

Chapter 24 – Army and Work

Continuing to teach the spring semester of 1969 at Austin Reagan High, the Principal loved me. Not only did I refrain from sending my discipline problems to the office for punishment, I made them stay in class and put up with me. Other teachers who had problem students would occasionally send theirs to me. That way they did not have to send them to the office which would reflect upon their own appraisals. (Lesson learned)

The principal had a problem with students smoking between classes. Cigarettes were smushed everywhere. I proposed a solution, and he said go ahead. Forming a smoking squad out of some little gangsters, we procured three 55-gallon barrels, painted them Reagan blue, cut a hole in the top lid, and labeled them, “Throw your BUTT in the can.” The kids loved it. They thought they were getting away with a ‘bad’ word. It was very successful. Smoking was only allowed around the outside Butt Barrels and only during the longer passing times. The “Squad” helped patrol.

A more important adventure was starting a movement for higher teacher pay. The Austin TSTA Association was run by administrators back then. The AFT was just getting started by June Carp. I went to a meeting of the TSTA larger association and was called on to speak. I asked them, “What are you doing about getting teachers a raise?” Mumble, mumble, crickets, ‘what we always do’ was all I heard.

I replied, “That is not enough! Teachers are starving on this pay scale. As a group representing these teachers, you must demand a \$1,000 a year pay raise. Even that might not be enough”. (*Not by design, a labor leader is born*)

Many teachers approached me afterward and we formed a committee. Our plan: #1) Sign petitions and collect \$1 for each signature.; #2) Buy a full-page ad in the Austin Statesman newspaper demanding the \$1000 raise. We managed to collect \$600 dollars and signatures by mid-May.

At the Austin ISD Board meeting at the end of May, I signed up to speak. When called upon, I stated our demand and why. I submitted the petitions and a copy of the full-page ad from the newspaper. I told the Board that teachers cannot live on this pay scale. The Board President asked me if I knew what the Texas legislature was going to do. I replied, “No and we do not care where the money comes from. You know we need it, and it is your job to find it.” ***Loud Cheers!***

Part 1 - Times and Places

The Board President turned to the personnel officer and asked about me...right there in public. The personnel chief said that I was hired in January after returning from the army and that the principal gave me high marks, an excellent appraisal, I had two years of successful experience in teaching in Las Cruces and a Master's in Ed Administration.

The President asked about my contract status. The personnel chief said that my contract is in the first year of the required two-year probationary. The contract was never renewed.

Out of a job. Wondering if I should have taken on a large district school board, I started selling WorldBook Encyclopedias door to door.

J.A. never wanted to teach so she resigned in May and started working on her dream. Computer Programming. She applied at the largest shop in Austin which was the Dept of Public Safety. There were no females in the computer department. They ignored her application. After a couple of weeks, she began sitting on the back entry step of the building on Lamar Ave. and greeting the bosses, "Remember me?" Finally, they hired her just to get her off the steps, I think. She excelled and they were lucky to get her.

WorldBook did not sell well. The UT doctoral program attempt was next. That lasted about a month. The war protestors had taken over the campus. Students? Most were unrequited hippies, barefoot, smelly, sitting on the classroom floors contemplating their navels about the nature of man. I stopped going.

Bama Peanut Butter and Jelly had an ad in the paper for a traveling salesman. I was hired. Wow, a company car and a route that took me east to Shiner, south to ½ of San Antonio, and west to Johnson City. Chicken Ranch in LaGrange was on the route too.

My job: straighten up the jam shelves, try to get exposure, compensate for glass breakage, and sell/stock specials. Strange how much abuse the store managers put on salespeople. Not rewarding work. An expense account and car were new for me. Those were unknown in the public education world. Bama even flew me to Birmingham and showed me the big jelly pots mixing up all that apple juice and sugar. That job lasted about 3 months.

Next, in the Spring of 1970, I became a nightwatchman for a mobile home factory. I wore a gun (my personal .22 caliber). Working from 10 pm to 6 am, a little black-and-white TV kept me from going crazy. I watched the drama of the Apollo 13 mess on that little TV.

Part 1 - Times and Places

Riding my 90CC Honda, which I bought for parking at UT, was always an adventure. One night in the rain, at the top of a steep hill, the traffic light changed to red on the way down. Brakes would not stop the vehicle or the passenger. Laying the bike down, all went sliding across the intersection. Shaking it off, the bike still running, I proceeded with the most dignified exit possible.

During May of 1970, at an Austin neighborhood party, I met a Norwegian. She was attractive with long blond hair and was a professor at UT. Through casual conversation, we learned of each other's involvement in the National Teacher Corps program. She was leading the project at UT and attempting to get school districts in the area to participate. She offered me a consultant job to help her persuade area superintendents to let the program in. We visited several districts.

None was as important as San Antonio ISD. We met with SAISD personnel people Victor Rodriquez and Steve Catalani. Since I had public school teaching experience, a Master's in Ed Admin, and was an administrator of the Corps program at NMSU, I convinced them that their fears of management problems were minimal. They accepted the Corps program. The blond professor was very appreciative...

On the way out, I casually asked Victor if he had any high school math teaching openings. He immediately said "Yes". Understanding that I would be commuting from Austin daily, he said Highlands High is near the Interstate. Pending recommendations, I would be considered for teaching there in the fall of 1970 he told me. I was so happy that Austin had not fired me nor entered any negative recommendations. Years later, after all my labor work, Victor said it was one of the biggest mistakes of his career. I am not sure that he was jesting.

I needed to return to the classroom. My one true calling. Promising never to be a troublemaker again proved to be difficult. Yet, I was so grateful!!!