

# ☺☹☹ MURPHY'S LAW IN CHICAGO ☺☹☹

## QUIZ BOWL 2012

[UPDATE: March 2018—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 photos to enhance the original travelogues.]



2012 Bishop Garrigan quiz bowl competitors at nationals

2012 marked the thirteenth trip to the National Academic Championships for the Golden Bear quiz bowl team. Perhaps I should have heeded the traditional superstitions regarding the number 13, because this would turn out to be anything but an ordinary trip. While the kids all did have fun (and, for the most part, so did I) this is honestly a trip I just don't care to repeat. **[Interestingly, enough has happened since then that this trip doesn't really stand out much, good or bad. It was just another of the string of quiz bowl trips.]**

Before we begin, I'll do as I often do in these quiz bowl write-ups and introduce you to our delegation. This year we chose to officially enter two teams, which would compete at the varsity and JV levels. We got that idea after watching a JV match in New Orleans last year. Many of our top players are younger, and it seemed as if a JV entry might play to our strengths. Unfortunately things didn't work out as they might have. A mistake I made was to allow the kids to self-select which of those teams they would be on. We ended up splitting up some of our strongest players, which probably wasn't the best overall option. Then we found out that only four JV teams had entered the JV competition in Chicago this year. Because teams needed to play six games, that meant half of the teams our JV would be facing would be regular varsity teams. **[we've never again entered a JV team.]**

Our varsity team included two seniors and two freshmen:

- **Philip Detrick** was this year's varsity captain. He is a senior who went with us to New Orleans last summer. While he's been in quiz bowl all through high school, I've probably worked with him more in speech. Philip loves acting and plans to major in musical theatre in college. **[I saw him in a summer stock company after his senior year at college. The last I knew he was working at a factory job in Algona, but his dream is still to make it as a professional entertainer.]**
- **Rachel Berte** is a senior who I've also worked with in speech. She's been active in sports like volleyball, and she also enjoys cheerleading and dance. Rachel is the younger sister of Brittany Berte, who was with us on multiple trips to national quiz bowl in the past.
- **Tony Kollasch** and **Zach Kollasch** are identical twins in this year's freshman class. **[They're the ones who probably should have been on the JV team.]** I know them best as the little brothers of Anna Kollasch, one of our top all-time players **[and, like Anna, they would go to nationals all through high school]**. I haven't taught either boy yet, but I've worked with them in speech and watched them in cross-country. They're also in basketball and track. It was convenient that the kids who were starters at the state track team had dyed their hair black. The fact that Tony had black hair and Zach didn't helped me tell the two apart. **[I've always had trouble telling twins apart; Zach and Tony were no exception.]**

The JV team was what everyone expected to be our stronger entry. It had a junior, two sophomores, and a freshman:

- **Allison Frideres** – While we alternated captains on this team, Allison was probably the overall team leader. Allison is fairly proud to be in all the “nerdy” activities, and she’s the cousin of two boys who went to nationals years ago—one of whom would join us for part of this trip. She is a junior.
- **Levi Bernhard** is a sophomore who is probably our strongest current player **[and likely should have been on the varsity team]**. He’s very knowledgeable, but unfortunately he’ll sometimes come up with strange answers that have almost nothing to do with what was asked. **[Levi has Asperger Syndrome, a mild disorder on the autism spectrum, which would account for this. He was very smart, though, and easily one of our top quiz bowl players ever.]**
- **Jakob Hamilton** is a sophomore who is the younger brother of Alex Hamilton who was part of our last two trips to nationals. Jake was probably our top math and science expert, but unfortunately being just a sophomore **[meant that]** “expert” was a relative term. Aside from quiz bowl, Jake runs cross-country and is active in math team, speech, and intramural basketball.
- **Hannah Bernhard** is a freshman and Levi’s younger sister. She was one of my top students in Algebra I this past year. Hannah is more confident than her brother, and she knows an amazing amount of obscure trivia—particularly in the fields of literature **[perennially our weakest area in quiz bowl]** and music.

