

Washington, D.C. - 1997

[UPDATE: December, 2008—As I gradually go back over my old travelogues, I'll be leaving the original text intact but adding additional comments in boldfaced enclosed in brackets to expand on what was originally said. I'll also add some additional scanned photos to enhance the original travelogues.]

For the third straight year my Garrigan quiz bowl students qualified for the National Academic Championships. This year seven students were attending the national tournament, accompanied by our most prominent quiz bowl alumnus—Aaron Twait **[who had gone on to captain the University of Iowa's Hawkeye College Bowl team]**—and my brother Paul and me. We were headed for the Washington, D.C. area, and since I hadn't been to this part of the country since I was a high school student myself, this was a trip I was definitely looking forward to.

[Paul couldn't chaperone a Garrigan trip under the current rules, and it's hard to imagine he'd have time to go along even if he were permitted to do so. Since he became a part-time clergyman, Paul's summers have been crammed full with theological studies.]

Wednesday, June 11

Algona, Iowa to Milan, Ohio

Our scheduled departure time was 7:15 this morning. Paul and I left home shortly before 7:00 and stopped briefly at Hy-Vee so Paul could get some juice and pop. There we happened to see Tim Mosbach, the only member of our team who was also at last year's tournament.



Getting ready to leave – the blue suburban in Algona, Iowa

that said we weren't leaving until 7:30, and he would have been early for that departure time. Unfortunately we were starting a bit behind the updated schedule.

Paul and I set out in opposite directions so we could pick up some of the out-of-town students. Paul headed eastward in the school's white suburban. He stopped in the town of Wesley to pick up junior Jeremy Richter. I took the blue suburban southward. After wandering around on a funny little gravel road, I eventually got to the Frideres home, where I picked up brothers Brad and Nathan Frideres and their neighbor Dennis Gisch. We headed south to Humboldt and then east along highway 3, and in a little less than an hour we met up with Paul again at Casey's in Eagle Grove.

We bought some papers in Eagle Grove. One of the big stories was that Mallard native Marc Kacmarynski had signed to play football with the Chicago Bears (although he was later cut). Marc happens to be Aaron's cousin, and he is the son of one of the women who operates the camera when I teach over the TV system at Iowa Lakes Community College. I know him best as a kid I judged in speech throughout his high school years. Marc was a stand-out athlete in high school, and he was featured in *Sports Illustrated* a

We got out to school and lined up the two suburbans along "Meister Drive" behind the gym. **[Naming rights to the drive by the gym are auctioned off each year at the Gala fundraiser. For many years our superintendent's mother paid literally thousands of dollars to call it Meister Drive. In 2008 it officially has a different name, though I couldn't tell you what that name is. EVERYONE still calls it by the name Thelma Meister paid her money for.]** Before long the local students (Tim, Tyler Struck, and Louie Bode) had shown up. The one problem was that Aaron, who is usually a very punctual person, was still nowhere to be found. Eventually we decided to stop by his home to pick him up. When we got there, though, he wasn't at home either. We re-traced our steps back toward Garrigan and passed Aaron and his mother a few blocks from the school. He had an earlier version of our itinerary

couple years ago as the franchise player for Central College (where he ended up coaching, after the Bears cut him). It's weird to read about someone I knew in a national magazine, and it's even weirder to think of him being a professional athlete. I certainly wish him all the best in his career, though.

[The comments about it being weird thinking of someone I know as a professional athlete are sort of weird given that I'd spend much of the next decade following a professional baseball player who I consider a friend. Brad Nelson hasn't been in *Sports Illustrated*, but he was featured on the cover of *Baseball America* magazine and I also have a tape of the strange cameo appearance he made on Country Music Television. Marc Kacmarynski, by the way, went back to Central College to become their head football coach—and his mother is still working as a proctor at the Emmetsburg campus of Iowa Lakes.]

While Aaron will be the first to tell you that he is anything but a gifted athlete, in fact his family is quite talented in that area. His brother Tom might have been along with our quiz bowl team this year, but he opted to stay in Algona to play baseball. Unfortunately, for the second straight year, injuries kept him on the bench all summer, so he wasn't able to contribute to either the baseball or the quiz bowl team. Tom is unquestionably our strongest quiz bowl player, and we would definitely miss Tom's presence on our team this summer.

We drove southward to Des Moines and then took Interstate 80 east to Iowa City. **[This trip was before Avenue of the Saints was completed north of Waterloo, so it was probably quicker to make the "L" via Des Moines.]** We stopped for lunch at McDonalds in Coralville. Apparently Aaron was surprised that I knew Exit 242 was the First Avenue strip. Growing up in Mount Pleasant, though, and having relatives both in and north of Iowa City, that exit was a major landmark for us. **[Exit 242 has become much less important since they built Coral Ridge Mall one exit west of there, but it's still the place I think of as THE exit for Coralville.]**

While we had lunch Aaron drove into Iowa City to drop off some stuff at his apartment there. When he returned we set off eastward again. We drove across the eastern end of Iowa and then on into Illinois. I've mentioned it in other travelogues, but each time I return I can't help thinking that Illinois is one of the dullest states through which to drive. While it's pleasant and green, it's also relentlessly flat and, until you get to Chicago, there's absolutely nothing of interest at the side of the road. **[I-88, the Reagan Tollway, is somewhat more interesting than I-80, but nothing in northern Illinois is terribly interesting. The interesting way to go to Chicago is via Wisconsin—though that's also the way that has the most traffic.]**

The miles peeled off fairly quickly today, and before long we were in Joliet, at the southwest corner of "Chicagoland". We stopped for over-priced gas (\$1.359) and to use a truly disgusting restroom. **[I'd forgotten that restroom, but it comes back in all its hideous detail as I re-read this. This was a Shell station in New Lenox; hopefully it's gone out of business since.]** I picked up a copy of the *Herald-News* to see what was up in Joliet. The big controversy here appears to be over an extension of I-355 (the North-South Tollway, and essentially Chicago's beltway) that would pass just east of here at New Lenox. Most locals appear to have a "not in my backyard" attitude, although some did complain that traffic was getting progressively heavier. **[The extension was fully funded by the "Illinois First" initiative former Governor George Ryan (and future President Barack Obama), but it's still being held up in court.]**

There was one other interesting thing in the *Herald-News*—an insert for PharMor discount drugstores. The only reason I know PharMor is because PBS's *Frontline* did an exposé on the company a couple of years ago. Apparently their top executives embezzled hundred of millions of dollars, and the auditors didn't catch on to anything until it was far too late. I assumed they had gone out of business after their president was hauled off to prison, but apparently the bankruptcy court managed to unload the company on someone else. Their prices were not exactly what I'd call "discount"—even with coupons—so they must still be struggling to make up the cash they lost earlier. **[One of PharMor's last surviving stores was on Collins Road in Cedar Rapids, across from Lindale Mall. They went out of business right before Christmas early in the 21st Century (2001 I think), and I bought tons of stuff (health and beauty aids, small electronics, and home furnishings) on close-out there dirt cheap. That location is now a Hobby Lobby, and I'm pretty sure the entire PharMor chain is closed.]**

The area east of Joliet, at the far south end of Chicago[land], alternates between rusting old factories and decaying suburbs built far too close to the highway. The modern industrial parks and luxury condos are far to the northwest, and what's left here is certainly not what the Illinois travel council would want to advertise. Perhaps the most unusual point of interest was the largest quarry I have ever seen. There is an enormous gash on the landscape that must be a mile square. The highway sits on an embankment carved out of one end of it. The quarry didn't look active, but neither do they seem to have made any attempt to reclaim the land. **["Chicago-South" has since attracted a lot of more modern development, mostly through favorable tax incentives. It's still mostly blue-collar business, though. The quarry was active in 1997, and it remains so today.]**

Eventually we crossed into Indiana, to an even older and seedier section of Chicagoland. Gary is steel country, or at least it was back in the days when Chicago had problems with air pollution. The air in Chicago is fine these days, and one of the reasons is that the mills are closed. According to *Rating America's Cities*, they no longer make raw steel in Gary (or anywhere else in Chicagoland). Gary's biggest industry now is "specialty metal fabrication", which doesn't sound a whole lot different from what Snap-On Tools does in Algona. Gary lost more people in the 1980s than any other American city—both in percentage and raw numbers. It apparently has bounced back somewhat since then, but it's definitely still struggling. However, in spite of the gloomy, grey cityscape outside the window, I couldn't help but think of that snappy old tune from *The Music Man* about "Gary, Indiana, my home sweet home".

Before long Interstate 80 merged with the Indiana Toll Road, and quite suddenly the area was rural. At first we saw mostly fields, just as you would beside an interstate in Iowa, but before long the trees became more common until we were definitely in forest country. The Indiana Tollroad runs within half a mile of the Michigan border, and I must say the landscape here looks much more like

what I picture in Michigan than in Indiana. It's gently rolling hills covered with every sort of deciduous tree. Occasionally someone has carved a small farm out of the woods, but mostly the view is just trees. **[That change from farms to forest is what to me is the boundary of the Midwest and the East. Of course, Indianans, Ohioans, Michiganders, and even some Pennsylvanians think they live in the Midwest. They're in a very different region than the one I live in, though.]**

... Or should I say trees and **TRUCKS!** Indiana was the first state we encountered that legalized triple-bottom semis. They call such vehicles "road trains" in Australia, and their length does seem closer to a train than a truck. I always thought the double-bottoms we have in Iowa were bad enough (and I remember what a controversy there was when we legalized them). They are nothing, though, compared to the triple trailers we saw going east. Fortunately it's a good road and there was virtually no wind; I hate to think what driving would have been like in bad weather.

We stopped for supper at a tollway service area near Jamestown, clear at the east end of Indiana. While there were a variety of food choices in the service plaza, most of us chose to eat Italian fast food at Fazoli's. **[I think this was the first time I'd ever eaten at Fazoli's, a place I've frequently patronized since.]** After looking over their menu, I decided on a combination platter featuring lasagna. Unfortunately, when I ordered, they told me they had just run out of lasagna. (Dennis Gisch from our group had ordered the last of the lasagna just before me.) I bumbled around a bit trying to find something else I wanted, and eventually settled for a simple spaghetti dinner. I was most disappointed, but Dennis tells me I shouldn't have been. Apparently he didn't feel terribly well after eating the lasagna.

After supper we drove on a few more miles to the state line. We paid our toll to Indiana and then picked up a fresh toll card from the roadway authorities in Ohio. It was right after sunset by the time we got to Toledo, and the only traffic on the road seemed to be a river of semis. The right lane seemed to be lined with trucks the entire length of the state. Occasionally we would come to construction, and the whole line would shift to the left lane, to avoid driving on the unreinforced shoulder. Surprisingly, the trucks were all driving at or below the speed limit, and we ended up passing most of them.

We could tell we were getting east when just past Toledo we started seeing signs for New York City. It's 700 miles away at that point, which made us just slightly closer to the Atlantic than we were to home.

We were all ready to settle in for the night when we finally reached our destination—Milan, Ohio, a combination small town/suburb just south of Sandusky and halfway between Toledo and Cleveland. **[Paul was familiar with this area, as Nancy has relatives here.]** There was construction at our exit, so we looped over a strange one-way bridge and onto the side road. Before long we spotted the Super 8 where we were staying tonight.

We parked and I went to check in. Unfortunately this was easier said than done. I had made reservations months ago and guaranteed them with my Super 8 VIP card. The reservation center had guaranteed me a price of \$149.98 for the three rooms we would be using. The check-in clerk startled me when she started to charge me \$178 (plus tax on top of that). I mentioned that this figure was wrong, but she said that no—that was the correct price. Then I said that the reservation center had assured me the price was almost thirty dollars lower, and mentioned that I was using my VIP card (which entitles holders to a 10% discount). She said the discount was already figured in and that \$178 was the correct amount. Then I noticed that the reservation form she was copying my information from clearly had the \$149.98 figure printed on it. I pointed that out, but the girl didn't seem to have a clue what was up.

By now a line of tired, impatient people was forming behind me, and the manager came over to see what the confusion was. I explained the same thing to her—that the reservation center had guaranteed me the \$149.98 price, and I made it quite clear I wasn't going to pay more than that. The manager tried to tell me that the price difference was just sales tax—as if even one of the highest hotel/motel taxes would jack up a price almost 19%. **[These days it could, but that wasn't the problem.]** The original clerk said the reservation center must have been mistaken; there was no way they could have gotten that price from any of the figures they charge for rooms. I wasn't going to buy that, either. Obviously they **DID** get that figure—it was printed right there on the reservation slip—and I made it clear I wasn't moving until I got the rooms at the price that had been guaranteed to me. I had chosen this motel because it was less expensive than others, even though it meant driving further than I would have liked to today. I wasn't about to be taken advantage of at this point.

By now Paul was here to see what the delay was, and we still weren't making much progress. Eventually the manager just said "give them to him at that price", but the clerk still didn't know how to go about that.. Finally the manager just had her divide \$149 by three (which doesn't come out even—since the original reservation had been for varying numbers of people in the different rooms). She did that and wrote \$49.99 X 3" on the slip (after first crossing out various other scrawlings). I checked the credit card invoice she presented to me only after double-checking that it was for \$161.46. I still don't quite understand how that particular amount of tax got on there (actually it was **LESS** than their sign said the local tax rate was), but I wasn't about to complain any further.

We got our bags and went up to the room. After a while I went out to get one more bag out of the other suburban, when I noticed that one of the dome lights was on inside the vehicle. I tried opening and closing all the doors, but I couldn't get the light to turn off. I kept picturing waiting around in Sandusky while some quack mechanic pretended to charge our battery. Eventually I found Aaron, who had been the last to drive that vehicle, and he quickly shut off the light. Apparently there is a row of switches down below the dashboard (where the fusebox is on my car) that activates the dome lights. That seemed pretty stupid to me, but at least Aaron knew about it.

The kids had been elated by the fact that this motel had a swimming pool. They rushed into their trunks and dashed outside almost immediately. After a while I went out to check on them. Technically it was after hours for the pool (which closed at 9:30, and now it was around 10:30 Eastern time). The kids were being good, though, and no one from the motel staff seemed to care that they were in

there. They were upset because the water was extremely cold. If you ask me, the weather itself was a bit chilly for swimming, but then I'm not a teenager anymore.

The kids were thrilled, though, that some auto racer who is apparently well known (by people other than me) was staying at our motel. His truck (as in the trailer that hauls his racing car) was parked beside the pool. I was intrigued that there was a Super 8 decal among his sponsorship stickers—I wonder if he had to argue about the price of his room. I still don't remember the guy's name, but it's probably as close as we got to anybody famous (except perhaps for Aaron's cousin) on this trip.

Thursday, June 12

Milan, Ohio to Arlington, Virginia

I've never been able to sleep in late in motel rooms, and this was certainly no exception. I was up around six, even though we weren't planning to leave until an hour and a half later. I had brought along the same percolator Margaret and I took to Chicago last summer, so I brewed a pot and sat down to read the local papers. **[Not long after this I'd accidentally leave that coffeepot in a motel room at the Motel 6 in Cedar Rapids, the last I'd see of the thing.]**

From the papers, at least, Sandusky seems to be a rather strange area. Most of the news was the same sort of thing you'd see in any small town or minor city—city council actions, traffic accidents, honor students, etc. There was also a big feature on the new "Chaos" ride at Cedar Point, the amusement park for which Sandusky is best known. Some other news let you know this isn't just a small town, though. The area unemployment rates vary between 7 and 12 percent, about quadruple what it is here in Iowa. Then there was a feature on a program the local police department was sponsoring called "Guns for Groceries". People could turn in their weapons and receive \$50 - \$75 in vouchers at area supermarkets. I can't say featuring that kind of thing on the front page made me feel terribly comfortable; I can't imagine they'd sponsor such a program if there weren't a need for it.

Each room at this motel came with a coupon for a complementary breakfast at the motel restaurant. I went down to check it out, but left before I even sat down. It reminded me of a small-town cafe—a paneled room with vinyl and brass furnishings from the '60s full of old men seated one per table. Occasionally they would acknowledge each other with grunts, while a flustered waitress in a hairnet constantly flew around the room pouring coffee. The old geezers are probably not farmers here, but it sure did resemble the corner cafe in small-town Iowa. I can't say I care for the "senior coffee" crowd at home, and it certainly wasn't what I wanted this morning. Aaron apparently did have the free breakfast; he said it wasn't worth much anyway. **[Small town cafes are pretty much a thing of the past in Iowa anymore. These days the geezers have coffee at the Hy-Vee deli or at McDonalds.]**

We set off eastward along the Ohio Turnpike. It seemed like the road was under construction almost the entire length of the state. It appears they've eventually going to six-lane it—which it certainly could use. **[East of Toledo it finally has been six-laned.]** Right now they keep shifting traffic back and forth, making one lane travel on the shoulder much of the time. It wasn't that bad, but I can't say this was my favorite drive of the trip.

We went through suburban Cleveland with no problems. I've gradually learned that tollways (or at least the kind where you pay only once, at the exit) are among the best ways through major cities. They have very few exits, so comparatively few commuters use them. Traffic was quite a bit heavier around Cleveland, but it wasn't anything really bad.

We stopped for breakfast at a service area between Cleveland and Youngstown. The only place that served breakfast at this area was a Dunkin' Donuts. Surprisingly, they did have a full menu—complete with meat and egg sandwiches, in addition to pastry and coffee. **[It was about this time that Dunkin' Donuts introduced this menu at all their outlets.]** Unfortunately a busload of vacationing senior citizens had also stopped here. Dunkin' Donuts appeared to have just two employees on duty, and they were in no position to handle the rush. Eventually they put out a page and a few employees from the other stores in the complex came to help out. Breakfast still took forever, but at least we did get served.

We drove past Youngstown (a place I know mostly from that same public TV documentary on PharMor; their headquarters was here) and on into Pennsylvania. I was more than happy to be a passenger at this point and let Aaron and Paul do the driving. I've driven the Pennsylvania Turnpike once in my life—when my father, Paul, and I went to Philadelphia the summer before I graduated from college **[towing a car behind a motorhome]**. I hated it then, and my feelings definitely haven't changed.

The turnpike proudly advertises that it is "America's First Super-Highway". Fortunately the engineers of most other super-highways learned from the mistakes they made in Pennsylvania. This road has to be among the worst in the country. The road winds and winds and WINDS through the foothills of the Appalachians **[really it's the actual mountains, though to my eye that was used to western mountains they look like foothills.]** Out in Colorado there are major cuts and tunnels to keep the main road going basically straight. Here they follow the lay of the land, which means the whole thing is like one endless S-curve.

The surface of the Pennsylvania Turnpike is bad, and the thing seems to be forever under construction. Whenever you come to a construction area the signs advise "New Traffic Patterns" for the next however many miles. Sadly, those new traffic patterns are rarely much worse than the old ones. This is **THE** road to all the big cities in the East, and it is constantly jam-packed with traffic. The whole thing is four lanes (even in the major cities), and the bridges and exits are designed so it really can't be upgraded to six without a major re-design.

This all might be acceptable if this were a free road, but they charge toll for the privilege of putting up with the monstrosity. It cost us over \$5 to drive just halfway across the state. Trucks that go all the way to the New Jersey line pay a full \$100 for that dubious pleasure. If they'd actually do something with that toll money (like Indiana and Ohio appeared to be doing), I might be more willing to pay for it, but here it just seems like another "user fee" that allows them to pretend to cut taxes elsewhere.

The traffic did at least move along smoothly—that is, until we got to Pittsburgh. The turnpike really goes nowhere near Pittsburgh. Check a map, and you'll see that the turnpike just barely touches the easternmost suburbs. It was also well after rush hour when we got to the "Three Rivers Metroplex" **[a term I think I invented—to my knowledge no one in Pennsylvania calls it that]**. For some reason we never did figure out, though, the whole eastbound turnpike became a virtual parking lot. We crept along at less than 5mph for nearly half an hour. We all assumed there must be an accident or construction, but neither was the case. Eventually the traffic just seemed to magically thin out, and everybody sped up again. We never did find out what was up.

