

Chapter 7c

Summer 1964 and End of job at Thiokol

I graduated June 6, 1964 from Utah State University with a B.S. in Applied Statistics. Thiokol promoted me from computer operator to Junior Programmer. Thiokol had the contract to build the 1st stage of the Minuteman Missile and I would be doing Fortran programming on missile related stuff. It was an exempt monthly salary of \$705 per month and I would be working permanent dayshift which was nice after working three years on shift work.

I moved out of the computer room and across the hall to a big open room with desks lined up one after the other in typical aerospace engineering style. The manager sat in a room behind us with a big window so he could see what we were doing (or not doing). We wore shirts with necktie and slacks. It was the custom to have a pocket protector with pens and pencils in your shirt pocket. In today's words we were "nerds". I was happy to be in a professional job, but it was not an office environment I wanted for the rest of my life.

Now that I had the summer free we bought a new tent and sleeping bags. We spent weekends camping in Logan Canyon, Bear Lake, and went to Bryce Canyon. When we arrived at Bryce Canyon about 2am we found that we had left the tent poles home. We put down the front seats in the Rambler for a bed for us, and the kids slept in the back. It worked great.

We spent the 4th of July weekend camping at Bear Lake where I sunburned the top of my feet badly and could not go to work for

two days. Another place we liked was up Strawberry Canyon east of Hyrum towards Bear Lake. LaRue's dad, Morris, had a summer job up there riding for the cattle association looking after hundreds of cattle. He restored an old sheep camp that he parked in the aspen trees. We would go up and spend weekends with him. We would be in our new tent. The beauty of the aspen grove, the mountains, the wild-flowers, and the sunshine was perfect. The kids got to ride horses, and I rode with Morris to move cattle.

LaRue's brother Val was a forest ranger on the district. They would come up weekends and stay in the Forest Service cabin nearby. We had a Gibbs family reunion, and everybody came from all over. It was a great place to camp and have a reunion.

Another camping trip we enjoyed was a trip to visit LaRue's brother, LaGrande, who was herding sheep. He was on a mountainside on the border of Idaho and Star Valley, Wyoming. We loaded up LaRue's folks, Morris and Mattie, and all our camping stuff in and on top of the Rambler and took off. We got to where he said he would be beside the road but there was no LaGrande, and no sheep visible anywhere. We went to Star Valley and backtracked looking for him. I stopped where he said he would meet us, and I smelled sheep. I took off on foot up the side of the mountain. I finally found sheep and his camp, but he wasn't there. I waited around and he finally rode in looking a little sheepish. He had ridden his horse to a tavern down the canyon, and was drinking beer when we went by. His weakness for alcohol had over ridden his obligations.

We got his spare horse and his pack horse and rode down to the highway. We packed the poor packhorse as high as it would go. We even had a card table on the top of the load. Tourists were

driving by gawking at us and laughing. It was quite a sight as we headed up the mountain. Morris and Mattie rode the horses and the rest of us walked. We had a nice camp in an aspen grove and the kids got to sit on the horses and play cowboy. LaGrande killed and butchered a lamb, much to our chagrin with the kids around. We roasted it over the fire. It was a weekend to remember.

Around the last of August we decided to take two weeks vacation and go see everyone in California. We couldn't go earlier as I was low man on the totem pole and got last pick on vacation time.

Knowing Thiokol was getting shaky I asked my supervisor if I had to be worried about getting terminated in the immediate future due to the lack of funding and work. If it looked like it might happen I would look for work while on vacation. His reply was, "Don't worry. We need programmers and they are hard to find. You would be the last to go."

We had a nice vacation and returned to Logan on a Sunday. That evening the phone rang and it was the driver of the carpool. He said he would not be coming by to pick me up Monday morning as he had been laid off. Also, the other four in the carpool had been laid off. After a pause he said, "you were laid off also". Wow, what a kick in the face that was.

I drove to Thiokol Monday morning and went to my desk. There was a big red X on my desk pad. I turned around and there was my supervisor with termination papers in his hand. I was processed out and home by noon. Now what do we do?

