

Chapter 19 – University Part 1

During the Spring of my senior year, Mother and Father tell me there is a university about 200 miles to the West. Father, who has only his G.E.D., is the main plant engineer who planned and built the telephone system for the city of Las Cruces. New Mexico State University is the name of my University.

I need about \$600 for the 1st semester, which includes room, and board.

The Red Cross offers lifeguard training at New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell at the top of the big hill. In February and March, I take and pass the certification. I also take the Water Safety Instructor course. I can make some money teaching swimming.

With the certifications, I am hired by the City to life guard and teach at Calhoon pool. It is a big pool. I make the \$600. I make 32 saves of swimmers who get in too deep.

In the fall, Mother takes me to NMSU. I matriculate in the cafeteria. Mother takes me to the Administration building. She introduces me to a former boss of hers and I get hired. The job is working the campus PBS telephone system at nights. Every other night. 10 PM to 3 AM. Then a switch of time after a couple of months from 3 AM to 8 AM. The pay is \$0.85/hr.

NMSU is the largest campus in acreage in the US. The ratio of men to women is 8 to 1. There are far more heads of livestock on campus than women.

Mother takes me to a new dormitory on the hill which is about a mile and a half from the main campus. No sidewalks, several dirt path arroyos to cross, no electric appliances, tv, etc. I move into a room with a Roswell Eastside friend as a roommate. He only lasts a few weeks. I have two suitemates from New Jersey – both are huge black football players. I get another roommate who is also from the Northeast. He is 23-year-old T.G. and is back from three years in the Navy. He became my best friend. All three teach me how to dance. I help them with homework.

I learn card games in the student center. The black students usually play a strange game called bid whist. It is a suit game like Spades. I catch on quickly. They are happy to have a white boy to teach. I find another group that that plays bridge. Duplicate bridge is in my future. Call shot and 9-ball Pool is fun and I become rather good at it.

Part 1 - Times and Places

I have no idea what I am doing in selecting courses. I do not have a concept of what an “hour” is. Father says to enroll in civil engineering. I do not know what that is either. I choose courses on paper that add up to 32 “hours”. I think that I am expected to go to class all available hours of the day, like high school.

I meet with some guy who is an assistant to go over my schedule. He gets quite a kick out of my selections. I wait for him to finish laughing. He then explains that only a few are allowed to take 18 – 21 hours. He set up my schedule for 17 hours. I tell him that I already have college algebra credit, but he makes me take it anyway. The first two years of my math classes are easy and a waste of time.

I must take ROTC for two years. Every Tuesday from 10 AM – 12 PM. We march and drill and do some war classroom stuff. On Friday afternoons for two hours, we spit and shine our spit and shine stuff. We also have an hour to break down and clean our M1 rifles. Once in a while, we go to the shooting range and fire for qualification. I am expert on the M1. In the second year, we get the much lighter M14's. I qualify expert on that one too. Once a semester we spend weeks preparing for inspection. Dress greens, shiny boots, buckles, and brass. We practice for several weeks marching, standing individually for inspection, presenting our weapons, reciting the nomenclature of the weapons, and sounding off the names of our superiors in the chain of command. I hated ROTC. The only benefit I receive for those two years was earning the status of PFC when I was forced to enlist in the US ARMY.

My sophomore and junior years, I find two more campus jobs. One is lifeguarding at the new natatorium. The other is maintaining and running the Alumni Association's addressograph machine. I have the metal plates made, keep them in order, and load the machine for mailouts. That is when zip codes show up and are required. What a mess. I earn \$1.00/hr for each of those two jobs. In June of 1963, I make \$330 from those three jobs. Divide that out.

I pay for my Fall freshman expenses; Father pays for my spring Freshman expenses of \$600. From my sophomore year on, I pay for all my expenses with my \$1/hr jobs. Although they might exist, I do not ever consider getting a student loan. Father never again offers to help after I change my major to math in my sophomore year.

Part 1 - Times and Places

My major choice again changes to education in my junior year after finding much displeasure with differential equations. I enroll in theoretical math courses and do not like that branch any better. I enjoy literature and history. Chemistry and physics are a bother. Russian is fun. I enjoy intramural sports.

My biggest concern is my longtime girlfriend, "A." back in Roswell. We started dating when I was a high school junior. We are engaged. She is finishing her senior high school year. I am in my freshman college year. I write her all the time. Big changes happen in October of 1962, during my sophomore fall semester