In addition to the competitors, our delegation included:

- **The Frideres:** Allison’s entire family—her father (Randy), her mother (Chris), and her littler **[twin]** sisters (Morgan and Taylor) came along in their own vehicle. On Saturday her cousin Nate (who works at Northwestern University) and his wife also joined us. Interestingly, Morgan Frideres is also Jake Hamilton’s girlfriend **[and they’d continue to date throughout high school]**.
- **The Bernhards** – Levi and Hannah’s mother, Dawn Bernhard, drove in her vehicle, accompanied by her mother-in-law Darlene Bernhard. Last year the two of them were with us in New Orleans.
- **Deb Kollasch & Mary Alice Berte** – Deb and Mary Alice were the other “official” chaperones. They are veterans of quiz bowl trips. This is Deb’s fifth trip to nationals **[and she’s just about my favorite adult to travel with]**, and I think Mary has been with us twice before.
- **Yours Truly** – I’m also a veteran at nationals, of course. In fact Chip Beall, the head of the tournament, remarked at one of our games that “Bishop Garrigan is here every year”. That’s not entirely true; but we have been there nearly half of the thirty years they’ve held the national tournament.

At one point both my principal and my superintendent had expressed interest in going along on this year’s trip. Various conflicts (most notably a huge fundraiser we’re doing with the goal of building a major addition onto the school) kept them away. That was all right, though, since most of the time we had seventeen in our delegation—and it was quite a chore to keep track of that many people as we made our way around the city. **[Various people have suggested to me at different times that I should get a summer job as a travel guide. It’s hard to think of anything I’d like less, though. I love traveling, but I don’t like being responsible for groups of other people. The best of the quiz bowl trips I’ve been on have been the smallest ones, particularly the couple we’ve been able to do in a single vehicle.]**

## ☺☹☹ FRIDAY, JUNE 8 ☺☹☹ ALGONA, IOWA TO SCHILLER PARK, ILLINOIS

I had driven the blue suburban home after a high school baseball game last night, and it was parked outside my garage this morning. My alarm went off at 5:45, and I dressed and changed quickly. I packed up my stuff and was off about 6:25am.

I kept up a long-standing quiz bowl tradition by stopping by McDonalds on my way out to school. A fast food breakfast has been my lucky meal ever since I was in high school, and today I had the Egg McMuffin value meal together with a box of cinnamonelts (the scraps of cinnamon rolls most people call monkey bread). I drove out to school, parked the blue suburban in the drive by the gym, and then moved the newer black suburban around behind



**Blue suburban parked in front of David Burrow’s garage  
316 W. North St. – Algona, Iowa**

the blue one. **[While I always rather liked the blue suburban, the school got rid of it shortly after this trip. The black suburban, which seemed new at the time, is now one of our oldest school vehicles.]** Before long most of the kids showed up. The exception was Allison Frideres and the rest of her family. We were scheduled to leave at 7 o’clock, and it was all of 7:05 before they showed. In fact, one of the kids was just calling Allison on a cell phone to find out what was up when they pulled up in the parking lot.

The first leg of our trip took us just eleven miles southward from Algona to the tiny village of St. Joe. Even in that short distance I could tell this would be one of the duller trips I'd made for national quiz bowl. The kids were practically dead silent—both on this leg and throughout the trip. They were well-behaved, but they spent pretty much the whole trip either sleeping, reading, or listening to music on headphones. While I was leading a caravan of four vehicles, there were many times I felt that I might as well have been driving alone. **[I've never been a fan of headphones, and one of the worst aspects I see in today's culture is the tendency for people to bury themselves in them.]**

We picked up the Bertes in St. Joe. Since I knew I'd be driving on the urban leg at the end of the trip, I took a break and let Mrs. Berte drive on the next leg. We headed south on US 169 to Ft. Dodge and then east on highway 20. There was construction near Webster City, where they had completely torn up half of the highway. While I still think of this stretch as "new", it actually pre-dates when I lived in Algona. We made it through with no problem and were soon on the truly new stretch east of I-35.

We made our morning stop at a Kwik Star convenience store in Dike. The place was actually more than a mile off the road, but it was still just about the closest business to highway 20 between Webster City and Waterloo. It surprises me that no one has built any "exit business" along that stretch, but it's just about as barren as any road you could find. **[Even today the only business that's actually on highway 20 between Webster City and Cedar Falls is a single convenience store near Parkersburg. By contrast, the stretch between Waterloo and Dubuque has businesses every few miles.]**

I took over driving at Dike and headed east to Waterloo. The stretch where U.S. 20 and I-380 join together just east of Waterloo is also under construction. This is another "new" section that's starting to show its age. They opened that part of 380 back when I was in college, so I guess it deserves to have some repairs. Traffic was very busy on the two-lane stretch, and it was particularly annoying when a big semi-truck forced its way from an entrance ramp right in front of us. We did make it through all right, but I was glad when things widened out to four lanes again.

