

Chapter 22 – Work and More University

1965, stepping into Lynn Junior High, wearing a skinny tie, a new sports jacket, and carrying a slick, shiny briefcase, a student commented, “Look!, Mr. Novak”. I found my assigned classroom with the help of a custodian (this was before the annoying days of in-services) and looked around. The chalkboards are all washed and dry. No chalk anywhere. Too many desks made the room very crowded. I pulled out my dot matrix printed a wide copy of my class lists, drew out my pen, and wondered what would happen next. The bell rings, disorder, and noise in the hall, and 7th graders filter in. “Where do I sit?” “Anywhere that is not taken.”, I reply. “Oh Boy!”, she says. Somehow, I make it through the day and end in good spirits. I found some chalk somewhere.

The Selective Service folks from my home county of Chaves, NM, keep me regularly updated. My status remains 1B which is equivalent to student and now teacher. It changes for a month or so to a 1C because I am a “Kennedy husband”, whatever that means. That designation was short-lived and is changed back to 1B. In the spring of ’66, I received a new card with a 1A designation. That means they do not care about me being a teacher and I am ripe for being plucked.

The Viet Nam call-up was in full swing and I was at the top of the list. Ironically, I glance at the signature on the notice and see a familiar name. It is the mother of a young lady I dated in high school. She was one of my three-week adventures whom I casually discarded. I then knew my status was not worth appealing.

Not wanting to be drafted and serve two years in Nam; Not wanting to enlist for three years and serve in Nam; Not supporting the Nam war, I looked around for a Reserve or National Guard unit. Eureka! A Military Intelligence Army Reserve unit in Las Cruces accepted me in November 1966.

I plan to get my master’s degree at NMSU. Enrolling in the summer of 1966 for 6 hours of classes in Ed Administration and continuing my classes in the fall and spring of 1966-67 turned out well. At the same time, my work assignment changed to teaching high school at Las Cruces High in the fall-spring of 1966-67. The high school teaching experience was also in my plan. While teaching Algebra I and Geometry, I attend college (6 hours) in the evenings.

Part 1 - Times and Places

J.A. graduated in the Spring of 1966 and worked odd jobs for university professors doing research for the next year. Using Fortran, she assisted Dr Edward Thorpe in his research on his book "Beat the Dealer" which changed the game of "BlackJack" forever. She was not certified to teach in New Mexico. I do not remember what she did the year after she graduated.

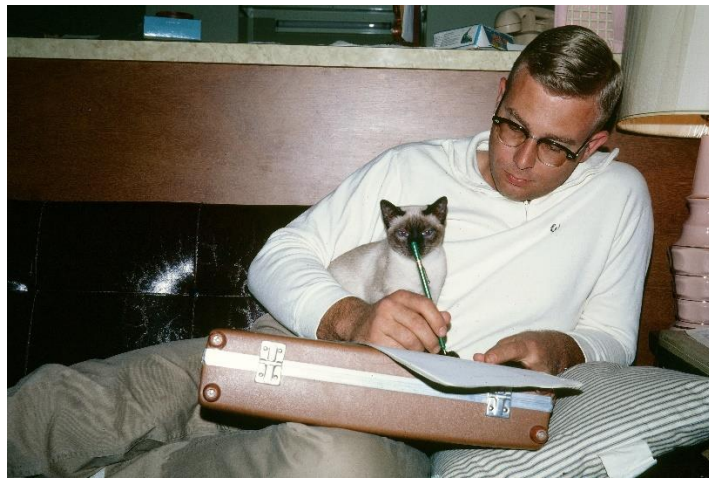
In June of 1967, I quit the public school teaching job and enrolled full-time in the master's program at NMSU. Searching for jobs, I found an opening as an assistant to the National Teacher Corps program. It is a halftime position with the assignment of observing returned, degreed Peace Corps members. They are seeking teaching certification and are assigned to numerous nearby school districts in New Mexico and Texas. This fit in perfectly with J.A.'s need for the certification. I request and she receives a slot.

The trainee observation trips to Hatch, Las Cruces, Ysleta, and El Paso are very enjoyable. Juarez is a familiar haunt since during my freshmen year, I visited the bars and enjoyed the bar girls along with many nickel tequilas. During our Teacher Corps observation trips, the observer team would venture into Juarez and go to the best restaurants. Steaks cost about \$2.00 including sides. A beer is 25 cents. All on an expense account.

Graduation was in May/June of 1968 with an M.A. in Education Administration. Being the first in my family on both sides, including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many cousins, to graduate from college is special. This Master's ceremony was the first time Father ever presented himself at any of the events. The only time I remember him at any of my events is a little league game where I made a miraculous catch jumping up and leaning over the roof of the first base dugout and snagging a foul ball. He was happy about that. He never attended any of the piano recitals or shows where I played. At home, Father always and only wants me to play 'Ole Black Joe'. It was easier than Rachmaninoff.

Now, movement away from the tumbleweeds, sandstorms, and old times in New Mexico happens. On to greener, wetter lands with trees. On to pursue the Ph.D. But duty is calling.

Part 1 - Times and Places



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