Shortly past Pittsburgh we stopped at another service area for lunch. The main food here was Roy Rogers, a place owned by Hardees that sells nothing but roast beef. That wasn't what I wanted for lunch, so instead I bought a hot dog from a permanent "street cart" in the lobby of the service plaza. Before long we were on the road again.

I was driving now, and I definitely lucked out on the driving today. The short stretch of the turnpike we had left had been re-surfaced fairly recently. Traffic was still extremely heavy, but it flowed along fairly smoothly. Before long we paid our toll and left the road from hell.

The I-70 exit from the Pennsylvania Turnpike is weird. Like most tollroad exits, they loop you way around so you can join traffic from the other side of the road at one toll plaza. What's really weird about this one is that while it's theoretically an interstate that's exiting, you end up on a city street (with stoplights) in Breezewood, Pennsylvania. After driving about half a mile down a suburban strip, you turn left and enter the real interstate. I have no idea why they didn't just build a ramp directly from one interstate to the other, but for some reason they didn't. **[The reason, of course, is that the businesses in Breezewood lobbied to make it like this.]**

We knew we were reaching our destination when the exit sign here said "Washington, D.C." This was the first sign we had seen for Washington, and from here on out it was the major destination on all the signs.

We had a much more pleasant drive along Interstate 70. While the road surface in Pennsylvania was still nothing to brag about, traffic was **MUCH** lighter, and the road was obviously much newer and straighter. We drove about thirty miles south to the Mason-Dixon line (marked by a sign) at the Maryland border. **[I'd find later that a preferable route is to the turnpike is to take I-70 to the south edge of metro Pittsburgh and then head across West Virginia on I-68.]**

While didn't have much time for Pennsylvania's roads, the Maryland D.O.T. I have nothing but praise for. Maryland's highways are truly excellent. They definitely put Iowa's to shame, and Pennsylvania wouldn't even be in the competition. The best thing about Maryland's roads is their use of lanes. The highway department seems to have a perfect sense of the correct number of lanes that are needed in every possible situation. Out here in the boondocks (the Maryland panhandle), I-70 is four lanes. It's fairly busy, but traffic moves right along. Just when traffic seemed to be picking up (around Frederick, which is the official start of the D.C. metro area) the road became six lanes. **[Frederick amused me. I imagined the home of Barbara Fritchie of Civil War fame to be a quaint, historic place. From the interstate, though, Frederick comes across as a pleasantly-wooded office park.]** As we got closer, we saw more and more lanes—always enough to keep traffic flowing along smoothly. Some of the highways are monstrously wide, with as many as fourteen lanes combining locals and expresses. To their credit, though—at least they have that many. The freeway was never a parking lot in Maryland. **[New Jersey is the other eastern state that always seems to have the correct number of lanes. I think it helps that both are geographically quite small but very heavily populated.]**

Surprisingly, neither was the highway like a racetrack. I always expect big city people to drive like they do in Chicago **[or Minneapolis, just about my least favorite place to drive]**—that is to alternate between flooring it and slamming on the brakes. I absolutely hate that kind of driving, and if there was anything I was **NOT** looking forward to on this trip, it was having to deal with urban speedsters. We were very pleasantly surprised in this regard, though. Traffic moved right along, at roughly the posted speed limit (which was 50, 55, or 65—depending on the situation). Nobody seemed to be trying to go excessively fast, nor (with one exception) was there much in the way of bottlenecks.

Maryland is a state of contrasts. Driving along almost every interstate, the place looks positively rural. What you see is mostly dense forest, with an occasional pasture or maybe a tobacco field. Even most of those super-wide freeways look like giant gashes through the woods. I expected to see sprawling suburbs everywhere, but they're well hidden from the road. You know the place is urban, though. From the moment we entered Maryland, we started seeing "park-and-ride" signs. Some were for the local bus services in Hancock and Hagerstown, but others were for the MARC trains that commuters take into Washington and Baltimore. The trains span the entire state, reaching out as far as 150 miles from the core cities. One route even goes into West Virginia. It's hard to believe people actually commute that far, but the trains wouldn't run (about ten times a day, each way) if they weren't used.

Eventually we got to Frederick, where the "real" urban area begins. We turned south on I-270, which they call "Technology Corridor", presumably in the hopes of attracting high-tech industries to the area. We still saw far more forest than industrial park, but the traffic definitely picked up past Frederick. We still sailed right along, though.

We knew we were really in the city when we got to Rockville and saw a "park and ride" for the Washington Metro. The capital's subway system is truly immense. We were about twelve miles outside the beltway—roughly twenty-five miles from downtown, yet here we could have parked and taken the subway anywhere in the city.

Before long we reached the Capital Beltway, the one place in Maryland where we found a bit of a slowdown in traffic. This part of the beltway is eight lanes wide, but there is a series of awkward interchanges with too much traffic entering and changing lanes all at once. We were part of that mess of entering traffic. Fortunately the local drivers seem **EXTREMELY** polite. We signaled, and people made room to let us in. That's what anyone is supposed to do, but you'd be taking your life in your hands if you expected others to drive so courteously in Minneapolis.

Very soon we came to the Potomac River. While the river is quite wide, I honestly don't recall ever being on a bridge. The beltway, together with a maze of entrance and exit ramps, is so vast that it is all you notice. The "Welcome to Virginia" sign was my clue that we had crossed the river.

We took the first exit inside Virginia. Again other drivers were very polite in letting us get over to the exit lane when we had to. We looped around under the beltway and ended up on George Washington Parkway, a virtually deserted expressway that follows right along the west shore of the Potomac. I was amazed how little traffic this road carried, especially since it leads straight to National Airport and downtown Washington. The road again looks utterly rural, although this time there's a reason: most of what we drove past was a forest preserve that hides the headquarters of the CIA.

Before long we entered Arlington County. Washington's largest suburb technically isn't a city; there is no local government here other than at the county level. When the District of Columbia was first established, it was intended to be a square region, ten miles on a side. Maryland contributed about three-fourths of the land for the district, and Virginia the remaining quarter. In the mid 1800s, when Washington was still a small town and no one could imagine it would ever amount to much of anything, the federal government returned what is now Arlington County to Virginia. It remained largely undeveloped until around the Depression. During World War II they built the Pentagon here, and ever since then Arlington has been one of the fastest-growing "cities" in America.

I'm not sure what I expected Arlington to look like, but I can most definitely say it wasn't what I imagined. Most of it is suburban, but it's one of the most densely packed suburbs I've seen anywhere. There are strips of businesses with impossibly small parking lots and luxurious mansions squeezed onto small patches of land. Most of the construction is mid-rise (3-8 floors), rather than the lower buildings I'm used to seeing in suburban areas. I read that Arlington is one of America's ten most densely populated cities; it has more than twice the people per square mile that Washington (much of which is parkland) does. Rather oddly, Arlington doesn't come across as terribly crowded. It helps that the place is extremely hilly. While the buildings are packed together, being built on hills gives you a spacious view everywhere. There is also lush vegetation everywhere.. You get the feeling you're in a rain forest rather than a city. The trees soften the landscape and give the whole area a park-like appearance. **[I'd see almost the exact same pattern of development years later in California. Arlington looks a lot like Los Angeles, though it's MUCH wealthier overall.]**

Perhaps more than anything Arlington is wealthy—or at least that's true of the parts of it we saw. Homes here sell for anywhere from \$200,000 to \$3,000,000. We repeatedly drove past a development with condos advertised for \$239,000, and apartment rents are around \$1,000 a month. We were amused by car repair places that serviced no American makes—only BMWs, Mitsubishis, and the occasional plebian Toyota. The place really is a beautiful community, but I doubt I could ever afford to live here.

Before long we reached our destination, Marymount University. We parked, and it didn't take long to go through the check-in procedures. Our dorm was basic and minimally acceptable. It, like most of the college (and, in fact, much of Arlington), was built in the '50s. The dorm was built on a hill, with its main entrance on what the elevator listed as the third floor. Our group ended up on the sixth floor, the top level of this building.

The elevator was one of the stranger quirks of the dorm. They had an unusual security system that required you to place an identity card into a slot to go up in the elevator. (Strangely, you could go down without the card.) **[That, of course, would make it hard to access the residential floors, but easy for those who lived there to leave.]** I kept pondering what, if anything, about the cards operated the elevator. They didn't have a magnetic strip, nor was there any code punched in them. What did make them unique (and annoying) was that they were an unusual size, just slightly larger than a credit card. I've never seen any other plastic card that size, and I have a feeling anything that size and shape would have turned the elevator on. I wish I could have found some other flat object that size to test out my theory. The rooms themselves were old and well worn. Ours featured built-in blonde wood furnishings with the name of someone's boyfriend carved on the closet. There was certainly nothing luxurious about the place, but it really wasn't all that bad.

After getting settled in, we collected the group together and went off campus. Each time we went out exploring in the Washington area, we traveled by metro. I wasn't sure ahead of time how that would work out, but believe me it's **much** easier than driving. We did have to drive to get to the train. We all piled into the blue suburban and drove about three miles west to I-66 and Sycamore, the location of the East Falls Church metro station. Our intent was to park at the East Falls Church park-and-ride lot and take the train into the city. When we got there today, though, all the signs said "Lot Full", even though there was obviously lots of empty space in the lot. We tried to enter, but the machine wouldn't give us a ticket to park in the allegedly "full" lot. My bet is that the lot was indeed full of commuters this morning, but now at evening rush hour it was rapidly emptying out. Why they don't let you park there at night, I don't know.

Fortunately the station also had a "kiss 'n' ride" lot. This is intended for temporary parking for people who are dropping off or picking up their spouses (hence the name). They have meters that will accept money for up to eight hours, though, so we fed it a handful of quarters and locked up. **[Allowing long-term parking in a kiss and ride lot seems to defeat the purpose, but we had no problem taking advantage of their stupidity. By the way, we could also have taken a free shuttle bus from the college to the Ballston station, which is one stop closer in than East Falls Church. It had an awkward operating schedule, though, so driving to the park-and-ride was a better alternative.]**

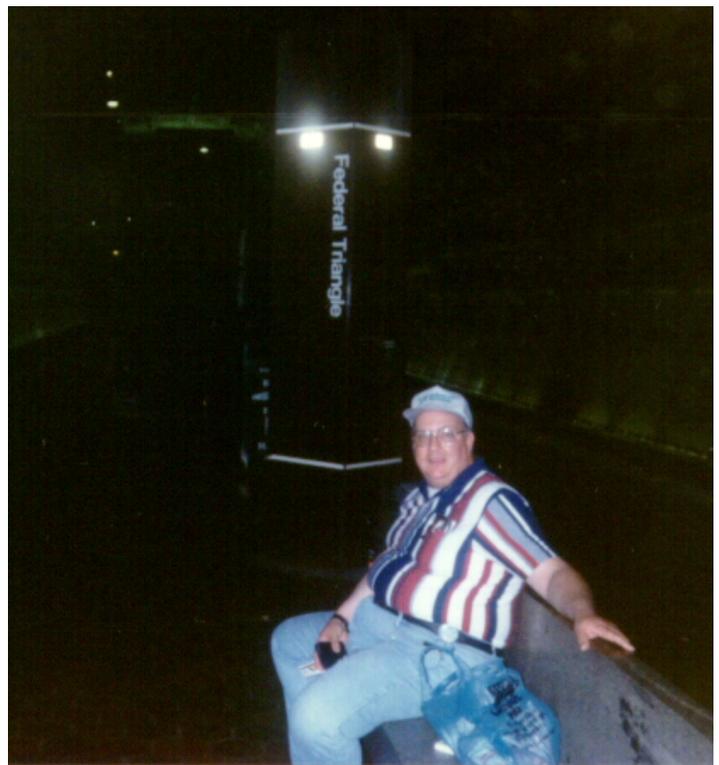
East Falls Church is an elevated station, located right in the median of I-66 (which is also elevated at this point). The escalators here (like most escalators in the metro system) seemed perpetually broken **[something that seems to be a perennial problem with the D.C. Metro]**, so we treated them like stairs and walked up to platform level.

Before I went to Washington, several people had described to me how lavish the Washington metro was. They described palatial stations that made me think of Moscow. While they certainly spared no expense in wasting government money to build the thing, it really doesn't come across as elegant. The stations are mostly made of pre-formed, unfinished concrete; Moscow's marble and Madrid's tiles struck me as more elegant. Even the Chicago el, with its decrepit cast iron stations, had more personality. The platforms are all made of a rough red tile that looks like the sort of ceramic you'd make drainage pipes out of. All the directional signs are on brown rectangular pillars. Many of these have been worn down—not really through vandalism, but through use—while others have outdated information that doesn't reflect the current configuration of the system. I'm glad I knew where I was going.

The trains themselves are amusing. Margaret and I periodically joke about how designers' concept of the future has changed over the years. In the '50s and '60s the latest designs showed us that the future would be round and white. (Look at the shapes on *The Jetsons*.) By contrast, today's state-of-the-art high tech goods are square and black. Well, the Washington metro dates to the mid '70s, and in that era the future featured "fun" colors and modular designs. I don't think anyone before or since has decorated with orange, but it was very much in vogue in the '70s. The Washington metro features orange vinyl upholstery; it would have fit right into our family room in Mount Pleasant. The train cars are a beige plastic in that boxy "modular" look that was also big back when Carol Merrill was caressing furniture. All they needed to really transport us back in time twenty years would be a Mediterranean console TV mounted at one end of the car and a tulip-shaped dinette at the other.

Whatever their campy entertainment value, though, the Washington metro cars are immaculate. I was utterly amazed that after two decades that orange vinyl upholstery still looked as it did in 1976. There were no tears or rips or patches or carvings anywhere. If only car upholstery could be so durable. There was no indication of graffiti or other vandalism anywhere in the system—cars, stations, or right-of-way. It's amazing in a city with one of America's highest crime rates, but they really seem to respect the train system here. **[In fact, D.C. has rather Draconian laws regarding the metro. Pretty much everything that might conceivably be a problem is outlawed, and the laws are strictly enforced. You'll get a strict fine for drinking coffee or eating a donut on the train, and graffiti merits jail time.]**

EVERYONE seems to ride the metro in Washington. There are people of all races and all income levels among the passengers. If anything there were more wealthy white people and fewer poor black people than I expected to see. The city of Washington, after all, is 80% black, yet I'd venture that no more than half the metro riders were people "of color". **[The Washington metro extends further into the suburbs than most transit systems, so it's probably fairer to compare its ridership to the whole area, which is about three-fourths white and generally quite wealthy.]** A huge percentage of the riders are tourists, and the station attendants obviously deal with them (or should I say "us") all the time. They were very helpful whenever any problems came up.



Paul Burrow, waiting in a subway station – Washington, D.C.

[I can't help but notice in the picture how heavy my brother Paul is. Paul has lost A LOT of weight in recent years and now is literally half of his former self. The chubby man who had to sit down after huffing and puffing his way to the platform is not at all like my brother is today.]

We took the orange line to Rosslyn station, which is the last stop before the Potomac in Virginia. We transferred there to the blue line and rode south to Pentagon City, a major development not far from the Pentagon itself (which, by the way, has its own station). We exited, went through a little pedestrian tunnel, and then took an escalator up to the basement of Pentagon City Mall. **[This description makes it sound like a longer trip than it actually was; the station is in fact virtually adjacent to the mall.]** If you think about it, a mall is a pretty sensible place to put a public transit hub in modern times.

Pentagon City Mall is a gorgeous building. It consists of four floors built around a skylit atrium. They call it the "Crystal Court", and the combination of glass and chrome definitely shows you where the name comes from. The stores tend toward the snooty side (pretty much the same stores you see at Mall of America), but it's really not stuffy or pretentious. **[Well, yes it is—but then pretty much EVERY mall is pretentious these days.]**

I was pleasantly surprised at the prices in the food court. I was expecting to pay "big city" prices for food in Washington, and this was our first indication that food would not be out of line. Paul, Aaron, and I ate at Taco Time, and I had more food than I really wanted for \$4.50. Pretty much everywhere we went in Washington, food prices were no different than equivalent places would charge

at home. You can eat a McDonald's value meal for \$2.99 [...and oh, how I wish I could do so today—when it's hard to get a value meal for \$5], or you can have an elegant lobster dinner for \$40. It was the low-end places that pleasantly surprised us. While fast food in Minneapolis and Chicago costs 10-20% more than it does in small towns, everything in Washington was exactly the same price it would be in Algona. That was one of several things that made Washington a surprisingly affordable place to visit.

The group divided, after agreeing on a time and place to meet up. Paul and I had very little desire to spend the entire evening in a mall, so we went back to the metro and took the train into Washington proper. We got out at Smithsonian station to scope out the area where we would be going for sightseeing tomorrow. One of the two exits for Smithsonian station lets off right in the middle of National Mall, that two-mile-long park that runs from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial. We got out, bought ice cream from a street vendor, and just sat on a bench for a while. The park was crowded with joggers and rollerbladers, but it still made a pleasant place to kill an hour or so.

We took the yellow line back across the river to Pentagon City. Before long the group re-assembled, and we headed back to East Falls Church. The suburban was still parked where we had left it, with time still left on the meter. We drove back to the dorm and settled in for the night.

It was miserably hot this evening. There must have been some problem with the dorm's air conditioning, since it barely breathed more than a trickle. Neither Paul nor I slept very well.

Friday, June 13¹

Washington, D.C. Area



FRONT: Tim Mosbach, Brad Frideres, Jeremy Richter, and Tyler Struck
BACK: Nate Frideres and Dennis Gisch
On the set of the National Academic Championships – Arlington, Virginia

Today was our major competition day. Our first opponent was Syosset High School, from a suburb on Long Island, New York. They were primarily Asian students, and everybody was dressed to the nines. I expected a complete mismatch with us versus the big city, but it was actually a fairly close game. We lost, 220 - 130, but everybody contributed and the kids felt fairly good about how they played.

After the game we drove to a McDonalds near the metro station for breakfast. The kids complained that no one on the staff here seemed to speak English. While I properly glared at them for this comment, they were basically correct. Half the staff appeared to be Hispanic, while the other was made up of recent Asian immigrants. They were able to take people's orders in English, but their skills were indeed quite minimal. How the two ethnic groups managed to communicate with each other, I have no idea.

[While the kids might still have the same reaction to the multi-ethnic staff today, it's unlikely they'd express it in quite the same way. The intervening years have brought an explosion in immigration—not just in

major cities, but throughout the country. Today our McDonalds in Algona has a Hispanic manager, and it's all but expected that service employees anywhere will be immigrants. People still grumble about those who don't speak English, but it hardly takes people by surprise these days.]

There were flyers at McDonalds for a special they were having for Fathers' Day, where if a father brought in his child, dad would get a free meal. We debated among the group who could be Paul's son, who could be mine, and even who Aaron's offspring might be. We never did take advantage of the offer, of course, but it was fun speculating. Another odd thing we noticed was that this McDonalds offered a breakfast buffet on weekends. The kids got excited and asked if they could come back tomorrow for what they called the "BUFF-it". **[The classical British pronunciation does appear to be the standard in Algona.]**

We played our second game around lunchtime. This match was at what they called the "Ballston Campus" of Marymount. This "campus" consists of one building. It is located a little over a mile south of the main campus, and right on the metro line [actually about three blocks away from the station]. It's a really ugly building—about six floors high and built mostly of bright blue materials. They offer most of their business courses here, as well as some fine arts classes. We were competing in the college's main auditorium.

This time we faced East High School of West Chester, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. I remember driving through West Chester each day the summer daddy, Paul, and I went out to Philly for Paul's NEA convention. The team from West Chester was more or less what I thought Syosset would be. That is to say they were good. We lost again, and this time the 300 - 140 final wasn't even vaguely close.

I was surprised that many of the people here never left campus. They just stayed around the dorm and practiced going through questions in their spare time. I can't imagine going to Washington without actually seeing the sights. I suppose, though, that for people from the East, it's not that much different than a trip to Minneapolis would be for us. ... Then again, I think I'd see the sights if I had some time to spend in Minneapolis, too.

