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Chapter 6.2 - Our Early Married Life in Berkeley (1961-1962)

. I was looking for a job as an engineering aid. It was a tight job market and most places said they had already done their summer hiring. I went to San Jose, Livermore, Oakland, and the gas and chemical companies in Antioch and Pittsburg to no avail. The large employer for those types of jobs were the counties, so I took the civil service tests for Alameda County in Oakland and Contra Costa County in Concord. County government moves very slow.

It was discouraging and in fact looking hopeless. The Ford was a gas hog and I was going through a lot of gas. I wrote to LaRue and said I was down to \$10 and had to get gas the next day to continue my job search. If I was looking for jobs around Hayward I would spend the night with Ross and Marion. If I was in Livermore I would stay with Uncle Fred and Aunt Merriam. If I was out near Concord I would stay with Jane and Jerry. This saved a few miles travel and gas.

I was in Berkeley visiting Max at his fire house and someone said to try the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory. It is located on the hill above the University of California and operated for the Atomic Energy Commission by the University. I drove up to the gate and was passed through to the personnel office. **They did not have any jobs in what I was looking for, but they needed a beginning computer operator. That rang a bell as my Weber College buddy, Marc, had said it was a good job.**

The personnel guy asked if that was something I might want to try, and I couldn't get "yes" out quick enough. He took me to the computer center. There was this huge IBM 709 computer that

filled the room. The operator console alone was three feet wide, five tall, and five feet deep with rows of blinking lights and switches.

The Lab would be receiving the biggest and newest IBM 7090 supercomputer in a few weeks. Wow, what a place. The head of operations turned out to be from Utah and we hit it off. I was offered the job and immediately accepted. I was on my way and what a day! It required an Atomic Energy Commission security clearance that they said would be no problem since I had been cleared for DOD Top Secret, but it might take a month.

In the interim I could work in data processing for an experiment being conducted on the University's 88-inch Cyclotron. I started the next Monday making a grandiose \$400 a month. I was in hog heaven and went and bought some new shirts, pants, and slim neckties that were in vogue at the time. I wanted to look professional.

The job was not much of a challenge if you knew your right hand from your left with a fist full of punched cards in each hand. It entailed running thousands of punched cards through IBM sorters and then running them through a printer and getting print outs for the scientists. One day we were moving boxes of cards around the room and my fellow worker asked me, "what are you getting your doctorate in?" I stuttered and stammered something like, "not sure yet".

After a paycheck I was able to get airline tickets for LaRue and the kids. They flew down and I picked them up at the Oakland airport. It was great to see them and be reunited. The airline was great with helping LaRue and the kids. There was a basinet for Brian

that attached to the forward bulkhead. LaRue was impressed with my new professional look and skinny necktie.

Max and Loa were leaving on a long vacation and we could live there and take care of their place while they were gone.

We started looking for place to live and found a two-bedroom house on Posen Avenue between Berkeley and Albany. We were on the Albany side. Max's cousin lived across the street on the Berkeley side. Max and Loa had an old gas kitchen stove in the garage that we cleaned up and bought a new kitchen table and chairs, a used refrigerator, and a new Sears washing machine. Firemen friends of Max and Loa were getting new furniture and for \$80 we got a dining room table and chairs, couch, lounge chairs, and lamps. We were back as a family again, settled in a house, and had a job with a monthly paycheck. It still was not easy. I was paid once a month and by the time we paid the rent, the monthly utilities, groceries, etc there was not a whole lot left. We were happy though.

My clearance came through and I began training as a computer operator. It wasn't long before I was trusted alone and began shift work as we operated around the clock seven days a week. I got to know a lot of the scientists and grad students as they would come in especially on the weekends. They would bring their programs for me personally to run as I catered to them. I turned the job around quickly since they were up there working. One that I really liked, Don Lind, was from Utah, an ex Navy jet pilot, and working on his doctorate in Physics. He was also applying for something called the astronaut corps. He eventually became an astronaut and worked on the Apollo 11 mission, Skylab, and flew on the STS-51 space shuttle flight. When he left NASA he became a Physics professor at Utah State University in Logan.

I found I liked computers and started studying the manuals to learn FORTRAN programming, which is the language used by scientists and engineers.

As fall approached it was time to see about attending Cal. Nonresident tuition was prohibitive, so I decided to work a year to become a California resident. As a lab employee I could take night courses at Cal and the lab would pay for a certain number of hours. I could make a little progress towards a degree. I enrolled in Theory of Equations and planned to be a math major. That was a tough course. I have never seen so many smart people in one place. It was intimidating.