Before too long we made it to Dubuque. I nearly had an accident when a light changed quicker than I imagined and I had to slam on the brakes. The blue suburban dates to the early '90s, and while it's been well maintained, it is definitely showing its age. The brakes were very soft, and I came within inches of hitting a car that stopped more quickly at that light.

We turned off on Kennedy Road in Dubuque and had lunch at a Wendy's near the mall there. For as large as our group was, they managed to serve us quite efficiently. Wendy's has recently added "half" salads to their menu, though the price for the smaller portion is more than what I paid a few years back for a full-size salad. At any rate, I had a half Baja salad and a small frosty. I think that was by far the smallest lunch of anyone in our group, but it certainly sufficed for me. We all had our food and used the restroom, and before too long we were on our way again. **[I really do wish other fast food places would offer smaller portions, but they forever seem to be super-sizing things instead.]**

We drove through Dubuque and then the rather seedy border town of East Dubuque. Beyond there highway twenty narrows to two lanes and winds its way through the bluffs of western Illinois. A Friday afternoon in summer was not the best time to be driving this route. Traffic was heavy with people flocking to Galena and nearby towns for the weekend. We got through without any real problems, but I was very glad when the four-lane resumed at Freeport.

U.S. 20 between Freeport and Rockford is weird. It's a four-lane highway with a 65-mph speed limit. Unfortunately, there are all too frequent stop lights along the road, some of which seem to be literally in the middle of nowhere. After testing the brakes in Dubuque, I didn't much want to have to suddenly slow from 65 down to nothing, so if anything I drove a bit too conservatively through this stretch.

We made our afternoon stop at the Belvidere oasis, a service area on the Northwest Tollway (officially called the Jane Adams Tollway these days) a short distance east of Rockford. We didn't really need gas, but buying gas there saved the trouble and expense of getting it in Chicago proper. The Mobil station at the oasis charged \$3.65<sup>9</sup> a gallon. While that was 31¢ more than the going rate in Algona, it was the same price they wanted at a truck stop we passed in Rockford and about 30¢ cheaper than we'd see in our ultimate destination, the northwest suburbs near O'Hare. (In Chicago itself gas was still over \$4 a gallon.)

I had gotten the school credit card to pay for the major expenses on this trip. When I slid it at the pump, the read-out flashed "SEE ATTENDANT". I made my way inside, and after a wait the attendant asked how much I wanted to pre-pay. I honestly didn't know how much the suburbans would take, but I estimated about \$70 each. He processed the credit card for a \$140 charge, and that went through all right. I put the full \$70 in the blue suburban, but it turned out the black one only required \$60.30. I went back in, and the attendant issued a credit for \$9.70 to make up the difference. I hope everything got processed correctly on the bill. **[I've learned that this method of over-charging and crediting is fairly standard at gas stations, but I still don't like it. I far prefer just scanning my card at the pump.]**

After buying gas we continued eastward on the tollway. They've simplified the toll structure, taking out several stops. This past year, though, they dramatically raised the actual toll rates. We went through three toll booths—one a little ways east of Belvidere, one at Elgin, and one right by O'Hare. The first cost \$3, and the others were \$1.50 each. That's six bucks to go just over 50 miles, which strikes me as quite pricey indeed. **[I should note that the toll rates are half as much for those who have I-Pass electronic transponders installed in their vehicles. If I travelled to eastern Illinois even slightly more often, it would be worthwhile to get one.]** It does look like they may finally be doing something with all the toll they collect. Signs from Rockford to Elgin announced that the roadway was being widened. They've needed to six-lane the whole length of the northwest tollway for years. Apparently now that is finally happening. Fortunately the construction was taking place at night, so we had a fairly easy drive down to Chicago.



Before we started I had put money into envelopes to cover the tolls for the suburbans. I'd counted out five one-dollar bills and four quarters in each envelope. We paid the \$3 toll and the first \$1.50 toll without incident. However, when we reached the final interchange, a small sign announced that while vehicles continuing on I-90 or switching to I-294 could pay in cash, those exiting onto I-190 toward O'Hare (which was what we were doing) could pay in coins only. It really seems strange that two of the three directions off that interchange have attended booths, but the other one is automatic. That's the way it is, though. I fumbled around in my trusty red book bag and did manage to find four more quarters. Presumably those in the other vehicles also found sufficient coins, because we all made it through that final tollbooth.