Our kids were definitely the most "normal" people at the tournament. That's been true every year we've gone to nationals. Many of the people here are stereotypes or even parodies of nerds. I won't say all our kids have perfect command of the social graces, but these Midwestern "hicks" do come across as more well-rounded than the big-city "geeks" against whom they played. It was also amazing to me just how uninformed many of the Eastern contestants were on other parts of their own country. Most of them had no clue where Iowa was, and most of those who did assumed everybody here farmed. (They probably thought we still farmed with horses and hand plows, too, but I won't get into that.) I'll admit I know more about geography than most people, but I think most Iowans could give a fairly accurate account of just how diverse the people and economy are in the East. It's shocking to me that so many of the Easterners (including many who had been accepted to the nation's most prestigious universities) can not do the same with other regions of their country.

In our third game we played a school called Bellaire, a private academy from Houston. Texas is a state where quiz bowl is every bit as bloodthirsty a sport as football. This was my least favorite of the games we played—and it's not just because we lost to them 490-65. They were just annoying. They were cocky, and they seemed to treat this game against a nothing school from the sticks as some kind of joke. They made an obvious point of trying to run up the score and they even complained **TWICE** about rulings the judges had made—as if it would have made a difference in the outcome of the game. They also had really stupid introductions for their players; one of them read like a personal ad, with the boy describing himself physically rather than giving his academic or activity information. I knew from the first question that we were going to lose this game, but there is no team I would have liked to beat more.



The Iwo Jima Memorial

Many of the kids wanted to have dinner at the Hard Rock Café, and I agreed to supervise them on a trip into the city. After losing to Bellaire, the kids changed into casual clothes, and we drove back to East Falls Church metro station. It was right at rush hour as we arrived in the city, and the trains got fairly crowded. Fortunately, haven gotten on in the suburbs, we had seats for the whole distance. We got downtown and walked about five blocks to the restaurant.

Washington's Hard Rock Café definitely isn't anything really special. It's located in an old office building, and outside there's nothing at all of architectural interest. I can't say I was terribly impressed with the inside, either. It's similar to every other Hard Rock I've seen, and if anything less interesting than most. The kids, however, were in heaven. I sat primly and read the menu repeatedly while they scoped out each corner of the place to see just who's guitars and gold records were mounted on the walls.

Each year at the National Academic Championships they have some sort of free "entertainment" as part of the registration package. In Dallas we went to a baseball game; in New Orleans there was a stupid dance. Here they had the best freebie yet. We got a complimentary Gray Line Tour of Washington, D.C. I was elated by that. We got to see all the "must sees" in one trip, and that left us free to see the other things we wanted to in our free time. **[They've since done away with the "entertainment" all together, one of several cost-cutting moves they've made in recent years.]**

Our first stop was at the Marine Monument next to Arlington Cemetery. This is the sculpture based on the famous photograph of the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima. This was one monument I really wanted to see, probably because my dad was in the detail that secured the outlying areas of the island after the Marines claimed it. I was really impressed with the statue. It's enormous, far bigger than I had imagined and definitely the equal of the war memorials they have (or at least had) all over Russia. For me the flag-raising statue and

especially the captions on the base (things like "uncommon valor was a common virtue") capture the emotion of my father's war. While it may technically honor the Marines, to me it represents the valor of everyone who fought against Hitler and Hirohito. I saw my father in that statue, just as I saw everyone who went to battle the last time our nation was attacked. **[I really like this quite a bit better than the much more pretentious World War II Memorial that was installed a few years later on the National Mall.]**

We crossed the Potomac and stopped at the east end of the National Mall. We first visited the Korean War Memorial. I hate to admit it, but I didn't even know there was a monument to Korea. You hear about Vietnam all the time, but Korea is virtually forgotten. Their monument is really quite impressive. The center of it is a whole field of statues representing the various types of people who fought in the war. They look like they're trudging across some barren field—not too much different from the way things were depicted on M*A*S*H. There's also a granite wall bordering the sight with etchings of various scenes from the war.

Next we saw the Vietnam Memorial, and I must say I was impressed. I never realized just how enormous the wall was. Where it angles in the middle, it's more than twice as tall as an average person, and it seems to extend forever in both directions. The names of the victims are engraved in lettering barely an inch tall, and every panel is filled with them—58,202 names in all. My biggest memory of the war was watching the *CBS Evening News*. Every night Walter Cronkite would tell us that day's body count, and we'd see them loading the bags into transport jets to be taken back to America. It's astonishing (and disturbing) that we lost 58,000 people in that war—and in the end, really for no reason at all.

There's a startling contrast between this and the Iwo Jima monument. At Iwo Jima I felt pride in our nation's victory over the clear-cut forces of evil. I was proud of America and proud that my father was a part of that victory. Certainly I felt sorry for those who died in World War II, but there was solace in the feeling that they died for what was right. I felt that sense of "lest we forget", reminding me that we couldn't enjoy the freedoms we treasure without the blood of those who fought to preserve them. The Vietnam Memorial, in contrast, is a huge tombstone that can't help but raise a tear. It brings back too many troubling memories and too many loose ends that remain unraveled even today. People still lay flowers at the wall, and they still make paper rubbings of familiar names. I am certainly grateful that I am not closely related to any of the victims who are honored here. It's sad enough just to see the vastness of the place and think of the utter senselessness of that war. Even twenty-five years later, it remains a national tragedy, and I certainly do feel sorry for those who lost loved ones in that war.

It must be even worse for the families of those who remain missing in action. A quarter century later there are still hundreds of men who can't be accounted for. That tiny glint of hope that they might somehow still be alive has to be almost more un-nerving than the knowledge that someone is gone.

The kids asked some questions about Vietnam as we walked past this massive monument. I, of course, was a child back then, but Paul was of draft age. It amazed me that he still had his draft card; he took it out of his wallet and showed it to the kids and me. Fortunately he had a very high number in the lottery. My brother John's was lower, but thankfully still above the cut-off line. With just a tiny change of luck, my brothers could have been among the names enshrined on that wall.

It's weird that these kids think of Vietnam as history, but of course it is to them. Vietnam happened as long ago from their perspective as Korea did from mine. It's strange, though. The war was so central to growing up in the '60s and '70s. Everybody knew someone who was fighting, and everybody knew someone who was protesting. You couldn't escape Vietnam; it was there on TV every night at suppertime in stark black and white. There are two world events that I would say had more effect on me growing up than anything else. The red ribbon would go to landing on the moon, but the winner by far was Vietnam. It made me and all the other children of the baby boom into the people we are today. I firmly pray our country never need go to war again, but if we do—may we never have another war like Vietnam. **[Sadly, we have done precisely what I hoped we would not. The quagmire we've gotten into in Iraq is almost a carbon copy of Vietnam—a war the government thought was right, that really seems to have no purpose whatsoever. Hopefully the next President will get us out of there soon.]**



The Lincoln Memorial

After the deep emotion of the Vietnam wall, we entered a rather carnival-like atmosphere at the Lincoln Memorial. There's an episode of *The Simpsons* where Lisa goes to Washington in which they joke about the crowds at the Lincoln Memorial. It's true. Even well into the evening the place was packed. This is a spectacular monument. Its elegant simplicity is perfectly suited to the man it honors. Neither the penny nor the five-dollar bill do justice to the Lincoln Memorial; again its hugeness is part of what makes it awe-inspiring. It is monumental in every sense, and really a beautiful tribute to one of our nation's greatest leaders.



The reflecting pool on National Mall – Washington, D.C.

The Lincoln Memorial faces onto the National Mall. In front of it is the reflecting pool, where you can see the image of the Washington Monument. Beyond there is a large open space leading all the way to the Capitol, two miles from here. The kids associated this place with the movie *Forrest Gump*. I never saw that film **[and I still haven't to this day]**, but apparently the title character sits by the reflecting pool in a key scene. For me the mall evokes memories of Martin Luther King. While I was all of two years old at the time of the famous March on Washington, throughout my lifetime I've seen the film clips of that landmark event over and over again. I could almost imagine those half million people gathered and that booming voice proclaiming the dream. The Mall has witnessed lots of big events over the years, and while King's march is far from the biggest gathering ever, I think it would be easy to argue that it was the most important. While Civil Rights has come a long ways since the mid 60s, in so many ways the different factions of our country seem to be drifting apart. King's dream was so simple—that all God's children can sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I wish we could preserve all that optimism today and really see everyone in our nation as one.

[It's hard not to see a bit of King's dream being fulfilled in the recent election. One wonders what he would think to see a black man elected President with the support of people from every race and income level. We certainly still have our problems, but this election really does show America at its best.]

Our group arrived back at the bus roughly at the designated meeting time. Almost everyone else on the tour did, too. Unfortunately two ladies from New York seemed to have no sense of time. They kept us waiting and waiting and waiting. The park police asked our driver to move along, and he made some excuse to buy a little more time. Eventually—more than fifteen minutes after we were scheduled to meet—the women showed up. Paul and I glared at them as they passed us going to their seats.

Our next stop was the Jefferson Memorial. This monument is under construction. It was built on swamp land, and apparently the constant vibration from jets at nearby National Airport has made it structurally unsound. Whole chunks of stone have fallen off pillars, and they've placed nets up to keep falling debris from injuring tourists. The main steps are closed, so to get to the monument you walk up a nearly endless ramp that keeps making switchbacks to maintain a grade appropriate for wheelchairs. I felt like I was at Disney World, with their mazes that make the lines seem shorter than they are. Once we finally got there, the Jefferson Memorial was pleasant enough. It's quite similar to the Lincoln Memorial, except round in design rather than rectangular. I prefer the layout of Lincoln, but Jefferson certainly has the better prose engraved on stone tablets surrounding his statue.

We next visited the newest of the Presidential memorials, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, which was opened just a month before our visit. Our bus driver told us it took President Clinton about an hour and a half to walk through the place on crutches at the official opening. I figured that lengthy time was because Clinton was on crutches; in fact, after going through it myself, it amazes me the man was able to finish it so quickly. The place is truly immense. It's essentially a gigantic outdoor museum to the great President-for-Life who led us through the Great Depression and the Second Great War.



Garrigan group at Roosevelt Memorial

photograph. It shows Roosevelt with his dog at his side. The President is seated in the chair he sat in when conducting most of his business at the White House—a straight wooden chair on casters. He is wearing a cape that covers his legs and the casters on the front legs of the chair. President Roosevelt, of course, suffered from polio. He wore leg braces, and he used the chair on casters like a wheelchair. He wanted the American people (and his allies and enemies abroad) to see a strong President, so he was careful not to reveal the extent of his handicap in public.

Apparently many disabled people were offended that Roosevelt was not portrayed in a true wheelchair. According to one article I read, they feel he should be seen "glorying in his being differently abled". While I'm not completely sure what that means, I'm pretty sure I disagree with the attitude it reflects. It distorts the truth. No one in Roosevelt's era gloried in disability. That was not how the President wanted to be portrayed, and he went to great lengths to avoid being seen that way. Only two pictures exist that show Roosevelt in a wheelchair. People knew he was handicapped, but he wanted to portray the image of a man who had overcome the physical challenges of polio and gone on to greatness.

People have speculated for years as to whether Roosevelt would have been elected so overwhelmingly had people known the extent of his disability. I've also heard people pondering whether a disabled person could be elected President today. I have no idea how the

The Roosevelt Memorial is divided into outdoor "rooms". Each contains various statues that trace what life was like during the '30s and '40s and depict the major events of Roosevelt's Presidency. They also have bronze plaques with quotations from Roosevelt—the four freedoms, "a date which shall live in infamy", "I hate war", etc. There is also a large display on the accomplishments of Eleanor Roosevelt. The rooms are divided by a series of waterfall fountains that do a nice job of absorbing crowd noise and making the place seem private and secluded. There's even a fountain you can walk out in the middle of. The kids did, of course, and I snapped their picture with the water falling in front of them.

Perhaps the strangest part of the memorial is a wall designed especially for blind people. They have "tactile sculptures" which appear to be bronze bas reliefs, together with braille inscriptions. There is no traditional text, so I have no idea what the braille says. The strangest thing about the area is that in front of it are pillars with a negative image of what is on the wall. The "tactile sculptures" go inward instead of outward and the "braille" is depressed instead of raised. I can follow the point of the braille wall, but what the stupid pillars are supposed to be, I have no clue.

The monument has been in the news for the one and only statue they have of President Roosevelt himself. Like many statues, this one is based on a famous photo-



Roosevelt's cape hiding his "wheel"-chair at the FDR Memorial

country as a whole would vote, but I know I personally would have no problem with a handicapped President—provided he or she did not make an issue out of being disabled. Being in a wheelchair is not a problem, but it becomes a problem if that wheelchair becomes your identity. I think for too many disabled people today that is happening. Roosevelt did not get bogged down by his handicap; rather he rose above it, and the disability was irrelevant to his Presidency.

[The argument I made in the previous paragraph generalizes to “identity politics” in general. Barack Obama was able to be successful while people like Jesse Jackson were only marginal candidates because he was a candidate who just happened to be black, while his predecessors built their identity around being black.]

We waited for those same ladies from New York after we finished seeing the Roosevelt Memorial. Fortunately, this time they were only about five minutes late. Next we took an "illumination tour" of the capital city. Most of the big buildings in Washington are lit up at night. I hate to think how much energy (and taxpayer money) they waste doing that, but it is pretty to look at. The driver did a very good job of pointing out all the important buildings, and he also mentioned news stories and anecdotes to help us recall why the various buildings should ring a bell in our minds.

It was nearly eleven by the time we got back to campus. We met Louie Bode back at the dorm. His sister lives in Washington, and he had permission from his mother to visit with her while we were here. So, after the first game, he spent the day separate from the group. He and his sister apparently went on a twenty-mile bike ride from the city to Mount Vernon. On the way they rode past many of the same monuments we saw on the tour. He seemed to have enjoyed himself, and I must say we had a pretty good day too.

This evening Paul and I opened the windows of our room, to see if it was any cooler that way. It was somewhat cooler, but also more humid. I still didn't sleep very well tonight.

Saturday, June 14 *Washington, D.C. Area*

Paul and Aaron took off early this morning. Several of the kids very much wanted to see the Holocaust Museum, and it requires advance tickets for a specific time of day. Apparently the lines can be extremely long, so we sent Paul and Aaron into the city to be among the first at the ticket booth today.

I was up early, and since I had time to kill I walked around campus on the guise of finding the building we would be competing in today. Finding the building (the college's auditorium) was easy, but the whole place was locked up tight, so I had no clue how to get into the place. Eventually I happened to run into one of the people who was working in that center, and he advised me which door was the correct one to enter.

I took the kids to McDonalds this morning to have breakfast at their buffet. That was a strange experience, primarily because it's just weird to think of McDonalds trying to be a "real" restaurant. It surprised me that they didn't serve their regular breakfast items on the buffet. You couldn't get Egg McMuffins or cinnamon rolls or hash browns. Instead they had pancakes, bacon and sausage, scrambled eggs, home fries, toast, and (probably strangest of all) omelettes. **[Actually most of these are part of the Mcd's breakfast menu, packaged together as the "big breakfast"—something I pretty much never order.]** Frankly, it wasn't really very good, and neither I nor the kids made plans to hurry back to the buffet tomorrow.

After breakfast we played our last game in the tournament. Our opponents were another 0-3 team, St. Elmo High School. They came from a small town in downstate Illinois (about an hour and a half east of St. Louis), and they were by far the most pleasant of the teams we faced. They were polite and sportsmanlike, exactly the way I insist our kids should be. We held a lead through most of the game. To be honest about it, neither of the teams had an outstanding game, but this was definitely the best one we played. Our lead fell apart, though, in the "lightning round" when we chose a category that turned out to be almost impossible while St. Elmo swept an easy set of questions. They went on to win 210 - 165. Oh well, quiz bowl is just as much about luck as it is about knowledge, and (while I would definitely like to have won), I'm glad these nice people from Illinois were able to go home with a victory.

Since this was our last game, I suppose I should introduce you to the players on the team. Here's the roster, complete with the pronunciations and interests given on the introduction card we gave the game moderators:

- **Tyler Struck**, Freshman – Enjoys sports and drama; also involved in choir, band, and publications
- **Brad Frideres** (FREE-durs), Junior (Captain) – Active in cross-country and track; the Midwest's biggest fan of Cal Ripken, Jr.
- **Tim Mosbach** (MAHZ-back), Junior – Editor of school newspaper and yearbook; plans to major in computer engineering in college
- **Jeremy Richter** (RICK-tur), Junior – Involved in speech, football, and 4-H; interested in space exploration **[Jeremy's much younger brother John is a freshman at Garrigan today and is also out for quiz bowl.]**
- **Dennis Gisch**, Freshman (Alternate) – Enjoys sports, especially golf; also interested in drama and science
- **Louis Bode** (BOH-dee), Freshman (Alternate) – Enjoys playing football and racquetball; captain of intramural basketball team; also interested in drama and journalism
- **Nathan Frideres** (FREE-durs), Freshman (Alternate) – Enjoys basketball and cross-country; also active in YMCA youth programs

[The no longer do introductions at the tournament. This was part of the trade off of creating a six-game, rather than four-game preliminary match-up. The kids always liked the intros, and I'm kind of sorry they did away with them.]

I expected Paul and Aaron to be back by the time we were done with our game, but they were nowhere to be found. I checked the parking lot, and the suburban was still gone. Time kept ticking by, and I was just starting to get worried when there they were walking in the door. Apparently the museum's ticket office didn't open until an hour after my guide said it did. Everything went fine, just slower than expected. **[Today, of course, they'd probably have called on a cell phone to let us know of the delay. Cell phones were still very much a luxury in 1997, though.]**

We had to hurry a bit to get back into the city in time for the tour the kids were scheduled for. So we rushed back to East Falls Church and rode the metro back downtown. Aaron and the kids got off at Smithsonian station. Each person at the Holocaust ticket office was limited to four tickets, so we had a total of eight. We decided that Aaron (the history major) could be the kids' official chaperon, while Paul and I explored some other points of interest. **[I'd see the holocaust museum on a later trip. It's interesting, but I can't say it's quite the "must see" it's hyped as.]**

After leaving the kids, Paul and I took the train back to Rosslyn station in Arlington. Rosslyn (pronounced like a woman's name ROZ-uh-lynn) is a strange place. While it's located across the river from the District of Columbia, it's essentially Washington's downtown. **[Actually it's Arlington's downtown; Washington has a downtown, though it's much less impressive than the one in Virginia.]** Skyscrapers are banned in Washington itself, but in Rosslyn you see block after block of enormous towers. The place is right in the landing approach to National Airport, and there has been more than one near miss as planes negotiated their way through the maze of tall buildings. **[It really had to have been a nightmare in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks, when most of the D.C. area was a "no fly" zone. National Airport virtually borders the Pentagon, and with numerous monuments to the east and the Rosslyn towers to the north, that would leave comparatively residential Alexandria to the southwest as the lone direction available for take-offs and landings.]**



Satellite farm by the USA Today building – Rosslyn (Arlington), Virginia

the surface. They obviously used the "cut and cover" method of construction, where they tore up a street, built a tunnel, and covered it over again. It's just a short flight down from street level to reach the platforms. Here, though, the escalator seemed to go on forever. (Fortunately, unlike most of the escalators in the metro, this one was actually running.) After thinking a bit, the depth makes sense. The metro tunnels under the Potomac, and this station is right next to the river. They presumably had to dig quite deep to find hard soil

While the buildings are tall, they really aren't that spectacular. In fact, the overall impression is rather dumpy. Rosslyn looks a lot more like the seedy apartment towers of Moscow than the splendid skyline of Chicago. Most notable among the skyscrapers is the atrocious headquarters of the Gannett Corporation and its flagship newspaper, *USA Today*. The place is a vast silver semi-circular cylinder; it looks like a tin can sliced in half and patched at the slice. Adding to the seedy feeling in Rosslyn was the fact that this was the only place in the Washington area where we saw significant numbers of beggars and homeless people—some of whom didn't seem to have all the cylinders in their brains firing. While the city of Washington has one of the highest crime rates in America, we never really felt unsafe anywhere we went in the city. The areas around Marymount and East Falls Church also seemed basically safe. Rosslyn, though, was a place I wouldn't dream of going after dark and one where I made a point of being aware of everything around me even by day.

