary's. I decided to leave in the afternoon and drive part way to California. My plan was to drive to Winnemucca and stay for the night. I got to Winnemucca and had a steak and decided to keep going. Next it was Reno and over Donner Pass to Sacramento about 1am. No use stopping as I was not tired. Too excited, I guess. I proceeded on to Walnut Creek. I arrived about 4am and got a motel room. It turned out to be about four blocks from where LaRue worked.

I had no idea how seeing LaRue would go and had no expectations. It could be hello, how are you, a short visit, and continue on my way. She could have other obligations.

I hoped at least I could leave my car for a while when I went to Guatemala. My backup plan in case things didn't work out was to visit Uncle Jim and family. He was a professor at the University of Nevada in Reno and they lived in Sparks, Nevada.

I was up early and called the house, hoping to catch her. Loa answered and said LaRue had gone to work at the bank. I later found the bank easily as it was nearby. I turned a corner too fast and my new portable transistor radio flew off the passenger seat and cracked the handle, which upset me. I told myself to slow down.

I walked into the bank and saw LaRue walking behind the teller cages. She was a more mature version of the high school girl I last saw over three years ago. She saw me and ran out into the lobby causing everyone in the bank to take notice. We could not talk long. I came back, picked her up, and we went to Loa and Max's for lunch. Loa invited me to stay with them and said I could have their son David's bed. I was all set for what I figured to be a couple of days before I moved on.

Max was home from the firehouse that night and we all gathered in the living room. It was a strange feeling being reunited with LaRue.

Max and Loa were having a martini and asked if I would like one. Knowing LaRue was against alcohol I declined. I had been wondering how I would handle this issue. Then she said she would have a drink! I was surprised and backtracked in a hurry.

We were rather reserved that evening. She sat on the couch across the room and we all sat around and visited. I wondered if this was how it was going to be. I might not be here long and started thinking about moving on.

I brought in my slide projector and slides and gave them a slideshow on Scotland and Turkey. All in all my reception was good, but LaRue and I were somewhat distant. We did get a hug in later in the evening when we all hung it up for the night.

Relations warmed up quickly the next couple of days. We were happy to be together again after three and a half years. I had planned to stay in Walnut Creek a couple of days, but I was easily convinced to stay over New Years. Max and Loa were great hosts. I knew them since the summer of 1954 when they were on vacation in Salmon. I felt they liked me and were promoting this reunion.

Max and Loa were going to a New Years Eve party and said we could have a party at their place and watch the kids. Larue's sister Jane and brother-in-law Jerry and another couple were invited. I went to the liquor store and stocked up with four bottles of good booze. Max was impressed with my selection and had to sample them all. We had a nice quiet New Years Eve party.

New Years Day I suggested we go to Reno. I wanted to visit my uncle Jim and explore college ideas as he was the Dean of Men at Nevada. I left that out. LaRue said, "to get married or what?" It totally surprised me hearing "married".

We did not go to Reno. We had talked before I went overseas about getting married someday, but that was ancient history. We had gone our separate ways as she had 3 more years of high school.

We were back where we were over three years earlier and I started thinking. Both of us by now felt we were

meant for each other. We both had over three years to explore life and other people, and here we were back together again. I would be leaving soon to go to Guatemala and then to college. I felt we needed to have a commitment to each other. A ring might be in order. I was not thinking any further than that. Monday morning I went to Samuels, a well known jewelry store in Oakland that Max and Loa recommended. I picked out a ring, and paid cash for it.

I showed the ring to Max and Loa. They were supportive. I had Larue's niece, Maxine, get a ring of LaRue's out of her jewelry box so I could get the new ring sized properly. Now the family was in on the plan, and anxious for the big moment. It all worked out and I presented the ring Friday night after LaRue got off work. She was totally surprised and accepted! I had stopped to say hello and hopefully leave my car and we were engaged! This was a huge fork in the road and totally unplanned. I would go to Guatemala, come back, and we would figure out the next move.

My Trip to Guatemala

I didn't have a passport but could go on a tourist card for a limited time. I had no idea how long I would stay. I thought it might be a couple of months working with my Dad at the small mine on the remote mountain surrounded by jungle.

I briefed LaRue on the quirks of the 56 Ford as she would be driving it. It was hard to start on cold mornings, so you had to pump the gas. The gas gauge was faulty. It would be empty when it shows 1/4 tank. It leaks engine oil, so check the oil level often.

Max, Loa, and LaRue drove me to the San Francisco airport. I boarded the plane and could see LaRue looking out the window. I really didn't want to leave and thought about getting off.

end chapter 5.1