We drove west to the next exit and looped around south to Manheim Road, the big strip that runs through the suburbs just east of O'Hare. I had printed out directions from Google Maps on how to get to our hotel. They said to go south on Manheim past the hotel, make a U-turn, and

**Newspaper photo of construction on the Jane Addams Tollway** then turn right while heading back north. It turned out those directions were needlessly complicated. Near O'Hare Manheim is a six-lane highway with a metal barrier its median. A U-turn would be necessary to reach businesses on the left in that stretch. As it turned out, though, just north of our hotel that median became a turn-lane, and while we had to wait a bit for traffic, it was really quite easy to make a left turn directly into the parking lot.

Once we were there the next chore was actually finding a parking spot, and that was easier said than done. I'd bet about half of the Hampton Inn's business comes from park-and-fly customers who leave their cars while they go on trips. That means that even though their lot is fairly large, it's filled with a lot of cars that don't belong to current guests. There were usually only about half a dozen available spots, most of them not well suited to large vehicles. **[I fairly often go to a hotel in Bloomington, Minnesota that has this same problem.]** We made due, though, and before long we started unloading.

While it's mostly a very nice hotel, the lobby area of the Hampton Inn—O'Hare is weird. The most prominent thing when you enter is the business center, and beyond that are elevators and the breakfast room. I had to do a little bit of searching to actually find the "front" desk, which was nowhere near the actual front of the hotel.

Once I did locate the desk a young man quickly started checking us in. There was a problem, though. The clerk politely informed me that the school credit card had been declined. I've actually had this problem on past quiz bowl trips, and I'd specifically checked with the school business manager before we left. She assured me there was sufficient credit available on the card, but nonetheless the charges weren't going through. **[Our school credit card account has been the target of multiple fraud attacks, so understandably they have a variety of security measures in place on it. Apparently using it at an out-of-state airport hotel had set off an alarm.]** Fortunately at the last minute before leaving I'd thrown my American Express card in my wallet. I don't normally take that card with me these days, because having it with me tends to make me want to buy things I shouldn't. It was good I'd brought it along, though, because I was able to charge the rooms (and all the other expenses we'd have on this trip) to it with no problem. Our new accounting rules say we're not really supposed to charge school expenses to personal cards, but when the school card isn't working, there isn't much choice in the matter

Everyone in the group liked the Hampton Inn a lot. I was probably the least impressed with the place. (I don't care a lot for Hampton's recent décor changes, with furnishings that look like the cheap but trendy stuff they sell at Target.) I had no complaints, though. Both the rooms and public areas were immaculate, the staff was friendly and helpful, they served an outstanding breakfast, the beds were comfortable, and the rooms were quiet. That last point was amazing, given both that the place is in the landing pattern for O'Hare and that there were dozens of other kids staying here for national quiz bowl. It's rare that I'd want to stay at a Chicagoland hotel that isn't right next to the 'L', but if I have a need to return to the O'Hare area I'd certainly stay here again. **[Unfortunately they've dramatically raised their rates since we made this trip. I've checked it on several other occasions, and the place just wasn't affordable.]**

I gave the group about half an hour to get settled, and then we had a meeting in my room. Mostly I wanted the kids to decide what they wanted to do during our free time. They never really did come to any decisions, but eventually I got enough input to plan things. I also showed the kids how the CTA passes I'd gotten worked, and then we set out for the evening.

Our group actually split up a bit tonight. The Bernhards had made reservations to go as a family to the Medieval Times dinner and tournament in Schaumburg, a suburb about half an hour northwest on the tollway. I've always thought it would be interesting to go to one of those shows (which my brother Steve went to in Florida), but I've never been able to work it in on any of my trips. The rest of the group packed into the two school vehicles. We stopped briefly at the Four Points Sheraton, just three blocks north of our hotel, and I went in briefly and checked out where the rooms where we'd be competing were located. Then we made our way east on Irving Park Road and then north on Des Plaines River Road to the Rosemont park-and-ride. Rosemont is a rather snooty-looking suburb on the near northwest side, and it provides a nicely sanitized entrance to the 'L' for high school kids and their parents. It took a while to figure out how to work the overly complicated machines they had for paying for parking, but before too long we were able to make our way up to the platforms.

An advantage of boarding at Rosemont (one stop from the end of the line) is that we were able to all get seats easily. We had a fairly uneventful ride on the blue line, though some in the group were surprised at just how loud it gets when the train rushes through the subway. We exited at Clark & Lake station and made our way over to Daley Plaza. I pointed out points of interest in the area, like Chicago Temple and the famous sculptures by Picasso and Dali. We basically just walked through the plaza and made our way back to the subway. I took the group south to Jackson and walked them through the underground transfer there to the red line. Half the group would be doing that transfer in reverse without me later on tonight, so I wanted to make sure they knew what to expect. We then took the red line north four stops to Chicago & State, which is right under Holy Name Cathedral.