[Gannett and USA Today actually occupied twin semi-circular towers, though the journalistic giant no longer has its head office in Rosslyn. Right around 2000 they moved to an office park in McLean, an office park on the beltway near Dulles International Airport. That part of Virginia is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the country—and it was largely the reason Virginia was a "blue" state in the last election. I have no idea what if anything is in the ugly Gannett buildings these days.]

We were quite surprised at how deep the Rosslyn subway station was. Most of the downtown Washington stations are quite close to

or rock under the river bottom, so of course an adjacent station is also quite deep. **[Foggy Bottom station on the opposite bank of the Potomac in the District is nearly as deep.]**

Our first stop in Rosslyn was the Newseum, which (as the name implies) is a museum dedicated to journalism. **[It has since been re-located to a more prestigious address on Pennsylvania Avenue a few blocks down from the White House.]** From my perspective, this was just about the most interesting place I visited. One floor of the Newseum traces the complete history of news, going back for millennia. They have Babylonian stone tablets and the knotted strings the Inca used to keep records. There's a Guttenberg Bible and a whole room full of printing presses from various eras. I was fascinated to see an old line-o-type machine; it brought back memories of the trip our 4-H club took to the Des Moines *Register* headquarters when I was in grade school **[still one of the most interesting tours I've ever taken]**. Also fascinating was a section of the first trans-Atlantic cable; this was particularly interesting because Margaret and I had seen the frayed end of the same cable in Newfoundland a few years back.

There are almost endless displays of historic newspapers and magazines. Some of these are original copies, while others are that reproduction on wood or metal that you see in museum displays. I saw things like the actual "Dewey Defeats Truman" issue of the *Chicago Tribune* and the famous *Life* photo of a woman kissing a Navy man in Times square at the end of World War II. They also have modern milestones, like the first-ever issue of *USA Today*, with a layout that looks amazingly different from the one they use just fifteen years later.

The *USA Today* memorabilia is appropriate for this particular museum. While they do a good job of trying to hide the fact, Gannett is the ultimate sponsor of the place. It's officially run by the "Freedom Forum", a liberal group with a conservative name that is fully funded by the Gannett Foundation. The Freedom Forum's primary issue is protecting the First Amendment (particularly the freedoms of speech and the press), and several of the displays at the Newseum revolve around that issue. One fascinating exhibit is basically an interactive computer game where they have you pretend to be a journalist and decide how you would deal with a wide variety of ethical dilemmas. While all were written as if they were hypothetical, with many of them it was very easy to see the real-life situations on which they were based. One, for instance, was about whether you should reveal the extent of a President's handicap, even though he didn't want that information public. (In Roosevelt's time, it was indeed a secret; it's hard to believe the press would keep their mouths shut on that one today.) **[This past summer I visited the Freedom Museum in Chicago, a very similar place funded by the Tribune Media. They have an almost identical set of interactive exhibits. It's also fascinating.]**

There are countless other interactive exhibits where you get a good idea of what it's like to be a reporter or editor. They also have miniature news "studios", where visitors can see what it's like to be on camera, standing in front of the invisible blue wall and reading a script off a teleprompter. There's also a full-size studio, where they produce actual "talking heads" programs that are mostly seen on obscure cable channels.

Just outside the Newseum is Freedom Park, one of the strangest places of modern greenery anywhere. Much of the park was built on what used to be an entrance ramp to a nearby freeway. The freeway was redesigned (apparently it now goes underground in the Rosslyn area), and they left an overpass to nowhere. Gannett bought the overpass (which conveniently connects their headquarters building with the Newseum), as well as an approach ramp. They re-paved it with artificial cobblestones and planted grass in strategic places. Today it's really quite a pleasant urban space. **[Apparently Freedom Park still exists in Rosslyn, even if Gannett doesn't.]**

What makes Freedom Park interesting, though, is what's inside it. Lined up along the ramp and overpass are symbols of freedom from around the world. There's an actual section of the Berlin Wall and the bars from Martin Luther King's prison cell in Montgomery. You'll also see replicas of the first ballot box in South Africa and the tiny boats on which Cuban refugees came to America. Each item represents what freedom means to a different group of people from around the world. I was fascinated by the place, and I'm surprised it's not better publicized in the tourist guides to the Washington area.

At the end of Freedom Park is the Journalists' Memorial, a tribute to reporters who have died while trying to gather the news. It's an ultramodern memorial, and I wasn't quite sure what to think of it. It's not unattractive—sort of a chrome bush with pastel orange and blue glass leaves. It didn't really strike me as a very appropriate memorial, though. To me it would be more at home as the focal point on a college campus than as a memorial to people who had given their lives.

Just beyond the Journalists' Memorial is the Gannett satellite facility. Just beyond the *USA Today* building is a whole field of satellite dishes. There must be thirty or more of them, in every imaginable size and pointed in every possible direction. Of course this is how news is gathered today, but somehow the old teletype machines (like they had inside the Newseum) had a bit more charm.

After seeing the Newseum, Paul and I had a very late lunch at a nearby Burger King. The service was horribly slow, and again the staff was a strange combination of Asian and Hispanic. I've wondered the same thing elsewhere, and I pondered again here just what White teenagers and senior citizens do for jobs in places like this. Here in Iowa those two groups are the backbone of the fast food workforce. In the South Black adults replaced them, while here recent immigrants seem to take their place. It's not like they were "taking" anybody's job; every fast food place we stopped at was hiring. I certainly wouldn't deny anybody the chance to come here to work, but I do wonder just what the local kids do when school's not on and what the retired folks do to supplement their income. **[We're getting more immigrant employees at fast food places in Iowa these days. It seems as if fewer kids are working, and their absence is creating an opportunity for the immigrants. Perhaps that just happened earlier out east.]**

After lunch we headed back into Washington proper. On the train I noticed that I didn't have my dorm key with me. The key was really quite awkward, placed on a ring that was attached to the card that activated the elevator. It wouldn't fit on my keychain because of the stupid card, and it kept falling off the ring that held it to the elevator card. Well, now I noticed that I didn't have either the key or the card. I searched through a shopping bag where I had put a few other things (like my camera) to keep them out of sight, but

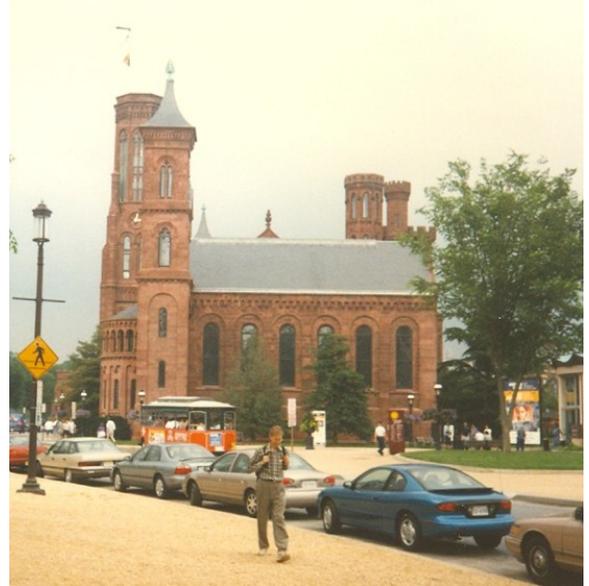
the key wasn't there either. I assumed I had lost it on the train earlier in the day, and I grudgingly prepared to pay the \$50 replacement fee. Almost worse was that after repeatedly warning the kids to keep track of their keys, it was I who ended up losing mine.

We met the kids back at Smithsonian station. They seemed to enjoy the Holocaust Museum very much. Perhaps "enjoy" isn't the proper word for such a place, but they did indeed like it, and hopefully they also learned from it. We arranged a time to meet back again, and then various portions of the group went their separate ways to explore various places in the touristed part of Washington.

Since Smithsonian station is right next to the museum complex for which it was named, Paul and I decided to spend our afternoon there. We first went to the "Castle", the original Smithsonian building that now serves as the organization's headquarters. There really isn't much for a visitor to see in the castle. It's an official visitors' center, so you can pick up maps and brochures and such, but except for a few displays on the history of the museum itself, there's nothing much here. We probably spent fifteen minutes in the place and then moved on.

Our next stop was the nearby Arts and Industries Building, which was among my favorites. This collection was originally displayed as the "world of tomorrow" at the Centennial Exposition world's fair world's fair that was held in Philadelphia in 1876. When the fair closed, they donated the stuff to the Smithsonian. It's been on display ever since, showing you a rather strange look at how past generations saw the future.

The place is quite a lot like the main museum at Old Thresher's in Mt. Pleasant. There's aisle after aisle of heavy machinery, showing the latest thing in every trade and business. One difference from Old Thresher's is that there's much more emphasis on electricity. Steam was on its way out at the time of the Centennial, and electrical power was the wave of the future. More interesting than the machinery are displays of everyday and idealized lifestyles in 1876.



Smithsonian "Castle"

What makes the place especially fascinating, though, is its building. It's an elaborate Victorian structure that really is the perfect place to house this type of display. Most of the display cases are those elaborate old wood and glass showcases that used to be the standard in museums around the world. They look horribly out of date, but in this 19th Century setting they work. **[This would not be the place to take a bunch of modern-day kids, since it's not a "bells and whistles" interactive museum. It's precisely the kind of museum I love, though.]**

It started to rain just as we left the Arts and Industries building, so we ducked into the Hirschhorn Museum next door. The Hirschhorn is a museum of modern art, and its building certainly sets the theme. It's a big concrete and chrome doughnut plopped right in the middle of all those Greek revival pillars that make up our nation's capital. We didn't actually tour the museum; Paul rested in the lobby while I browsed through the gift shop. I was amused by some of the things they had for sale. A "designer" stainless steel spoon (that was certainly for display only; you couldn't have gotten its Picasso-esque shape in most people's mouths) went for \$150. They also had a kit to create your own cardboard chair for \$85. Their model looked—well—like a little toy chair a child would improvise out of leftover boxes. I guess recycling old boxes from the dumpster isn't arty enough to cost \$85, though.

After the rain let up we walked next door to the National Air and Space Museum. This is the most popular of the Smithsonian attractions. It's here you can see some of the most famous remnants of the space program, as well as selected artifacts from aviation history. Paul was most interested in seeing the Apollo 11 capsule. While I had seen it before (when I visited Washington for the "Presidential Classroom" in high school), I was eager to check it out again. They have the original command module, rescued from the Pacific after splashdown. By today's standards, the thing looks hopelessly archaic. The confusion of dials and gauges and the maze of open wiring spliced with electrical tape is astonishing. **[Whenever I see artifacts from the space program, it amazes me that we made it to the moon—or indeed that we ever got off the ground at all. These days we're so litigious and so preoccupied with safety that I wonder if NASA would even be allowed to build such primitive vehicles.]**

A lot of kids I teach ask me what was the big deal with the space program. That's hard to answer. For those of us who lived through it, it gave us a taste of what Columbus or Magellan must have felt centuries ago. There's a more important "big deal", though. I'm sitting in my living room typing this on my computer. As I turn around, everywhere I look in my house, there's electronics—the VCR, the portable tape deck, the cordless phone, the microwave, the graphing calculator, and even the digital clock. On the TV news they just had a satellite report from Hungary, and coming up there's a feature on the internet **[something that was still rather new in '97]**. The electronic revolution that today's kids take for granted had its birth in the space age. It's hard to believe that something that looks as primitive as Apollo 11 could lead to today's state-of-the-art computers, but without the space program, we'd live in a very different world today. You could argue about whether that world would be better or worse, but it would be totally different from the one we know. **[I really am in awe when I think just what a debt we owe the primitive electronics of the space program. Pretty much everything in our modern world is computer-based, and virtually everything derives from work done at NASA.]**

In addition to the Apollo 11 command module, there are reproductions of several other significant rockets, satellites, landing vehicles, and the like. I can't say this was my favorite thing to see; I've seen the same stuff at the NASA facilities in Mississippi and Houston—and it's a lot less crowded there.



Enola Gay at the Smithsonian

What I was interested in seeing here was the Enola Gay exhibit. The Enola Gay was, of course, the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima at the end of World War II. There was a lot of controversy when they first put the plane on display here at the Smithsonian. The original exhibit stressed the effect the bombings had on Japan. Some felt it implied that America was to blame for the deaths of Japanese civilians, and that perhaps we should apologize for what we did. Numerous veterans' groups expressed their outrage over the exhibit; they demanded it be re-framed to imply that the bomb brought an earlier end to the war—thus saving thousands of lives.

Of course, neither view is totally right. In the end, the Smithsonian did a remarkable job of reaching a compromise. They have an introductory exhibit that explains the controversy and presents the arguments from all the various sides. Then, for the main exhibit, they have the plane and a replica of the bomb—with no comment whatsoever. Then at the exit there is a place where visitors can reflect and share their own feelings on the place.

Apollo and the Enola Gay were the only major exhibits we saw at the Air and Space Museum, and I can't say I was terribly upset about that. The place is just too crowded to really enjoy the displays. We exited to the street and caught the metro at L'Enfant Plaza station, where we rode back one station to Smithsonian.

Before long the whole group re-assembled outside the metro station. Most of them hadn't eaten yet, so the next order of business was supper. About the only place I was certain had convenient fast food was the Rosslyn area, so we went back into the metro station to head over there. In case you should be headed to Washington and have plans to take the metro, one word of advice—avoid Smithsonian station between 5 and 6pm. The museums close at either 5:00 or 5:30, and thousands of tourists flock into one of the smallest stations in the system. The mall entrance leads right to the middle of the platform, and there's huge congestion at the bottom of the escalators. A woman with a rather nasty voice keeps scolding the crowd to move on down to the end of the platform, but often there's nowhere to move. We did make it onto a train, and I must say I was only too glad to leave that station.

[The crowding at Smithsonian is one of the biggest flaws in the Washington metro system—and it's really pretty stupid. Surely the designers could have predicted this would be one of the most popular stations and designed it accordingly. Once it was built, though, it's very difficult to enlarge.]

We went back to the same Burger King Paul and I had visited for lunch. After dinner I took the kids to Freedom Park, making a creative detour to avoid heading past a line of homeless



BGHS Quiz bowl team at the Berlin Wall remnant in Freedom Park (our "official" team photo for this trip)

people that stood in the way. The kids seemed especially impressed with Freedom Park. For them the fall of the Berlin Wall is the kind of big event of their childhood that landing on the moon was for me. **[My, that's changed. These days the fall of communism is an almost forgotten bit of history—sort of like the Korean War.]** Everyone wanted their picture taken beside the chunk of the Wall, and they really seemed impressed with the sight. They also noticed a section of cobblestones from a ghetto in Warsaw from which Jews were taken during the Holocaust. This hadn't really registered with me earlier, but the kids had seen pictures of the area in the Holocaust museum, so it stood out for them.

Paul was waiting for us at the Rosslyn metro station. As we entered the station, for one of numerous times during the trip, Louis Bode had trouble scanning his fare card. While I'm sure Louie won't admit it, the reason was that he always wore gym shorts without pockets. He held his money and fare card in a money clip that was attached to the waistband of his shorts. Every time he moved, the card got bent and crushed by the clip. I was amazed it would even go into the machine, and it was certainly no surprise that the magnetic strip didn't work correctly. Fortunately the station attendants were very helpful whenever there was a problem. They have equipment in their kiosks that allows them to read many of the cards, even when the turnstiles won't. When even that doesn't work, they can see the value printed on the card, and go from there. In this case the attendant just issued Louie a new card for the same value as the crumpled one. Technically he's not supposed to do it (they take no responsibility for damaged cards), but they do seem to be overly helpful with tourists.

We went back into the city and got off at the Archives/Navy Memorial stop. As the name implies there is a monument to the Navy near here—a cheesy little statue. More importantly, the stop is right behind the National Archives building. I also remember visiting the Archives when I was in high school. Mostly I remember a line that stretched outside the main door and dozens of guards whose job was to keep us moving. We might have had thirty seconds to catch a glimpse of the great documents of freedom. This visit was a much more pleasant experience. Purely by chance, we had stopped at precisely the right time; early evening is apparently a slack time for visitors. We quickly made it through security (roughly the same procedures they have in an airport) and on inside.

First we took a look at their rotating collection, which features assorted documents from throughout American history. While they have papers from as far back as the early 1800s, the bulk of the items are from the late 20th Century. One of the most interesting things I saw here was Nixon's official resignation.

About halfway through the rotating collection you go up to a platform to look at the cases with the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence. The documents are kept in an inert atmosphere, beneath six layers of bullet-proof, polarized glass. The anti-fade tinting gives the cases a greenish-yellow tint, as if the foundation of our country were suspended in a tub of Mountain Dew. The documents obviously faded quite a bit before they were placed in the special cases, so hopefully this will keep them well preserved.

Because the place was virtually empty, several of the kids chatted at length with the guards beside the great documents. The guards mostly explained the security procedures. Each night the display cases are lowered into a bomb-proof vault the equivalent of six stories beneath the building. If any visitor should threaten the documents, the guards simply press a button. The documents instantly retreat to the vault. I couldn't help but think that the security is really a bit excessive. After all, the basis of our freedom isn't just a few pieces of parchment; it's what those documents SAY that counts. There's millions of copies of these documents around the world—just look in any almanac. While no one would want the originals destroyed, it's not as if our country would come to an end if they were.

Perhaps the reason we guard the documents so well is that ours is one of the few nations that actually honors its Constitution. When the old Warsaw Pact was still in existence, every member of that alliance had a constitution that guaranteed all the liberties ours does and then some. The problem was that their constitutions weren't worth the paper they were written on. Neither were many similar documents in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. What has made America a model for democracy for so many years is that we try to live up to the challenges our founding fathers left us. Our country is certainly not always perfect, and we haven't always granted every freedom to every person we should. On the whole, though, we've done a lot better than most countries.

[Sadly, of course, three years later we'd elect a President who used an attack on our country as an excuse to ignore or re-interpret many parts of the Constitution (and especially the Bill of Rights). Hopefully the incoming administration can undue much of the damage the previous one did.]

After seeing the National Archives, we headed back to the metro. Most of the group had pretty much exhausted their fare cards, so we had to take some time to add value at the fare machines. While we were at it, we also picked up passes to use tomorrow. The day passes cost \$5 each, and they are good for unlimited rides all day long—a real savings if you're taking more than a couple of trips. **[When we'd return to Washington on future trips, I'd buy these day passes in advance online. This was before "e-commerce" was well-established, though. Indeed, it wasn't until the fall of '97 that I even had internet access myself—with a WebTV unit.]**

We stopped at a supermarket on our way back to campus. I was surprised that the place was not open twenty-four hours. Even in small towns around here, most big supermarkets are now open around the clock; I figured that was true everywhere, but apparently it isn't. **[I found it true even in New York and L.A. that very few places were often not open 24/7. Even convenience stores seem to close early in big cities. That really does seem strange to me.]** We arrived just moments before this one was due to close, so we had to rush to make a few selections before they kicked us out. Probably the most interesting thing I bought was a Virginia lottery ticket, which turned out to be a winning ticket. Of course, to claim my \$5 winnings, I'll have to send it back to the lottery headquarters in Richmond. It's a toss-up whether to claim my "prize" or keep a souvenir. **[I believed I kept it.]**

One last thing I should mention today—when we got back to the park-and-ride, my dorm key (with its elevator card attached) was sitting right on the front seat of the suburban. It had apparently fallen out of my pocket while I was driving to East Falls Church in the morning. Small miracles are always nice. **[These days when I travel I most often wear cargo pants, with buttoned or velcro-closed pockets on their fronts. That makes a convenient place to store such things—and also a more secure place to store passports, money, and the like where they aren't easily accessible to pickpockets.]**

Sunday, June 15

Arlington, Virginia to Pikesville, Maryland

As is almost always the case when I travel, I woke up early this morning. Since we had no games today, we were letting the kids sleep in late, so I had quite a bit of time to kill. I decided to walk down to that McDonalds on Lee Highway. It's close to a mile away, but it made a pleasant morning excursion.