Thiokol did everything they could to help place people. They set up and staffed a "recruiting in reverse" center in Brigham City. We

could get help writing a resume and use telephones, copiers, etc. They also invited companies to come to Brigham City to interview people.

I went over to Brigham City the next day and got started. I had three months experience as a professional programmer. I thought nobody would be interested in me. I was openly wishing I had a year of experience. An older engineer said, "Yeah, but you don't want a year of experience forty times". He was a veteran aerospace engineer that had been through this many times. I filed that one away in my mind somewhere. It encouraged me to open new doors in the future.

Within two or three weeks I was getting offers. Some without even being interviewed. Programmers were in big demand. I had an offer from Boeing in Seattle, Washington as well as Huntsville, Alabama, Ford in Detroit, Pratt and Whitney in West Palm Beach, Florida, interest from Bendix in the Mojave Desert, and interest from Honeywell somewhere that I don't remember. IBM requested me to come to Poughkeepsie, New York for an interview. I hopped on a flight to New York and rode the train up along the Hudson River. The interview was over two days, and included a programming aptitude test. One manager that interviewed me was from Idaho. Over lunch I asked him what he thought of living and working in New York. He said he would rather be in Idaho.

Before I departed IBM I was told that I would receive an offer in the mail and their policy was the job would have a six month probation period. Also, IBM had a dress code. You measured up or you were out. Then they put me on the train to New York City and said there was a room for me at the Waldorf Astoria. They told me to take in the World Fair on IBM. On the train into the

City I was sitting behind two young IBM engineers. They were griping nonstop. I was all ears.

I thought about it a lot on the return flight. The offer was in software development for the new IBM 360. It was something I wanted to do but from what I had overheard, and the thought of moving to upstate New York tipped the scale the other way. I declined IBM's offer, which most people don't do.

I was pondering other offers when I was notified that a manager from Edgerton, Germeshausen, and Grier (EG&G) in Las Vegas was in Brigham City and wanted to interview me. EG&G was the prime contractor for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in Las Vegas and responsible for the operation of the Nevada Test Site. I reluctantly went to the interview and was impressed with Jim Carter, who was the manager of systems programming for the scientific computer system in Las Vegas. All my experience was on IBM computers and they had a Control Data Corporation (CDC) 1604 computer. I knew nothing about CDC, or the 1604, and started looking for a way to end the interview. He said I would really like the CDC 1604 and why don't I come to Las Vegas and have a look. EG&G would fly LaRue and I down. I thought it was worth a look, and it was a free trip for both of us to Las Vegas.

We flew down and I spent a day interviewing and took a programming aptitude test. I was relieved to find the computer center was in town and not fifty miles out on the desert. It was across the runway from the airport terminal. Jim Carter was correct. I was impressed with the CDC1604 unique features. It was ten times faster than the IBM 7090. It was designed by Seymour Cray (now a legend). From what I could tell it was a much better scientific computer than IBM's. Furthermore, my job

would be a systems programmer maintaining, fixing, and enhancing the operating system. You got into the internals of the computer and what makes it work. Then I began to worry that I wouldn't qualify for the job as I only had three months as a professional Fortran programmer. EG&G extended a good offer that included all moving expenses. I would be in the elite field of systems programming. I accepted, and we were moving to Vegas.

Somewhere along the line we had acquired two cats. Kathleen and Brian named them "Table Head" and "Rolly Cookie". We had to find a home for them. LaRue's dad was still up in the mountains with the cattle and liked cats. He agreed that we could bring them up. The cats were not there long and went missing. It was well after we were in Las Vegas that we learned one of the cats found its way to the house in Logan. It was at least thirty miles through rough mountains and canyons.

The movers packed us up, loaded everything in the moving van, and we were off to Las Vegas in early October. We were put up in a hotel just off the strip and looked for a house. We found a small two bedroom with a carport at 1705 Bonita Avenue between Sahara and ,Charleston and near the Boulder-Henderson highway. The air conditioning was a swamp cooler but it worked well in the dry climate. The lawn was sand and Bermuda grass.

End chapter 7c. Continued in Las Vegas chapter 8b