The new IBM 7090 computer arrived and was installed in the newly constructed Chemistry Building that was several stories high looking out over the campus and San Francisco Bay. It was quite a view. By now I was gaining status and was the lead operator on the shift. I didn't care to be on shift work but at night it was quiet, and you were your own boss. Often on midnights I would run out of work. I would start a standby job that performed calculations on moon orbits for as long as you let it run. If you had to end it, you put down a switch and it punched out a few cards that you stored away until you used them to restart the calculations. While that ran it was a good time to read and study.

President Kennedy visited Berkeley and since I was off during the day we took the kids and watched the motorcade come into town. He was in the open top Lincoln and we had a very good view. He was to visit Cal and the lab with a scheduled stop at our building. We had to spruce everything up for days and nobody was allowed in. After he was gone one of the scientists found a note on his desk pad from Kennedy thanking him for the use of his space.

The Cuban Missile Crisis became a major issue and looked like war was imminent. I received a notice that my reserve military obligation was extended from eight years to indefinite. I was afraid I might be recalled to active duty.

One night I headed to work on the midnight shift. I was driving along and saw flashing lights and searchlights out in the bay. It was the big prison break from Alcatraz! I got to work and put on the long standby program and went up on the roof of the Chemistry Building. I watched the circus in the bay the rest of the night.

The 56 Ford Fairlane, while it looked good, was not reliable. I figured it must have been a high mileage traveling salesman car. I was overhauling brakes or fixing something all the time and it was a gas hog. I decided it had to go. I found a used dark green 1960 six-cylinder two door Ford Falcon station wagon that I thought would be good for a young family. It was affordable, and I was able to work a good trade for it. I do not remember a bank loan, so we must have had cash left in our savings. We liked the two doors for the safety factor with the kids and it served us well.

The weather in Berkeley and the bay area took some getting used to. The mornings were overcast and gray. Then the fog always rolled in about two or three in the afternoon and added to the gloom and cold. Out in Walnut Creek and the East Bay it was usually sunshine and nice. It was one of the coldest winters on record the winter of 1961-1962. There was even an inch or so of snow in the Bay Area.

The Oakland Raiders football team was in the second year of their existence. There was a Catholic school across from our house

and the Raiders used the football field for their practice field. Being on shift work I was home a lot in the afternoons when they were practicing. I would go over and watch them. It would just be me and a newspaper reporter, Scotty Sterling, watching practice. Sterling later became part owner of the Raiders along with Al Davis. I quickly got challenged as to what I was doing there. They thought I was spying on them. They were so bad that nobody needed to spy on them. They were getting beat badly every game. Anyway, I became a Raider fan. That year they played their games at the new Candlestick Park and the 49ers played at Keezar Stadium.

1962

In June 1962 I was working during the night and picked up a magazine for computer professionals called Datamation. There was an interesting ad for a computer operator position for the scientific computer at Thiokol Chemical in Brigham City, Utah. They were the prime contractor for the solid propellant first stage of the Minuteman ballistic missile. The more I thought about it the more interested I became. I thought, what the heck, I might as well send my resume and see what happens. I got a call and they wanted me to come for an interview. They would even pay my expenses to fly up. We saw it as a chance for a free vacation and flew to Salt Lake and picked up a rental car.

The interview went well, and I was what they were looking for. They agreed that I could work straight night shift so that I could go to school during the day. A formal job offer would be coming in the mail.

We visited LaRue's folks, and I also visited Utah State University to check them out. I could register as a resident, all my credits

would transfer from Weber College, and the tuition was low. I found that the Applied Statistics Department had the school's only computer and that was interesting. I was going to major in math but started thinking about applied statistics. Rent and the cost of living was much lower in Logan than Berkeley and this was looking good. But we were not sure we wanted to move again or leave California.

The written offer came very quickly, and it was for more money than I was making. A big surprise was Thiokol would pay all moving costs even though the job was nonexempt hourly, and only exempt salaried employees qualify for paid moving expenses. They wanted me and made an exception. The job required a DOD Secret clearance, but that was not a problem with my past DOD Top Secret and AEC clearances.

I hated to leave the job at the Berkeley Lab, but the offer was too good to pass up. I was told that if I ever wanted to return I had a job. So, we were on our way back to Utah. Max and Loa hated to see us go but understood the reasoning and opportunity. Just another fork in the road or maybe just a course correction. A year ago, I was struggling to find any kind of work and now a company was paying all our expenses to come work for them. What a concept.

end of chapter – continued on chapter 7b