The neighborhood around Marymount is wealthy. The homes wouldn't quite compare to the mansions in New Orleans **[though they likely cost more]**, but they're definitely not those little boxes made of ticky-tacky you expect in a suburb. The homes are huge—three or four bedrooms minimum. At first I wondered who these days had a family large enough to need all that space, but then again I manage to more than fill my two-bedroom apartment all by myself.

All the area residents seem preoccupied with security. The yards are all fenced and gated, and signs by all the houses warn of burglar alarms, motion detectors, and watch dogs. Several families had their \$30,000 cars parked in the driveway (in fact, there's surprisingly few multi-car garages around here; some of the homes don't even have any garage at all), and they invariably had "the club" locked across the steering wheel. While I enjoyed a very pleasant walk in what appeared to be a safe area, the wealthy locals made it perfectly clear they don't trust anyone with their property.

I was reminded of a book I picked up last fall that describes the comparative possessions of people in different places around the world **[still one of the most fascinating books I've ever bought]**. One of the families they featured came from an American suburb that looked much like this one. They, too, were overly concerned about security. They had a high tech burglar alarm system, car alarms, and guns hidden everywhere around the house—for "safety", according to them. The author asked if they had ever been the victims of a burglary. They hadn't, and it turned out no one in the neighborhood ever had. They were just so worried about everything they had acquired that they were paranoid.

I checked some reference books, and in fact, Arlington County has an extremely low theft rate—about the same as Iowa's. The only crime that happens more often than the national average in Arlington is rape. In the D.C. metro area, almost nine-tenths of the break-ins and car thefts happen in the inner city of Washington; the victims are the people who can least afford to lose what they have.

You get a clue as to just how close things are in the East when you see that the *New York Times* is delivered to homes in Virginia. **[These days it's available in Iowa, but that's really quite a recent development.]** New York is just up the interstate, not much further from Arlington than Minneapolis is from here. Almost everyone here seems to get the *Times* (at least on Sunday); I think I saw more of them on people's sidewalks than I did copies of the *Washington Post*.

As nice as the homes in this area are, Lee Highway really isn't much. It's a tacky old strip that's not much different from what you'd find anywhere. About the only clue as to the type of neighborhood it's located in is an art gallery located in one of the little shopping centers along the road—between Subway sandwiches and a muffler shop.

When I walked into McDonalds their background music was blaring so loud I could barely make myself heard to order. Before long an old man came up to the counter and complained about it. The Asian girl at the counter didn't speak much English, and she didn't seem to understand what the old man was saying. She did eventually get the manager, though. He was a black man who spoke perfect English. Oddly he didn't seem to think there was a problem with music that was louder than a jackhammer, but he did eventually agree to tune it down just a bit.

The breakfast buffet wasn't open yet (no great loss), and since I didn't have a "son" with me, I couldn't take advantage of the Father's Day special. So I had my usual Egg McMuffin and coffee and spent about twenty minutes just watching the people in the place. McDonalds in the early morning reminded me of the restaurant at our motel in Ohio; it is obviously the gathering place for the old men in the neighborhood. There were probably twelve old men there. Each sitting at a separate booth and deeply engrossed in the Sunday paper. The only women in the place were employees, and I was by far their youngest customer.

I stopped to read a sign on my way back to the dorm. I had noticed this historical marker when we sped past before, located in the parking lot of a drive-in bank on the corner of Lee Highway and Glebe Road. The sign said that this part of Arlington was called "Wunder's Crossroads", because the Wunder family owned most of the land for what is now six blocks (half a mile) in each direction. I couldn't help but thinking of Jeanne Wunder, our health teacher, and her children who I've taught at Garrigan over the years. I wonder if their genealogy has a Virginia connection.

I walked back to the dorm and started packing up my stuff. I try to pack disposable things when I travel, so I can throw them out as I use them up. Even so, I always seem to end up with far more things than when I left. Somehow I managed to get everything

stowed away, and I made a couple of trips to take it down to the suburbans. Paul, Aaron, and the kids also managed to get packed, and not long after that we turned in our keys, checked out, and left Marymount one last time.

We drove both suburbans to East Falls Church, parked and locked up for the day. (I may not be quite as concerned with crime as the locals, but I'd never dream of leaving my car unlocked.) We rode back to Smithsonian station and then split up again. Paul and I took the train back to Metro Center station, where they have a metro store that sells souvenirs of the system. I was interested in checking out just what they had available. Unfortunately we found out when we got there that the store was only open on weekdays. The station attendant did manage to find a mail order catalog, though, and since returning home I have become the proud owner of a coffee mug and coaster and a miniature replica of a metro train car. I'll have to assemble the replica myself, which means it will probably stay in the box for years to come. I am pleased with the souvenirs, though.

[I actually assembled the model car fairly quickly, but my lack of artistic talent and fine motor skills showed in a less than perfect rendition of the real thing. These days pretty much every transit system on earth sells souvenirs online. I recently bought my sister Margaret a mug commemorating the Clark & Lake "mixmaster" station in Chicago as one of her Christmas gifts.]



**Lunch counter that was part of an anti-segregation sit-in
National Museum of American History**

just an excuse to display a bunch of junk the curators found interesting.

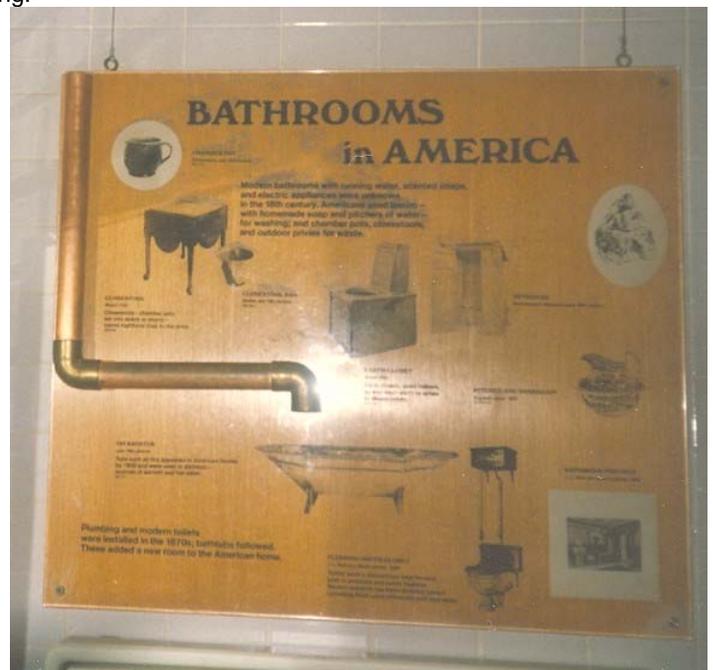
EVERYTHING is an exhibit here—even the restroom. Just inside the men's room door, there's an engraved copper sign explaining the history of bathrooms in America. I sneaked a peak as a woman was walking in next door; the ladies' room had the exact same sign.

It was lunchtime when we left the museum. We grabbed hot dogs from a street vendor (some of the worst and most overpriced food in Washington) and then walked a bit through the downtown area. Before long we came to the Federal Triangle metro station, scanned our day passes, and went underground again.

This time we headed to the Foggy Bottom station. Foggy Bottom is a neighborhood that was so named because it is literally a piece of bottomland (right next to the river) that tends to get lots of fog. Apparently in the early days of the city it was a mosquito-infested swamp. They've drained it, and today it's one of the poshest residential areas in town. Foggy Bottom is also where you'll find the Watergate, as in "Watergate"—the scandal that brought the Nixon Presidency to a shameful end. The Watergate was one of the first modern multi-use urban buildings. This green glass high-rise is mostly a condominium development, but it also includes an exclusive shopping mall, a hotel, and two floors of

After finding nothing at Metro Center, we rode back to the Smithsonian. Today we started our sightseeing at the Museum of American History. This is often called the "nation's attic", and that's not the stupidest name for it. They proudly display junk. Most of the collection has no real monetary value, but everything helps illustrate what life was like at different times in American history. This is the place where you'll see props from TV shows and famous movies. I took a picture of Archie and Edith's chairs from *All in the Family*, and I was properly impressed by Hawkeye's martini glass from *M*A*S*H* and by Mr. Rogers' sweater. There's also a display of Presidential campaign memorabilia, from the 1800s through Bill Clinton.

In addition to scattered small displays, there are also many major exhibits here. One of the best traces African American history. They go from slavery to sharecropping to the "great migration" northward. Another enormous exhibit traces the complete history of computers in almost painful detail. Tim Mosbach, who'll be the first to tell you he's a computer nerd, was in heaven at that display, but I must say I found it a bit much. Perhaps the strangest exhibit was called "Materials". Here they showed what materials (wood, metal, glass, plastic, etc.) things were made of over the years. I really think the whole display was



Bathrooms in America exhibit

offices—including the one that was the site of the infamous break-in, which is apparently a travel agency now. It surprised me in a way that there is absolutely nothing to see at the Watergate. I guess I expected at least a sign pointing out its significance in modern history. After all, they had put up a sign for Wunder's Crossroads. It seems to me that Watergate was a lot more important than that.

I snapped a picture of the building, but I didn't even think of going in. The door is guarded by parking valets, and while we probably could have gone into the shopping mall, I'm sure we wouldn't have been welcome anywhere "interesting". I also took a picture of the Howard Johnson's motel down the street. I read in a guide that the burglars actually stayed at Howard Johnson's, supposedly because the Republican National Committee didn't want to pay the expense of putting them up at the Watergate. (I'd venture they also wanted to make it harder for people to trace the origin of the crime.) The guidebook said that the Ho Jo's management has put up a plaque in the room where the burglars stayed (which is apparently like any other motel room), but it was far enough away that I decided it wasn't worth the hike to see it.



The Watergate



7-Eleven in Foggy Bottom

Foggy Bottom is mostly a neighborhood of restored rowhouses—"townhouses" I suppose their wealthy owners call them. They're exactly the same as what you'd see in the slums of Chicago, except they've been properly gentrified into exclusive homes for the well-heeled. We passed one that was for sale. The sign featured the financing plan, which was \$11,900 down and \$1,758 per month. (I don't know the term of the loan.) I can't even imagine that steep of a monthly payment that steep (more than my salary at Garrigan), but then I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be very welcome in this neighborhood anyhow.

I was amused that one of the rowhouses had a discrete little sign above its door that said "7-Eleven". We walked up to it, and it was indeed a convenience store—although probably the strangest convenience store I've ever seen. It had no parking lot, so all their business was walk-up. Obviously they didn't sell gas either. From the looks of things, they just knocked out the non-structural walls on the bottom floor of the building and put in a few shelves and coolers. I think the owner (who, I'm almost embarrassed to say, bore a remarkable resemblance to Apu, the south Asian man who manages the Kwik-E-Mart on *The Simpsons*) lives on the upper floor. It reminded me a lot of the "supermercados" I saw in Spain, but it really didn't fit in this wealthy American neighborhood.

We bought some pop (pardon me, it's called "soda" here), and I picked up a bag of peanuts. In this Spanish-looking store, it amused me that the peanuts were called "Barcelona" brand. Why they have that name, I have no clue. The company is based in Baltimore, and the bag doesn't say anything about the nuts being imported.

We took the elevator back into the Foggy Bottom metro station. They've built a little park on top of the station, with the elevator sticking up in the middle of it—almost like a little shrine. The elevator has two buttons, "S" and "P"—which I eventually figured out had to stand for "street" and "platforms". We pressed "P", and before long we were in the subway again.

It was a hot day, and Paul's legs were hurting [**something that seems to be less of a problem since he's lost a large amount of weight**], so we spent some time just riding the train. That's always just about my favorite thing to do anyhow, so I certainly didn't complain. To me an above-ground commuter train is the cheapest city tour you'll ever find. We rode long enough that we were above ground again. We went back into Virginia and continued south of Pentagon City, the place we had always ended our journeys before. Not far beyond there the train surfaces at National Airport. There's a nice view of the airport, as well as a fairly good view of the city beyond. South of there the Metro follows old freight tracks at ground level. It alternates between industrial and residential neighborhoods, but most of it seemed relatively nice.

We got off the train at King Street, the main stop in the city of Alexandria, just south of Arlington. Alexandria is quite historic; it's one of the few places that can truthfully say "George Washington slept here". You wouldn't know it from King Street, though. The area around the station is dominated by one of the largest hotels I've ever seen, the Embassy Suites—Alexandria. The place reminded me of the Rossya in Moscow, which we were told was the largest hotel in the world. The building (which is modern, but built to look old) is eight stories tall, and covers an entire square block—with streets that are farther apart than normal. Between the station and Embassy Suites was a parking lot that seemed impossibly small for such a huge hotel (actually I think it was a "kiss and ride" for the metro); I assume there must be more parking underneath the hotel. The rest of the panorama from King Street includes a high school,

a couple of office buildings, an apartment building, and the Virginia Rail Express depot, from which you can connect with trains that serve the distant suburbs.

We just waited on the platform a couple of minutes and got on a northbound train. We rode back past the airport and on into Washington, where we stopped at the Union Station stop. Union Station was and is the central passenger depot for Washington, D.C. Like many grand old stations, it was recently restored as part of an urban renewal project. Now much of the space is occupied by a middle-class shopping mall. Rather oddly, though, the station still gets a lot of passenger traffic. It's a lot like an airport inside—with TVs showing arrivals and departures and barely-comprehensible P.A. announcements. **[My Amtrak trips were in the future at this point, and this was probably the first time I'd ever been in an urban train station. They're pretty much all quite similar to this.]**



The Embassy Suites by King Street station, Alexandria

Most of the trains through here are commuter trains. Virginia Rail Express has about twenty trains a day that stop here on weekdays, and there are even more trains from MARC, the Maryland state commuter railroad. You can take Marc from Washington to Baltimore, and from there you can connect to other trains that will take you to virtually every little town in the state. MARC also runs trains northward to Philadelphia, where you can connect with New Jersey Transit trains that serve almost every corner of that state. At New York City, N.J. Transit connects with the Metro North service, which serves New York state and Connecticut. Metro North in turn connects with Massachusetts Bay Regional Transit, which will take you to Boston and on into New Hampshire. You hear how the "megalopolis" is like one big connected city, but I never realized just how connected things were.

If you don't want to make all those transfers, you can take the Amtrak Metroliner, which provides high-speed service (125 mph) with stops at Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Providence, and Boston. **[It wasn't—and still isn't—high-speed service north of New York, though.]** A ticket to Boston costs \$125, which I'd bet is actually more expensive than flying. It would be a fun way to travel, though—and it would have an advantage over flying in that you arrive right downtown.

I wanted to get something to drink, so I went to find the food court. On the way I passed a sporting goods store with its team apparel in the window. It's interesting how the teams they feature on shirts and caps here differ from the ones we'd see at home. About the only ones that are the same are those that the street gangs have adopted as their uniforms: the Spurs, the Raiders, and the University of Michigan. The big teams here are the Yankees and the Orioles. You see Yankees stuff in Iowa, but it's never the most common team in the store. Baltimore apparel, on the other hand, is **NEVER** available in Midwestern stores—even though it's the favorite team for an awful lot of people **[a testimony to the popularity of Cal Ripken—pretty much nobody follows the Orioles in the Midwest these days]**. They're all but the home team in Washington, so it was certainly no surprise to see orange birds on everything here. There wasn't a Cubs cap or a Vikings jersey to be found anywhere, though.

Across the street from Union Station is the Smithsonian's newest museum, the National Postal Museum. I had read about this museum in *National Geographic*, and I was interested to see what it was like. It's interesting. Like the Newseum, they have a section that traces the complete history of written communication—this time with the emphasis on delivering messages. They trace the history of the U.S. Postal Service and its predecessors in detail, with interesting exhibits such as an old rail car that served as a mobile post office. There's also a huge gallery of stamps, most of which we skipped. We did spend time, though, in their junk mail exhibit. They have an interactive display that shows you how marketers target customers and prepare mailings. At the end you watch an actual mailing system prepare your own "personalized" piece of junk mail—which mostly included a discount coupon at the museum shop.

I should probably say at this point that I was really rather disappointed with the Smithsonian shops. I've gotten the Smithsonian catalog for years; it's one of the staples of the Christmas list for almost everyone in our family. While I always enjoy the catalog, the actual museum shops didn't do a lot for me. The books are either too technical or too superficial, and the souvenirs are either completely tacky or unaffordably elegant. I could spend a fortune (if I had it) at the museums in Chicago, but here there just wasn't much I was interested in.

We went back to Smithsonian station and re-joined the kids—all of whom seemed to have had a good day. Unlike me (whose purchases mostly consisted of newspapers), the kids seemed to buy everything in sight in Washington. It amazed me how freely they spent, and how much money some of them had to spend. So, out of all their many purchases, what was each kid's prize souvenir? The answer would be the same for every single kid. On the first day we were in Washington they picked up counterfeit designer sunglasses from a street vendor for \$5 a pair (apparently the real thing costs over \$100 in trendy shops). They wore them constantly through the

whole trip, and they guarded them as if they were the real thing. The metal started corroding, and the paint chipped off them—sure signs of the imposters they were—but that just seemed to make the kids love them more.



The Shrine of the Immaculate Conception at Catholic University

ahead of time to see what the schedule was here, and they conveniently had a late afternoon Sunday mass (what the kids called a "drunkards' mass"—for the people who were getting drunk on Saturday night and couldn't get out of bed on Sunday morning) that was perfectly timed for us. **[I must say, though, that it seems strange that both Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon count for satisfying the same obligation.]**

Oddly (because they were a very good group overall), this group of kids complained more than the previous ones about having to go to church. One kid even asked if he could skip mass, as long as he had permission from his mother to do so. I didn't even bother responding to that one. To me it's pretty pointless to send your kid to a Catholic school and then let him skip the chief sacrament of the church **[though there are an amazing number of parents who do just that]**. I just made it clear that mass was not optional; it's one of the responsibilities that come with representing our school.

I had chosen this particular church because I had read that it was beautiful. I figured that if those kids that were complaining were bored with the homily, at least they could appreciate the architecture. As it turned out "beautiful" was almost an understatement; the place is truly spectacular, and one of the most gorgeous buildings of any type—religious or secular—that I have seen anywhere. From the outside it looks almost like a mosque, with a blue tiled dome at its center and an open steeple that could pass for a minaret. We walked quite a ways from the metro station, and the closer we got, the more beautiful it seemed.

Paul was worried that we might be underdressed for church. To tell the truth, I wasn't positive myself. I know how people dress for mass in Iowa (i.e.: **very** casual by Protestant standards), but I wasn't certain the same standards would apply at a shrine in a big Eastern city. **[There's comparatively less difference between Catholics and Protestants these days, as the Protestants have become MUCH less formal than they used to be—something my "old fogey" self still finds disconcerting and irreverent.]** As we approached the parking lot, it was clear we needn't have worried. There was a variety of dress—including some that was quite formal—but even in our shorts and T-shirts, we were in no way underdressed.

We followed the crowd in what we assumed was the main entrance, a grand door which faced onto the main parking lot. The kids walked in, blessed themselves, and headed straight to what they assumed was the back row. It was, in fact, the back of a side chapel. We were actually quite far forward in what is probably the single largest church I have ever been in. (It is, in fact, the largest church in the Western Hemisphere and the seventh largest in the world.) According to a leaflet I picked up, almost 10,000 people managed to crowd in here to see the Pope a few years back; they can seat over 6,000 comfortably.

The interior of the church is even more spectacular. It easily rivals the great cathedrals of Europe (even though it isn't actually a cathedral; just a normal parish church—with eight resident priests). The tile dome rises above the altar, with gold flecks on blue looking almost like stars in the heavenly sky. The whole interior is decorated in blue and white (the colors of Mary) Up close the work is very intricate, but from a distance it comes across mostly as elegant. Mostly there is a feeling of reverence. You can't help but feel you are in God's house in this place.

Part of what makes it so nice is that it's really quite new. Construction started in the '40s, and it was finished in the 1950s. They solicited contributions from every Catholic parish in the country to build the place, and it is supposed to be a place where every American can be at home. Because it's only forty years old, there's nothing here that's crumbling or in disrepair. Everything is as fresh and new and beautiful as it was when the place first opened.

I must say these sunglasses **[fake Oakleys]** are some of the ugliest eye accessories I've ever seen. They brought back memories of those ridiculous things Elton John wore in the late '70s. They were enormous hunks of plastic and chrome with mirrored black lenses that blocked out the kids' faces. I must not be up on the latest trends, because to me these things were truly hideous.

We got back in the metro and took the train northeastward. This time our destination was Brookland/CUA. The "CUA" stands for Catholic University of America, which is the home of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Each year when we've gone to national quiz bowl, I've made a point of seeing that the kids get to Sunday mass. While it's not a formal policy, that's pretty much standard at Garrigan any time an activity keeps kids away from home on weekends. When we used to have the CYO basketball tournament over a weekend in Sioux City, for instance, mass was always scheduled in as part of the trip. I had checked

[Our school secretary, Sr. Janet Goetz, says she remembers when the National Shrine was built. They solicited contributions from throughout the country, and school children back in the '50s were asked to save their change to help with the construction. Sr. Janet was impressed that I had chosen to go to mass there; she said she'd always wanted to go there herself.]

It surprised me that they didn't have misallettes in this church. Instead they had all the music and responses printed on a hand-out, just like we do for liturgies at school. They surprised me by singing every verse of the hymns, but then given the size of the church, it took most of those verses just to get the parade up there during the processional.

This church gave us a good clue at just how multicultural both Washington and the Catholic church are. The concelebrating priests included an Irishman, a black, and an Asian. We had a Hispanic deacon and a dark-haired white woman was the cantor. One of the altar boys was black; the other was a blond kid. The congregation (which seemed to be mostly local people) included people of all races, with no clear majority. The immediate neighborhood around Catholic University is almost entirely black, but these people may have driven here from other places around the area.

Sitting on the side, we were entertained by all the latecomers. It amazed me just how many people came late. Literally dozens of people trickled in well after the service was started. Even more surprising was just how late some people were. Lots of people showed up during the homily, and one lady walked in with her son **AFTER** the consecration. She had the good sense not to go up for communion, but her son went up—just as if he had been there the whole time. After communion, some people headed straight to the doors, without even returning to their seat. They had a notice in the bulletin saying “we ask you respect our custom of standing in place and singing the complete recessional hymn”, but the second the first note came out of the organ, there was a rush toward the exits. I shouldn't have been surprised—people did the exact same thing when I went to mass at grad school in Mississippi—but it really seems sacrilegious to leave before the priest.

We waited to the end of the hymn before we exited. After all the complaints ahead of time, the kids were **VERY** well behaved at mass. Indeed, they seemed even more shocked than me at all the people coming and going around us. After the fact, every one of the kids made some comment implying they appreciated having come here. I recommend that anyone—Catholic or not—visit the shrine; it's a beautiful and sacred place.

We had one last place to visit in the Washington area. I had mentioned to the kids a fact I had read in one of the guidebooks—that the escalator in the Wheaton metro station was the longest in the world. The Brookland/CUA station where we were now was relatively close to Wheaton, so we decided to make the detour to the end of the line to take a ride on the record-holding escalator.

The Metro's red line was the first in the system, and it is starting to show its age. It's hard to say exactly what's different; mostly the cars are just dirtier and more worn than on the other lines. The red line also goes through neighborhoods that are obviously much poorer than those served by the other lines. Since much of the line is above ground, you can see the run-down apartment buildings sprayed with graffiti along the tracks. The metro itself is still perfectly safe, but I wouldn't want to get off at most of the above-ground stations around here. (Actually, if I hadn't had a reason to go there, I wouldn't have gotten off at Brookland/CUA either. Right near the station, it looks equally bad. About a block away, though—toward the college—it's a much nicer neighborhood.)

We rode above ground to the Maryland state line and on into the suburb of Silver Spring. Brett Schneider, one of my all-time favorites among the students I've taught over the years, lives in Silver Spring with his Salvadoran wife. Brett stopped at Garrigan last fall and visited with me. He's a doctor at Walter Reed Medical Center now, and he met his wife (a lovely young Honduran woman) while she was looking for the metro station. He thanked me for teaching him Spanish (which is what I taught many long years ago), because he was able to speak to her and get to know her. We didn't stop to see Brett (although I do regret a bit that I wasn't able to look him up while we were here). We kept on riding above ground through Silver Spring, and in fact at one point the line was elevated. I started to wonder if the guidebook was mistaken, since we were getting awfully close to Wheaton, and we weren't even underground, let alone deep within the earth.

Then, just before we reached the beltway, we suddenly plunged—and plunged is the word for it. This is one of the few times on a subway I've actually been able to feel that we were going down—and going down a long ways fast. One of the kids even remarked that his ears popped, just like they did when we went through the mountains in the car. I have absolutely no idea why the train is so deep at this point. It makes sense to tunnel under the beltway, but I can't imagine why you'd have to go so far underground. At any rate, the guidebook was right—it is a **VERY** deep subway, and I could believe we were going to see one heck of an escalator.

Actually, I was personally rather disappointed by the Wheaton escalator. I've been on escalators where I couldn't see from the beginning to the end. Here I could, although to be fair, I think that's because there was a fairly high overhead clearance in the tunnel. It's also not that steep of an escalator. I've been on some that are almost like ladders—far steeper than a staircase. This one made about a 45 degree angle; it just kept on going up for quite a while.

That "quite a while" turned out to be two minutes and fifty four seconds, by my watch anyway. That was actually the time it took to go **DOWN** from street level to the platforms. I lost count on the way up. All in all, the escalator probably wasn't worth the detour (not one of the “must sees” I'd advise for people reading this), but it did make a humorous little excursion.

We got a clue as to the size of metro Washington in the time it took us to get back to East Falls Church by metro. It's about a forty-five minute trip, mostly underground. It would have been a full hour if we'd gone on to Vienna station, at the end of the orange line.

From the park-and-ride we went back to Lee Highway one last time, where we stopped at a Taco Bell for supper. Then we retraced our way back to the beltway and across the river into Maryland. We stayed on the Capital Beltway for about sixteen miles. I was amused to pass under a bridge where the other branch of the red line runs up to Rockville. Later we passed a sign for the Wheaton park and ride. Traffic was heavy (by Iowa standards), but flowing smoothly, and at this time on Sunday night we made it back to Wheaton **MUCH** more quickly than the metro trip had taken. Apparently at rush hour on weekdays, though, the metro makes much better time than cars.

It's amazing just how green and forested this whole area is. If you look at a map, we drove from suburb to suburb to suburb. Occasionally we would see an office park or a condo development, or a shopping strip at the side of the interstate, but mostly we drove through woods. If I didn't know better (and if the highway had about a third as many lanes), this could pass for rural Mississippi. Except for the ten-lane highway, you really don't know you're in a major city.

We exited onto Interstate 95, one of two main routes that connect Washington and Baltimore, and the modern-day "Main Street" of the Eastern seaboard. It was here that it actually registered just how close Washington and Baltimore are. It's twenty-two miles from the Washington beltway to the Baltimore beltway. That's actually closer than Dallas and Fort Worth. I-95 is eight lanes all the way between the beltways, and tonight it seemed practically empty. Before we knew it, we were in Baltimore.

The Baltimore beltway isn't nearly so wide and spacious as Washington's. It is only six lanes, and traffic was noticeably heavier, even on Sunday. It still wasn't impossible, though; I wish the Twin Cities [**where most of the beltway is just four lanes**] (or even Des Moines) were as easy to get through as Washington and Baltimore.

We followed the beltway northward across the west edge of the city. Baltimore looked much more heavily developed than metro Washington. I think this is because the beltway is closer in, but it really does make Baltimore seem like the more important city. (Actually, the city of Baltimore is slightly larger—700,000 vs. 500,000—but the 4 million people in the Washington metro area make it almost twice as large as metro Baltimore.)

We exited at Reisterstown Road. (I found out later that the correct pronunciation of the place is RICE-turs-town.) Reisterstown Road is a very old shopping strip that reminded me of some of the old close-in suburbs near Chicago. Northward it leads to the ultra-posh suburbs of Owings Mills and Reisterstown (the place where Cal Ripken lives). To the south it leads to Pikesville, the rather dumpy old town where we would be staying for the next two nights. We drove about two miles south and stopped at the Econolodge, an older motel sandwiched between a church and a bank, with only a minimal parking lot. Fortunately they didn't have very many guests, so we managed to park the suburbans right in front. We checked in, and the kids looked forward to swimming in the pool. Unfortunately state law requires that they have a lifeguard, and their old one had quit. The pool was closed until someone else could be hired. The consolation for the kids was the motel's cable TV, which had more channels than I ever dreamed could exist. Oddly, though, they didn't have remote controls for the TV; you had to flip through almost a hundred channels one at a time.

I was still hungry, so I decided to cross the street to McDonalds to get something to eat. That turned out to be quite an adventure. Reisterstown Road is **VERY** busy—much busier than any of the roads in the Arlington area had been. The traffic is even heavier on Sundays. That's because the Baltimore metro line parallels the road, but for some reason it's closed on Sunday. People have to either drive or take the bus—both of which add traffic to Reisterstown Road. Eventually I managed to cross the street, and I waded past a crowd of people waiting at the bus stop and went on into McDonalds. In front of me in line were two very strange young ladies. The people of Pikesville appear to be of two ethnic backgrounds, Black and Jewish. These girls were Jewish, but they may as well have worshipped the Great God of the Mall. They were some of the densest people I've ever seen. The girls spoke in that breathy, gasping voice that so many white girls use. The woman at the counter appeared to speak that "language" they call "Ebonics" out in California—that unintelligible inner city Black dialect. It was a true miracle that the girls and the clerk managed to communicate at all.

One of the girls didn't seem to comprehend the concept of sales tax. She ordered a burger and a drink, and she seemed surprised when the total was more than the advertised price of a value meal that included the same sandwich. She decided to take the value meal, but she didn't seem to get it when the cash register said more than the \$3.29 they had on the menu board. (In fact, it was \$3.70, which includes the hefty 12.5% tax they have around here.) She eventually did pay for her value meal, but she never really did seem to understand what was going on.

The other girl was talking about some guys in the video store they had just come from. They apparently were dorks (or whatever the appropriate derogatory term is these days). What amused me was that she described their actions as "the sort of thing they'd do up in Pennsylvania"—as if **NO ONE** would do the kind of things they do in Pennsylvania. I grew up hearing people deride Missouri that way, and around here Minnesotans make the same kinds of jokes about Iowa. It's amusing to see that kind of thing happen somewhere else. (I must say, too, that her opinion of Pennsylvania pretty much agrees with what I'd say about the place.)

There was one other amusing thing about McDonalds—their décor, or perhaps I should say lack of it. All the furniture was a cold blue, and the only decoration was a cactus by the condiment counter. What a cactus was doing in the city of crabcakes, I have no clue.

I made my way back across the street to the motel. My main duty this evening was to call KLGA radio in Algona. Because we hadn't done well, I purposely postponed this until a time I knew no one would be at the station. I didn't really want to do an interview; instead I preferred to just leave a message on their answering machine telling how we had done. I knew that on Sunday evening the computer would be running things on auto-pilot, so this was the optimum time to call. I left the message, and then we watched some TV and went to bed.

Monday, June 16

Baltimore Area, Maryland

Again today I was up fairly early. I walked over to the McDonalds for breakfast. There I got a real taste of the ethnic spice of the neighborhood. Again most of the clientele was elderly. What made them different from Arlington (or Algona for that matter) was that every customer except me was a stereotypical Jew. There was table after table of women with enormous grey hair, caked-on make-up, and ostentatious jewelry. They were talking so loud it seemed as if they were shouting, and they could have been doing the hula for all their hand gestures. Meanwhile their wimpy bald husbands sipped coffee and grunted occasionally; they couldn't have gotten a word in if they had wanted to. It was as if everyone here had tried out to play Fran's mother on *The Nanny*.

The workers here were equally bad parodies of Pikesville's other ethnic group. At the counter were two of the most enormous black women I have ever seen. They waddled around and occasionally screamed slang at each other. The man at the grill had a shaved head and a nose ring. He had headphones on and appeared to be listening to music rather than monitoring the drive-through window. He was dancing and lip-syncing into a spatula as he cooked. It was like everyone in the place had conspired to present a floor show for me as I had my breakfast.

After I finished my Egg McMuffin and Danish, I set off to explore the neighborhood. In particular, I wanted to know exactly where the nearest metro station was. On maps I had looked at ahead of time, it looked as if it were within walking distance of our motel. I wanted to know if it would be easier to walk or drive there. I'm glad I didn't know it at the time, but I read later that the Thursday before we arrived, a man from New Jersey was mugged while walking to the same metro station. I could believe it; it's really not a very nice neighborhood—mostly cheap apartments with skuzzy business (truck rentals, motorcycle repair, etc.) thrown in between them. There are also long stretches of vacant land, overgrown with weeds and bushes. Apparently the mugger had hidden in the brush and jumped the man while he was walking to the station.

[Much later I read some background on the Baltimore metro. It appears to have been built primarily to line the pockets of well-connected contractors, with the side "benefit" of making Baltimore one of those "world class" cities that had rail transit. Most of the wealthier parts of Baltimore screamed "not in my back yard", which resulted in the line being routed past the decaying businesses and public housing that extend northwest of downtown. It doesn't really connect those who live there with much of anything, since few of the jobs available downtown are staffed by people from these neighborhoods. It remains one of the worst examples of public transit development in America. Baltimore has more recently built an extensive light rail network, which serves wealthier, whiter, and more tourist-oriented areas, and on the city's maps these days the light rail lines are shown as subways are on other city's maps while the metro appears as little more than a bus line.]

While I was not mugged (thank goodness), I did find the walk rather creepy. It was also a fairly long walk (probably three-quarters of a mile), and I decided there was no way I'd have the kids do it. I also decided to check out other nearby stations to see if it might be wiser to drive to one that was in a better neighborhood.

When I finally got there, most of the area around Milford Mill station was paved over with one of the biggest parking lots I've ever seen. This is obviously one of their largest park and rides. The lot was virtually empty (and remained so, even after rush hour), and I made my way across it to the station.

The Baltimore metro has only one line. It runs from Johns Hopkins Medical Center downtown to an industrial park in suburban Owings Mills. About half the route is underground, and most of the rest (like the Milford Mill station) is elevated. To ride the Baltimore metro, you buy a ticket from a vending machine. Unlike the fare cards in Washington, the tickets don't carry any specific value with them. They do have small magnetic strips on them, though, and they activate the turnstiles (which are traditional turnstiles here). When you enter, the turnstile gives you back your ticket. You use it again to leave the station, and at the exit it gets eaten by the turnstile. You can buy a single trip for \$1.35 or a round trip for \$2.70. For double the price, you just get two identical tickets. They also have day passes for \$3, which are basically just a cash register receipt. Each time you enter a station, you show the pass to the station attendant, and he gives you a ticket. It's not quite the high tech system they have in Washington, but I guess it works.

I chose first to board a train for Owings Mills. It quickly became apparent that I was the only white person on the train—a strange feeling that would become quite familiar before we left Baltimore. I hadn't realized it beforehand, but the northwest part of Baltimore (the area served by the metro line) is almost exclusively black. The inner northwest suburbs (like Pikesville) are mixed black and Jewish, and the outer suburbs (like Owings Mills and Reisterstown) are almost exclusively Jewish (although, according to his autobiography, Cal Ripken is Methodist). The Jews apparently don't ride the metro, but their help does. Most of the people on the train were women in maids' uniforms. They were headed from the projects in Baltimore out to rich people's homes in Owings Mills. **[In most cases, they'd have to transfer to a bus at Owings Mills station and continue further out.]** There were also a few black men dressed in the uniforms of their jobs—security guard, mechanic, cook, etc. No one in greater Baltimore—either here or anywhere else we went—appeared to be of any race other than black or white.

The train runs through a trench behind block after block of public housing developments through the inner suburbs. The buildings have graffiti sprayed on the back of them, lending real "charm" to the neighborhood. The apartments extend most of the way from Milford Mill to the beltway (about two miles north), and another mile or so southward, all the way to Reisterstown Plaza station, just inside the city of Baltimore. Past the projects to the north, the train ducks under the mess of off-ramps where the beltway intersects with Interstate 795, and then heads down the median of I-795 to Owings Mills. The Owings Mills station is also basically a big cement

block building in the middle of a sea of parking. Beyond it is an almost endless office development. Among all the Fortune 500 companies, I was pleased to see the headquarters for Maryland Public Television. The one and only thing I knew about Owings Mills before coming here was that one of public TV's largest producers was headquartered here. The next time I watch programs like *Wall Street Week* or *Motorweek*, I'll be able to say I saw the building where it was made.

I got on a southbound train at Owings Mills. The northbound train was fairly full, but there was almost no one on this one. Besides me my car had three black people (two men and a woman), all of whom were dressed for the world of business. Apparently even wealthy black people take the metro, but I was still the only white person in the car. I went back to Milford Mill, past more graffiti-covered public housing, and on to the Reisterstown Plaza station, which is named after one of Baltimore's major shopping malls. I'm not quite sure where the mall is in relation to the station. From the platform all I saw was a really seedy looking old K-Mart. Finding no reason to leave the station here, I caught a northbound train and went back to Milford Mill.

Back at the station I decided to save some time later by picking up day passes for the kids now. The station attendant wasn't terribly thrilled with the idea of selling me ten day passes all at once. Apparently they're supposed to be non-transferable (although when they're just receipts, absolutely anyone could use them). He's also not supposed to accept a bill over \$5. Eventually he allowed me to buy them, though, and I put a ten and a twenty into the little farebox by his kiosk.

I noticed an interesting thing at the metro station. Near the exit they have a table that serves as the "Metro Book Exchange". You can take books, read them while you commute, and leave them for others when you are done. It's part of the "City that Reads" program. I had heard of that program before, mostly because it's the primary charity Cal Ripken supports. His wife is one of their principal directors, and her name appeared on a poster by the table. Mostly they sponsor adult literacy training, but they also promote reading in general. It was interesting to see a very small part of that program here.

When I got back to McDonalds there was practically a mob out front waiting at the bus stop. **[The bus seems to get far more passengers than the metro.]** On the bus as on the train, every single passenger was black. I made my way past the group and on across the street to the motel.

The kids had also gone to McDonalds for breakfast this morning, and they returned with stories of the "weird" people there. They were also amused that as they waited to cross the street in front of McDonalds, a bus stopped to let them on. Apparently there was no crowd out front when they were there, so they hadn't realized it was a bus stop.

Our main plan for the morning was to take a tour of Oriole Park at Camden Yards. We drove to the Milford Mill station, showed our passes to the station attendant, and went upstairs to the platforms. We waited for quite a while before a train came; the schedule is much less frequent than in Washington. The whole system is not quite as nice either. Really, I think I liked Baltimore's trains and stations better; Washington's were frankly overdone. The Baltimore metro was clean and serviceable, but not in any way luxurious.

Eventually we did board a train, and we headed southward toward the city. There were other white people on the train this time, but even with our group of ten, we were still very clearly in the minority. It reminded me of Mississippi—not really a threatening feeling, but definitely a strange one.

It intrigued me as we went down the line that every single station in the Baltimore metro is identical. While in most cities (like Washington), some stations have island platforms between the tracks and others have side platforms with the tracks in the middle, here in Baltimore all the stations had the tracks on the side and the platform in the middle. All the stations—whether they were above or below ground—were the same size, and they all had the same red tile with a bumpy yellow strip right at the edge of the platform. A few stations had minimal artwork to dress things up, but otherwise everything was the same from one station to the next. **[This is especially strange on a relatively new system. Pretty much every other modern transit system on earth prides itself on the beauty of its stations. Baltimore, though, is strictly functional.]**



**Waiting on the platform at Milford Mill Station
(Note the fake Oakley sunglasses Tyler is wearing.)**

We got out at Lexington Market station. We followed signs to the nearest exit, surfaced, and walked down Eutaw (pronounced "Utah"), the street that leads to Camden Yards. ... And we walked ... and we walked ... and we walked. On the map it appeared that Camden Yards was about four blocks south of the metro station. We had gone at least double that distance through an extremely

seedy neighborhood. I couldn't see the ballpark, nor anything else that appeared to be a landmark. Eventually we got to Martin Luther King Drive, and Eutaw Street made a big curve. I remembered from the maps that M.L.K. was around the back side of the ballpark, but I thought it ran parallel to Eutaw, rather than intersecting it. I was extremely confused, but I kept walking. We were already late for the tour, and I wanted to get there if we possibly could.

Before long we saw a sight that was both familiar and disconcerting: the elevator to a metro station. The problem was this was the State Center metro station, the next stop north of Lexington Market. We had walked nearly a mile in the opposite direction of the ballpark. I was furious—mostly with myself—and the kids rather wisely avoided me.

We got into the elevator, which the kids said reeked of urine. This was one time I was grateful that my nose was clogged up from allergies. We entered the State Center station and got on a train back to Lexington Market. I pondered things as we rode. Clearly we weren't going to be able to make the 11:00 tour, and if we took one later in the day, that would pretty much kill the other plans we had. Eventually I figured—why not take the tour tomorrow? It would get us to our destination late at night, but we weren't really planning to do anything other than crash at the motel anyhow. I proposed the idea to the kids, and they agreed it was the most sensible thing to do. So we turned back around at Lexington Market, boarded a northbound train, and went back to Milford Mill. We had killed over an hour for no reason at all.

We stopped briefly at the motel, and then got into both suburbans and headed out. We drove back north to the beltway, and then headed eastward around the city. Baltimore's beltway was really quite busy, but we managed to negotiate things with no problem. We passed the endless industrial park called Towson (the first syllable apparently rhymes with "wow", not "no"), and then drove onward through endless housing developments to the east end of the metro area. Eventually we re-joined I-95 at the point where it heads northward toward Philadelphia and New York.

Our destination was Aberdeen, the town where Cal Ripken grew up. They have a museum there dedicated to the Orioles' all-star, and several of us (especially Brad and I) wanted to see it. Aberdeen is about twenty miles beyond the beltway, up I-95. This is another of those "rural" tree-lined drives on an extra-wide, super-busy highway. The road was never narrower than six lanes wide, and just as often it was eight. My bet is, had we continued northward, we wouldn't have seen four-lane again until we were north of Boston—over 400 miles from here. **[I'd be wrong on that. It's mostly four lanes across Delaware and in the Philadelphia metro area. There's no way of avoiding the congestion around Wilmington, but most traffic wisely avoids The bottleneck in Philadelphia by instead following the vastly wide New Jersey Turnpike.]**

Aberdeen was an interesting place. It obviously used to be a nondescript small town, the sort of place Algona would be if it re-located to the east coast. It's still not large, but it's obviously changing from rural to suburban. Near the exit there was a major condo development and a huge shopping strip. As we neared what the signs called "Aberdeen Town Center", the road narrowed to two lanes, and it looked a lot like small-town U.S.A.

The townsfolk seemed about evenly divided between blacks and whites, and there didn't seem to be much pattern as to who lived where. There's a lot of military people here (if you've heard of Aberdeen, it's probably because of the naval base nearby; they had a big sex scandal there a couple years ago that's still making news today), but most of the town seems to be pretty much typical middle-class people, and everyone we dealt with seemed quite pleasant. I liked Aberdeen a lot. It was nice to see someplace in the East that was neither "big city" nor a major tourist center. Aberdeen is a pretty generic town—that just happens to count a family of baseball players among its favorite sons.



Ripken Museum – Aberdeen, Maryland

The Ripken Museum is located right downtown, in a new building adjacent to city hall. Across the street there's an old brick building that they've decorated with the "2,131" numerical banners that hung on the warehouse next to Camden Yards on September 6, 1995, the night Cal Ripken broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive games record. It hadn't occurred to me when I watched that game on TV that those banners were plastic, but of course they would be in this day and age. They were, however, every bit as enormous as they looked on TV. They really dwarfed the small building from which they were hanging in Aberdeen.

In front of the museum (whose honorary address is #8 Ripken Plaza—after Cal's uniform number) is a really bad bronze statue of Cal Ripken that could be of anyone you wanted to pretend it was. It looks like a person, but that's about all you can say for it. There's not even a baseball cap or a bat or glove to give you a clue as to who it's supposed to be. The woman who ran the museum was obviously embarrassed by the statue, but she let us know the Ripken family had selected the artist and approved its design. (That woman, by the way, was originally from Iowa, and she has relatives in Mount Pleasant—small world, isn't it.)

I won't bore you with all the details of the museum. Unless you're a baseball fan or a Ripken fan or both, it won't mean anything anyway. They do make a point of featuring the entire Ripken family—including Cal, Sr. (a former major league coach who still lives in Aberdeen) and Billy Ripken (who played second base in the majors for several seasons **[and is best known for a famous baseball card where he holds a bat with vulgarity written on its knob]**). It's really is quite a large museum, and I was impressed at how nicely presented everything was. Many small-town museums are basically a collection of junk laid out like a flea market. Here everything was well organized, with good explanations and interactive exhibits to keep your interest. It reminded me more of a national park visitors' center than a local museum for a small-town boy who made good.

They have two films in the museum. One traces the life stories of all the Riplekens in almost painful detail. The other is of Cal's famous speech the night he broke Gehrig's record:

... whether your name is Ripken or Gehrig, Dimaggio or Robinson, or that of some boy who picks up a bat or puts on a glove: you are challenged by the game of baseball to do your very best, day in and day out. And that's all I've ever tried to do.

While I rarely idolize sports heroes, Cal Ripken is someone I find inspiration from. It's not just baseball that challenges people to do their very best; we all should feel that challenge in whatever we do.

After seeing the museum we had lunch at a really nice Wendy's on the strip by the interstate. The other event on today's schedule was the Orioles/Expos game tonight at Camden Yards. So we drove back to Pikesville and parked at the Milford Mill station. I had mentioned before that virtually all the metro riders were black. This afternoon we had our only truly unpleasant experience in that regard. A black kid on the train told a couple of our kids to "get back to your neighborhood; you don't belong here". While there may be some truth to that statement (in the sense that we didn't fit in), I have no time for comments like that. Everybody (black, white, or whatever) should be free to go wherever they want to go. That should especially be true on public transportation like this. We had invaded no one's "turf" but that of the Mass Transit Authority; the boy's comment was clearly out of line.

[I'd return to Baltimore years later with another group of quiz bowl kids, and we'd have an uneventful and basically pleasant metro ride. I'd also find that the downtown area north of Camden Yards had gentrified quite a bit in the intervening period. Even today, though, Baltimore remains a city I have few pleasant memories of and one I have little desire to return to—and that racist encounter on the train had an awful lot to do with forming that opinion.]

Later on a different group of our kids had another unfortunate and partially race-based encounter. They were in a shopping mall in the restored inner harbor when two black teenagers came up. One looked at them and said, "What are you doing here?" When they didn't respond, the other said "What are you looking at?" and proceeded to shove them. Our boys ignored the people and quickly walked into a store (precisely the right thing to do), but they were obviously upset by the encounter.

Those were only two in a long list of things about Baltimore I didn't like. I think everyone in our group had pretty much the same reaction. Frankly, most of Baltimore is a dump, and most of the people (black and white) struck me as unfriendly. While it was Washington that had the high-crime reputation, it was Baltimore where I felt unsafe. (I looked up the statistics after I got back, and Baltimore does indeed have nearly double the overall crime of Washington; the only category in which the nation's capital is higher is murder.) I felt I had to keep my guard up everywhere I went in Baltimore, and it got tiring to always have to be alert.

[People have stereotypes of New Yorkers as abrupt and unfriendly. Whenever I've been in the Big Apple, I've found that completely untrue. Indeed pretty much all my experiences in New York have been pleasant. I can't say that Eastern attitude doesn't exist, though. It's precisely what I encountered in Baltimore, and I'd also see it in Philadelphia and to a lesser extent in Boston.]

This time we took the correct exit from Lexington Market station. (Had we gone just a few more feet down the platform this morning, we would have seen endless signs for "Camden Yards" right there in the station.) I can't say that the "right" exit was a lot more appealing than the wrong one, though. Camden Yards was built as part of an urban renewal project. It's not really downtown, but rather in a neighborhood of abandoned warehouses (like the famous one that's now part of the park) just outside the main business district. The "yards" the name refers to were rail yards, which are rarely the nicest part of town.

Eutaw Street, which leads to the ballpark, features mostly boarded up buildings that used to be businesses. What businesses still existed were mostly bars. Probably the most interesting thing we passed was a strip club that advertised a "pre-game warm-up". The boys, of course, all joked about going in there; I wonder what they would have done if I actually said they could. Eutaw Street also had lots of winos and beggars—as did most of central Baltimore. I go back and forth on what to think of homeless people, but it's really hard to have much sympathy for someone who's just sitting there drinking himself to death. **[This area was MUCH nicer when we returned after the millennium; the ballpark seems to have accomplished precisely what the city hoped it would do.]**

The ballpark really looms over its neighborhood. As you walk down the street, the main thing you see is the back of the enormous scoreboard, topped by an elaborate clock. Most of the stadiums I've seen before have either been out in the suburbs or else next to equally huge downtown buildings. They are also almost always surrounded by a sea of parking. Camden Yards has very little on-site parking **[actually there's quite a lot there, but it's almost all south of the park—and we came from the north]**, and most of the nearby buildings are small. By comparison, the place looks truly immense.

We split into separate groups at Camden Yards. I went with a couple of the kids to the Babe Ruth Museum, a few blocks west of Camden Yards. The Babe was born in Baltimore roughly a century ago. The neighborhood he lived in, Pigtown, was a slum and it

would be today had the ballpark developers not paid to gentrify the immediate surroundings. The rowhouse where Ruth was born is now a museum. Unfortunately the neighboring houses have been cleared for parking. The area loses some of its effect when you have a rowhouse that's not part of a row.

I had really liked the Ripken Museum, and being a longtime Yankee fan, I was very much looking forward to seeing Ruth's birthplace. Unfortunately, this place was not nearly as nice as the one in Aberdeen. Part of the problem is that they have to work around the awkward rooms of the rowhouse location—made more awkward by the ramps and elevators they had to add to make the place accessible to handicapped people. Really, though, there's not much to see here either. They have a bunch of baseball memorabilia, but it's badly organized and not well preserved. I certainly didn't feel it was worth the \$5 admission.

We went back to Camden Yards, and I picked up tickets for tomorrow morning's tour. Careful readers of these travelogues will remember that a year ago, after seeing the Orioles play in Chicago, I vowed that someday I'd make the "pilgrimage" to Camden Yards. Well, I made it! Now my next vow: sometime I'll make my other great baseball pilgrimage—to the South Bronx. I'll see those outfield monuments to the game's greatest players at Yankee Stadium. They say they'll be tearing down "The House that Ruth Built" in the year 2002, so I'd better get moving fairly quickly for that one.

[I did make that pilgrimage to Yankee Stadium on my next quiz bowl trip, and I returned and toured the park on my own later on. The park got a stay of execution that kept it standing well past 2002, but it is literally being bulldozed as I write this, with "new" Yankee Stadium scheduled to open next year.]

We still had about an hour to kill before they opened the gates to the ballpark, so I decided to do a bit of exploring downtown. Again I have to say I was less than impressed with the city. The inner harbor area, which all the guidebooks describe in hyperbole, is basically a couple of mirrored glass skyscrapers set among the seedy old brick buildings that make up most of downtown. While parking is limited near the ballpark, there's parking everywhere downtown—mostly because they razed a bunch of empty buildings and created parking lots.

They also have the strangest "skywalk" system I've seen anywhere. First of all, it doesn't go much of anywhere. Even Cedar Rapids has a more comprehensive system of skywalks than Baltimore, and there's not even a comparison with Des Moines or Minneapolis. What's really weird about the skywalks, though, is that they aren't covered. They're basically just overhead sidewalks that connect the roof levels of various buildings. I couldn't help but wonder what the point of a skywalk is, if it doesn't keep you out of the weather.

I went back to Camden Yards and strolled around the entry area a while. One thing that is pleasant about this particular ballpark is that there aren't scores of people scalping tickets everywhere you go. One reason is that scalping is illegal in Maryland—and they mean it (unlike, say, Illinois). In fact, there's a sign that proclaims the neighborhood a "scalp-free zone". Another reason is that there aren't a lot of extra Orioles tickets floating around. Lots of games sell out, and the season ticket-holders tend to use their seats. In fact, the only solicitation for tickets we saw tonight was from people who wanted to buy them.

There were strange signs all around the area proclaiming "Baltimore 200" and "Happy Birthday, Baltimore". Paul and I got to talking about what they could possibly mean. After Baltimore was already a well-established city at the time of the American Revolution. How could they possibly be celebrating their bicentennial twenty-one years after our nation? When we got back to Iowa, I looked it up in the encyclopedia. Indeed, just as we thought, Baltimore's history goes much further back than two centuries. The place was first settled in 1661, the core of the largest Roman Catholic colony in British America. The town received its official charter from the king in 1729. To me, if anything, that would be the year they should commemorate as the "founding" of their city. When Philadelphia was occupied by the British, the Continental Congress met at Baltimore in 1777, making it the temporary "capital" of the young republic—before the current people even acknowledge it existed. What happened in 1797 was the official incorporation of the independent city of Baltimore, which gave the place its present boundaries and separated it from Baltimore County. To me, celebrating the bicentennial of that seems like they're just creating an excuse for a party.

We entered the ballpark about 6:00—roughly an hour and a half before game time. Camden Yards is every bit as beautiful as everyone says it is. In fact, it was just about the only thing in Baltimore I really liked. They're talking about building a ballpark in this style in Minneapolis (although the Metrodome is still in perfectly good shape). If they did, I might actually go to see the Twins on occasion. It's really a lovely place to spend an evening.

Camden Yards started the trend in sports stadiums where new construction was built to look old. The ballpark itself is pleasant, but what really makes it look spectacular are the nearby buildings they restored as part of its construction. From our seats down the third base line we could see the three biggies: the Bromo Seltzer Tower (which used to feature an enormous pink bottle on



**Bromo-Seltzer Tower
(a landmark in downtown Baltimore)**

top of it, but is now merely a handsome clock tower), old Camden Station (which looks like a church and will soon be an Orioles' museum), and the Warehouse.



View of Camden Station and the B&O Warehouse from Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore

The Warehouse (with a capital "W") means the B&O Warehouse, built 150 years ago to transfer cargo from ships to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Every guide you read tells you this is the "longest building on the east coast". I have no clue what that's supposed to mean. It is long and narrow—the equivalent of two blocks long and maybe fifty feet wide, as well as eight stories tall. Every industrial park in America has longer buildings, though. That's true even on the east coast. I distinctly remember the Johnson & Johnson factory in New Jersey as a building that never ended; perhaps the guide book writers should go see that one.

The Warehouse is an integral part of the ballpark. Lights are mounted on the roof, and there's a skywalk (covered, even) that they use to take supplies back and forth between the two. Between the Warehouse and the stadium they have turned Eutaw Street into a beautiful pedestrian mall. By day it's a park open to the public, and at night it's a place where ballpark patrons can get away from the crowd and catch a bit of fresh air.

Our seats were in Section 69, which is in the "terrace" level—meaning the back of the lower deck. The upper deck overhangs the section, which kept us out of the sun but also obscured the view slightly. That's really not a problem, though. They have TVs installed all over the overhang, so you can get a close-up view of things. I must say it was strange, though, to be at the ballpark and essentially watch the game on TV.

In some ways this was a historic game at Camden Yards, the first interleague game ever played here. That hadn't really registered when I ordered the tickets; it was just the game that happened to be scheduled while we were here. It's a good thing I ordered tickets ahead of time, though. This was the first game I've ever been to that was a sell-out. (In fact, I can't think of any sort of event I've ever been to before that was sold out.) The official paid attendance was 47,556. Officially the park seats 48,000, but between complementary tickets and flexible seating in the skyboxes, it can "sell out" with fewer than that. It's really weird to look out over a vast stadium and not see gaps of empty seats. This was the Orioles' thirteenth sell-out of 1997, and it was part of what makes them lead the Major Leagues in attendance.

The game really wasn't very good. Both Baltimore and Montreal started their weakest pitchers, so we saw a lot of walks and full counts. There were a couple of nice catches and one Montreal home run, but nothing that really stood out. In the end the Expos won, 6-4.

The walk back up Eutaw Street was downright creepy. If I had known ahead of time just how seedy the neighborhood was, I would have made alternate transportation plans. Unfortunately, with the suburbans parked at Milford Mill, we were committed to taking the subway. I set a brisk pace, ignoring all the drunks and hoodlums as best I could. The kids kept up well, but Paul got behind a bit. I wasn't going to wait around for him in an unsafe neighborhood, though. I figured he knew the way; I just wanted to get to the station.

The south entrance of Lexington Market station (the one closest to Camden Yards) was brightly lit when we arrived. When we tried to enter, though, everything was locked up tight. We walked to the north end of the station, where there was no lighted sign—only a little blue "M" on a street sign to indicate that this was a metro entrance. Fortunately this one was open. I pointed out to the attendant

how confusing it was that the lighted “main” entrance should be closed while the dark entrance was open. He got downright mad at me for suggesting there was anything unusual about it. Ah well—just one more thing to dislike about Baltimore.

The trains run very irregularly in Baltimore at night. We waited for over fifteen minutes before a northbound train finally stopped. On our way home the kids visited with one of the most pleasant people we saw in the city. He was a thirty-something black man who had obviously just gotten off work. I have no idea what his job was, but he wore one of those photo IDs around his neck. **[Most likely he worked at Johns Hopkins Hospital.]** He obviously recognized we had just come from the ballpark and asked how the Orioles did. He then struck up a pleasant and genuine conversation with the kids that lasted until he got off, about two-thirds of the way back to Milford Mill. After so many negative impressions of the city, it was nice to end this day on a positive note.

Tuesday, June 17

Pikesville, Maryland to Greenfield, Indiana

I began this morning with a walk. This time I walked the opposite direction from yesterday—southward towards the city. I knew Reisterstown Plaza wasn't too far away, and I figured I could probably get something to eat for breakfast there. STRANGE is almost an understatement for this neighborhood. What's really weirdest about it is the combination of Jewish and black. Side by side you'll see restaurants serving kosher chicken and barbecued pork. A music store featured Russian folk songs and rap. There were old Jewish men with long grey beards and black hats who almost looked Amish, and there were teenaged black boys in fluorescent shorts that were falling down to their calves. Most of the places I travel, there's something that reminds me of home. That wasn't true of Baltimore. Almost everything here was alien to me. Some of it was entertaining, and some of it was scary, but nothing made me feel like home.

I don't know when I've seen so many kosher restaurants in my life. As far as I know I've never eaten in a kosher restaurant **[and I still haven't]**, but I could have chosen from dozens in the mile or so I walked this morning. There was also a kosher supermarket, the “Mirakle Mart” (spelling intentional). I chose to patronize it, mostly to try to see what makes a supermarket kosher. It certainly wasn't the staff or the customers. Both the manager and the check-out girl were black, and the only other patron at this early hour was a Catholic nun. I spoke briefly with Sr. Paulette; she apparently teaches at Seton Grade School—that is the mostly black Seton Grade School in Pikesville, Maryland. St. Elizabeth Seton (for whom Algona's Catholic grade school was also named) was from Maryland; her home is just a few blocks west of Lexington Market. I considered visiting it until I saw how bad the surrounding neighborhood was. There are Seton schools all over Maryland; even a **PUBLIC** high school is named after her.

Mirakle Mart didn't sell pork, of course. Actually the only meat they appeared to have in stock was veal. The whole place was very sparsely stocked. It was almost as if they were going out of business, but there was nothing to indicate that was the case. I bought a bag of kosher pretzels (and I still have no clue what makes one pretzel kosher and not another) that were imported from Israel. I also bought some artificially flavored grape drink—apparently there's nothing sacrilegious about chemicals.

[The whole concept of religious dietary restrictions, be they kosher, halal, or whatever, still seems very strange to me. I can understand people who make an ethical choice to be vegetarian, but eating one meat while shunning another makes no sense to me. It also seems silly to allow certain foods separately, but prohibit them in combination. On several occasions I've read articles that attempt to explain the reasoning behind various religions' dietary rules, but they all seem completely arbitrary.]

The other thing I picked up in the store was a copy of the Baltimore *Sun*. While I didn't care much for the city it serves, I must say the *Sun* is one of the best newspapers I've seen anywhere. It's been a while since I've seen a paper where lengthy articles were the norm. They're well-written articles, too. Following the rules of journalism, you get everything you need to know up front, but you can keep on reading to get more details. That was refreshing after years of reading papers that thought hard news should be written like fluffy features. **[As I write this revision, I just learned that Tribune Media, which owns the *Sun* just declared bankruptcy. With the credit crunch, there are few if any buyers who can afford its assets, so it's likely many of their newspapers may simply cease publication.]**

The top story today was about the lawsuits being brought against tobacco companies. This is an especially important story locally, because Peter Angelos is the chief lawyer for the states bringing suit. Angelos also happens to own the Baltimore Orioles (or at least the controlling interest in them); it was he who decided to build Camden Yards. This type of lawsuit is nothing new to him, though. He made the money to buy the most expensive team in baseball by representing asbestos miners in their suits twenty years ago. He's also been a big defender of labor unions, which put him in the awkward position of being the one owner who publicly refused to hire replacement players during the 1993 baseball strike.

I walked on about a block further to the Baltimore city limits. The neighborhood changed abruptly, but not really for the better. Where there was mostly old suburban strip, suddenly there was block after block of row houses. I kept on Reisterstown Road for about three more blocks and eventually arrived at Reisterstown Plaza.

The first place I went was Dunkin' Donuts, which also advertised itself as kosher. (I'm no rabbi, so you'll have to ask someone else what makes a doughnut kosher.) The people in here were certainly Jewish, and probably orthodox at that. Everybody's head was covered, and I felt rather out of place in a baseball cap rather than the brimmed black hats all the other men were wearing. The service at this Dunkin' Donuts seemed about as slow as the one we stopped at on the turnpike, so I left before ordering anything. I

surveyed the neighborhood around the mall, which was most notable because several stores had signs in Russian only—obviously indicating the ancestry of the Jewish population. Eventually I walked across the street to a Burger King.

Burger King wasn't kosher, but it did obviously cater to those Jews who, while not orthodox, still stuck to traditional diets. They featured egg sandwiches (no meat or cheese—just scrambled eggs on a bagel), and two people in line ahead of me ordered them. The ham and cheese croissant was more my style, and hopefully the old Jewish men in the next booth weren't too mortified by what I was eating.

On the way back to the motel I saw a sight that made my heart jump. For about a block and a half, every single car parked along Reisterstown Road had its windows smashed in. The thieves or vandals appeared to have stopped just two blocks south of our motel.

It amazed me that right in the middle of the cars with smashed windows, I passed a bus stop where a woman was sitting counting her money. She had at least two \$50 bills on her, together with several other bills whose denominations I couldn't see. And there she was, out in the open at the bus stop, counting her money where everyone could see. She's definitely braver—or stupider—than I am. **[Over the years I've seen a number of local people in large cities handling their money in public. That's something I would NEVER do, and it amazes me that not once has anyone even seemed to notice they were doing it.]**

We packed up everything and drove to Milford Mill one last time. I was a bit worried about leaving the suburbans with all our stuff in them, especially after seeing those smashed-in windows this morning. We didn't have much choice, though, and fortunately nothing happened while we were gone.

We took the train back to Lexington Market, but this time we avoided the creepy walk down Eutaw Street. Baltimore actually has two public transit systems—the metro and what they call the "Central Light Rail" system. The light rail is essentially a modern-day streetcar. It runs on rails down its own lane of a downtown street, stopping at the lights just like the cars do. Out in the suburbs it picks up speed as it heads down the median of an expressway. The light rail comes within one block of the metro at Lexington Market, and it stops right at Camden Yards. Today we transferred to the light rail, which was much more pleasant than the walk down Eutaw Street.

If I were planning this trip again, I would have gotten a motel in Towson—where the light rail ends up—rather than Pikesville. Baltimore is an absurdly race-conscious city (more so really than much of the deep South). Towson appears to be a prosperous white suburb, and white people appear to use the light rail system in far greater numbers than they use the metro. (It's about evenly split, rather than all black.) While the light rail is very slow and runs only every fifteen minutes, it would have given the kids a better impression of Baltimore. Unfortunately it's hard to figure out ahead of time where the good and bad neighborhoods are in a city. **[It's easier in the internet age than it used to be.]** The travel writers would probably be sued if they bluntly said which parts of town to avoid. I picked a place I thought would be a nice suburb, but I sure won't rush back there again.

[Baltimore has expanded their light rail system dramatically since this was first written. There are now several lines that mostly share tracks downtown and then branch out in different directions. The trains go far into the suburbs, offer convenient connections to commuter and long-distance trains, and also serve Thurgood Marshall (formerly Baltimore-Washington) International Airport.]

One of the strangest things about the light rail system is that payment is on the honor system. You're supposed to buy a ticket from a vending machine at the "station" (a canopy that isn't much more than a glorified bus stop). Supposedly police randomly ride the system and ticket people who don't have tickets, but we certainly could have ridden without paying—and no one would have known or cared. It seems weird in a big, crime-ridden city that they would be so trusting about their fares. I suppose it makes it cheaper than building a "real" station with turnstiles, but they've got to lose a lot of money to freeloaders. **[Baltimore must be the first place I encountered "honor system" ticketing, which is the norm on light rail.]**

We spent some time in the Orioles' store in the Warehouse building, and then it was time for the tour. I'm surprised more sports teams don't offer tours of their facilities—or if they do, that they don't publicize them better. **[Almost every team offers tours, and in the internet age, they're pretty well publicized.]** The Camden Yards tour was really fascinating. We began with an overview of the place, where the guide emphasized that this was a ballpark, not a stadium. In fact, there has been only one event here that was not a baseball game. It surprised me that most people on the tour did not know what that event was. I did, because I watched it on TV—it was the Pope's first mass the last time he came to America.

The guide told us to ask questions if there was anything we wanted to know, but he never seemed to have an answer when people actually did ask him things. He pointed out monuments they have at the entrance for those Orioles whose numbers have been retired. I asked him if they would be putting up a monument for Jackie Robinson (whose number—42—was formally retired in all of baseball this spring in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of his pioneering rookie season). It surprised me that the guide didn't even seem to be aware that Robinson's number had been retired. We did, however, get lots of facts and figures about the ballpark. One of the most amusing was that there are twenty miles of beer pipes running to the concession stands. I was intrigued that they pipe the beer in from a central location, but I suppose it would be easier than lugging kegs all over the place.

We spent much of the tour on the club level—the luxury boxes where corporations entertain their rich clients. The kids were doing the math on what it would cost to rent a skybox. They are available on a per-season basis only, but if they could sub-let one for a single game, they figured it would cost them about \$200 each to see the game. If they brought some friends and filled the place to maximum capacity, they figured they could get the cost down to around \$45 a head. That's really not that much, considering bad seats go for \$20.



Standing in front of the dug out at Camden yards

way they could run tours there and make it practical. I mean—I'd love to meet Cal Ripken, but I don't really want to walk in on him in the shower. One of the most interesting things we saw at Camden Yards was the control room, where technicians keep track of the scoreboards, the video display, and the music that is broadcast throughout the park. I was really impressed with their scoreboard displays at the game. They also have one board that records the type and speed of each pitch thrown in the game (including one that was recorded as a 47-mph "fast"-ball). It takes about ten people to keep the whole system operating during a game. Three of them were already here getting things ready for tonight.

It was also interesting to see the pressbox, mostly because of how enormous it was. Being the P.A. announcer for Garrigan games **[it's scary to think how long I've done that now]**, I know it can get pretty cramped in there--especially if more than one radio station is broadcasting the game. You could probably fit everyone who has ever announced a Garrigan game into the Camden Yards pressbox, with plenty of room to spare.

The last place we went at the ballpark was the field. We walked through the same tunnel the players go through (which has about a five-foot clearance) and emerged next to the dugout. We were told not to walk on the grass (we wouldn't have wanted to anyhow, since the sprinklers were on) but we could pretty much do whatever we wanted by the dugout. The panorama from the dugout mostly showed people working. It was amazing just how many people it takes to keep the park in shape. People were literally hosing down the seats, picking up litter, raking the infield, taking food to the concession stands, adjusting speakers, running cable for who knows what purpose—the list goes on and on. I wonder if these people think of this as a dream job, or just a job—probably a bit of both.

[I've since been on numerous other ballpark tours, and most of them show about the same stuff we saw here. The two best tours I've done were at the two ballparks in Chicago—on visits I didn't write up in any travelogue. At Comiskey (now called U.S. Cellular Field) they do a good job of explaining all those different ballpark jobs, and they talk show unique stuff like the buffet where the players eat (something I'd find out more about when I knew a player personally) and the daycare center where the players' kids stay during games. At Wrigley they spend most of the tour discussing the history of the park. There they did take us into the home locker room (though the team was away at the time), where we saw that Sammy Sosa had an extra locker just to accommodate all the fan mail he received. They ended the Wrigley tour by letting us play catch on the outfield grass, right next to the famous ivy. That really was cool.]

Lexington Market was lively when we returned. At the east entrance they have a police kiosk, like you see in pictures from Japan. An officer was sitting in there looking very bored at the various happenings in the neighborhood. **[He was basically monitoring the video from surveillance cameras.]** Perhaps most interesting was an old drunk black man who was ranting into a megaphone about his bizarre religious beliefs. I didn't catch everything, but among other things he said that Queen Elizabeth was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. I was walking with [one of the kids] at the

(By the way, if you do the multiplication, the companies pay a minimum of \$115,000 a season for a club suite, and the prices go up into the millions.)

There's a special elevator to keep the riff-raff from mingling with the well-heeled club-level patrons. For those that do belong here, the entire club level is paneled in mahogany and carpeted. They have formal waiter service, rather than just vendors hawking things as they go by. There's also a concierge service, that apparently assists patrons with their post-game travel plans. You can either sit at cocktail tables and watch the game in air-conditioned comfort out the windows, or you can sit in box seats on your own private balcony.

While on the club level we saw a video of Brady Anderson (the Orioles' centerfielder and last year's home run champ) showing us the clubhouse and training room. Some of the kids were upset that we didn't actually go to those places, but there's no



Police kiosk at Lexington Market

time. We stared at each other, quickly ducked into the stairwell of the subway (out of sight), and burst out laughing. --The things you see in cities.

We took the metro one last time and then hopped in the suburbans. We drove out to the beltway and about ten miles west on I-70, where we stopped for lunch at the town of Lisbon. It amazes me just how rural much of the east is. Here we were just minutes from one of the largest cities in America, and we could have been in Hooterville. **[It's amusing to read this, as *Green Acres* was a *Jeopardy* category just last week, with Hooterville one of the answers—or should I say “questions”.]** Paul and I dropped the kids at a tiny little McDonalds while we went to get gas. We ended up at a funny old station in a brick building just off a traffic circle. This has to be one of the few true "service" stations left in America, with a functioning repair garage. The man behind the counter muttered about the weather, and it was clear just looking around the place that this was rural America—we had left the city behind.

We drove back to Frederick, and on to Hagerstown and Hancock. Then we continued west on I-68 across the Maryland panhandle. This was a MUCH better choice than the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I may not have liked their city, but I have nothing but kind words for Maryland's roads. ... In the panhandle we started to encounter serious mountains—really the most rugged part of the whole trip, but taking the interstate through them was not problem at all.

Eventually we left Maryland and crossed into West Virginia. We were there about half an hour, just long enough to skirt the edge of Morgantown. From there we took I-79 northward to Washington, Pennsylvania. We had a slight detour due to construction at Washington, but we managed to pick up I-70 again, which we followed back into West Virginia. This time we were there maybe twenty minutes, and it wouldn't have been that long if we hadn't stopped at a rest area. We cut a small slice of the West Virginia panhandle and drove straight through downtown Wheeling.

It was getting into evening when we crossed the line into Ohio. We just kept on driving ... and driving ... and driving. Ohio is not an unattractive state, but I've always found it boring. I think it's the reaction people from elsewhere have to Iowa. It's not a place that's anybody's destination, it's not in any way spectacular, and it's just too big. When my dad, Paul, and I went out to Philadelphia in 1983, I described Ohio as "IN the way" to the east. Well now it was in the way home.

We drove straight through downtown Columbus, but since it was well past evening rush hour, traffic was relatively light. Then we stopped for dinner at a Wendy's somewhere between Columbus and Dayton.

We kept driving across I-70 into Indiana. Indiana uses Eastern Standard Time year-round, so it's essentially the same as Central Time in summer. That meant that even though it was ungodly late by the clocks in Baltimore, it was ten-ish local time when we finally arrived at the Super 8 Motel in Greenfield, Indiana, our final destination for the day.

This was a really nice motel. The rooms were large and pleasant, the staff was friendly, and the kids even enjoyed a late night swim in the pool (and were amused that people in a poolside room were obviously smoking dope). I was dead tired from driving, and before long I was asleep for the night.

Wednesday, June 18

Greenfield, Indiana to Algona, Iowa

I had purposely planned a late start to avoid driving through Indianapolis at rush hour. I was, of course, up early (why is it I'm always pressing the snooze button on my alarm clock at home? **[truly an interesting question]**), and I decided to go out for breakfast. It had been pouring all night, so I took the suburban instead of walking. The phone book said there was a Waffle House in Greenfield. I remembered the Waffle House chain from my time in the South, and I had my mouth set for some of their crispy hash browns. Unfortunately this wasn't the same Atlanta-based chain that slings hash out of mobile homes across the South. It was a much more up-scale place that was officially called the "Waffle House Family Restaurant". I found out later that this Indiana-only chain pre-dates the "real" Waffle House. The chain I was looking for also exists in Indiana, but for legal reasons their restaurants are called "Waffle 'n' Steak" here. **[Years later Waffle House finally bought out the pre-existing trademark in Indiana, and they now operate under the same name across the South—and to my mind Indiana is more southern or eastern than it is Midwestern.]**

I did have breakfast at the fancy Waffle House, but I can't say I particularly enjoyed it. There wasn't anything wrong with it (except for the coffee, which can only be described as "greasy"—it was weird), but it wasn't what my taste buds were expecting. (By the way, I finally did get some of those hash browns when I went down to St. Louis over the 4th of July.)

We did indeed miss rush hour in Indianapolis. In fact, the city proved remarkably easy to get through. I was amazed just how much we lucked out with traffic almost everywhere we went on this trip. From Indy, we headed northwest on I-74, stopping for gas just shy of the Illinois state line.

Two years ago when we went to Dallas, Fr. Feierfeil started an unfortunate tradition when he stopped for fireworks in Missouri. We continued this tradition last year, and the kids kept begging to do it again this time. I was secretly hoping the liberal east would outlaw senseless danger (and indeed most of the places we were did). Unfortunately that was not the case in Indiana. The kids saw that this convenience store sold every kind of fireworks in the book, and they rushed in prepared to stock up.

Indiana is more sensible than Missouri in its fireworks laws **[though, if you ask me, there's no such thing as a "sensible" law that allows the public to possess explosives]**. First of all, it is illegal for minors to purchase fireworks in Indiana. Several of the kids asked if I would buy for them, but I made it clear that this was their problem, not mine. Eventually they conned Aaron into being their fireworks connection. It wasn't easy for him to buy, either. He had to join the Indiana Fireworks Users Association (a formality that the store is prepared to do for every purchaser) and sign two different papers saying he planned to use them safely. With all he ended up buying (virtually all of which was for other people), he could have blown up the whole state, but the kids stowed everything away safely, and we were on our way again.

Our next stop was at the Northwoods Mall in Peoria, where we had lunch. This is the only mall I know of anywhere that doesn't have a real food court. In fact, there are very few places to eat here at all. A few people had hot dogs at A&W, while the rest of us ate pizza by the slice. **[I've since been to a surprising number of malls with limited food options. I've read that some malls do that intentionally, thinking that multiple choices will limit the number of customers who come to any one counter. It seems to me, though, that the lack of options would limit the number of people who eat in the mall at all.]** Before long we were on our way again.

I really started to feel like we were getting home at Peoria. Western Illinois is a place I know. It is, after all, where I was born, and I've been through there countless times on the way to one place or another. We followed I-74 all the way to Moline, where we crossed the river on a horrible old bridge.

We got on Interstate 80 and ran into some of the worst traffic of the whole trip. If this were Maryland, I'd guarantee you this stretch of I-80 would be six lanes wide. It should be in Iowa. The road was packed, and the driving was tense all the way to Iowa City. **[There's a lot of Iowa interstates that need to be six-laned. If I were in charge of the DOT, I'd look at widening I-80 from Davenport to Williamsburg and through the Council Bluffs area, I-35 between Ankeny and Ames, and I-380 between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. Minnesota and Wisconsin also need to seriously look at six-laning some of their rural interstate stretches.]**

We stopped at Arby's in Coralville. The kids and I killed time while Paul drove Aaron to his apartment in Iowa City. We then headed up I-380 (also jam packed) to Cedar Rapids. Traffic finally thinned out north of Hiawatha, and we had a pleasant drive on to Waterloo. We took Highway 20 west from there, and went north on U.S. 65 to Hampton. One of the kids announced that we were finally in the North Central Conference **[though Hampton is one of the longest road trips our kids make for sports]**, and I must say it really did feel like home was finally in our grasp.

Paul and I split up for the last leg of the trip. He dropped off one kid in Wesley, while I dropped off three others at their homes north of St. Joe. It was just after eight when we got to Garrigan. We were surprised that there were baseball and softball going on. Nothing was on the calendar; it must have been re-scheduled from a rain-out. The kids made their way home. Then Paul and I drove back to my house, and the trip was officially over.

... By the way, this journal was originally longer, and it may have some continuity problems toward the middle and end. It was the one travelogue that was originally written in Apple II-e format for which no print copy existed. An abbreviated electronic version (with no reference to any specific students), which had been posted online, was used as the basis for this version. A disk copy in Appleworks existed, but the disks were so old that two of the seven files that comprised this travelogue were damaged beyond recovery. Those parts (which largely described the Washington metro and the trip home) appear in much less detail here than in the original version.

[Unfortunately, I don't really remember much of what may have been deleted when this travelogue was first re-typed. That is a problem with modern media. In fact, I've read articles that suggest records from our modern civilization may be lost more quickly than those from ancient societies simply because "advanced" storage methods don't work well for long-term storage. While the Declaration of Independence can still be read two centuries after it was written and the Rosetta Stone still holds up millennia later, that Appleworks diskette went bad less than a decade after it was first recorded. Who knows how long the CD or flash drive this version is stored on will last—or how long Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat will be standard ways of writing or accessing documents? I guess we'll find out the next time I get around to revising these travelogues.]