We surfaced and walked east three blocks to Michigan Avenue, the Magnificent Mile that is one of the top retail addresses in the world. We passed the historic water tower and pumping station and then made our way to Water Tower Place, the vertical mall that is across the street from the John Hancock Center. Our main destination here was the food court, which is awkwardly located on what they call mezzanine level—only accessible from the rear part of the second floor. I was far from swimming in cash, so my dinner consisted of bread sticks from a pizza place and a glass of lemonade. Most of the group ended up going to an upscale fast food place called M-Burger, which they said was excellent.

At Water Tower Place the group split again. Half were going to see the stage musical *Rock of Ages*, which was playing at the Broadway Playhouse located in the Water Tower Place building. **[This seems like a surprisingly small an intimate theatre for a rather over-the-top show, yet it's played there again more recently.]** I walked them to the entrance and gave them their tickets. Then the rest of us headed back to the subway. We continued further north and got off at the Belmont 'L' station. I'd been here before when eating at Ann Sather's restaurant and when seeing plays at a run-down theatre just west of the station. Tonight we were headed to another theatre, the Briar Street Theatre. To get there we walked east on Belmont and then turned south on Halsted.

While I'd personally have probably preferred *Rock of Ages*, I had purposely booked myself into this group. Part of the reason for that was that I knew the neighborhood where the theatre we were headed to was located. Belmont and Halsted is not exactly a family-friendly area. It's right in the heart of the neighborhood called Boystown, and the bars and adult shops in Chicago's gay district were all buzzing on Friday night. There's also a large homeless population in the area, and I thought it was best that I help navigate the group to this particular destination.

I'm not sure if it was a reaction to the neighborhood or to the cramped conditions on the red line subway, but when we reached the theatre, Mrs. Frideres got out her purse and took out a bottle of hand sanitizer, which she proceeded to pass around to the group. Everyone but me felt compelled to "freshen up". I've never been a fan of hand sanitizer. I don't like the feel or smell of the stuff, and I tend to agree with the reports that say over-reacting to germs causes those germs to become resistant to normal treatments. I think the rest of the group felt I was crazy, but I kept my hands as they were.

We arrived at the Briar Street Theatre about forty-five minutes before show time, well before they had even unlocked the doors. We had tons of time to kill, and Allison suggested we look for a pseudo-famous site (a recording studio, I think) whose address she had come across in an advertisement on the 'L'. It was fairly near where we were, so we set out walking. While we got a grand tour of Boystown (and all the associated "local color"), we never did find the place. After giving up, I suggested we take side streets back. While Halsted would best be described as seedy, the nearby residential streets are really quite nice **[one of the priciest areas in the city, in fact]**, and we had a pleasant walk back to the theatre. Even so, the others in the group felt compelled to spritz the hand sanitizer again before we entered.



**Blue Man Group**

don't really say much, they give the show four and five stars and imply everyone must go.

I was intrigued to find the theatre decorated in a —galaxyll of PVC pipe hanging from the ceiling. We made our way up to our balcony seats, and it was fun to see the light bar from which many of the special effects were generated. When we sat down I was prepared for a nice show.

My opinion soon softened, though, and it rapidly became more and more negative. While I didn't hate the show, I probably should have read the handful of negative reviews on the web, because they came closer to what our group experienced. They have titles like "Too Loud", "Completely Boring", and "What's All the Fuss?" Let me share the details of one of those reviews:

Our purpose for going to the Briar Street Theatre was to see the Blue Man Group. I'd vaguely heard of them before, but didn't really know what to expect. Pretty much my entire knowledge came from searching the internet. I discovered (in Wikipedia's words) that the Blue Man group "are a trio of performers who all wear blue makeup and bald caps". **[There are actually several Blue Man troupes who perform open runs in different cities.]** Their shows combine music (particularly drumming), comedy, mime, and multimedia and are supposed to satirize modern life.

The show came highly recommended. On the travel review site TripAdvisor, they're listed as #20 out of 325 attractions in Chicago—ahead of the Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium, Navy Pier, Willis (a.k.a. Sears) Tower, all the downtown theatres, the White Sox, the Bulls, the Magnificent Mile, and "The Loop". While most of the reviews

... WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT! ... too long, redundant, seemed unrehearsed, and just not entertaining at all. Every single part seemed stretched out to the point where even if it was potentially funny it just became old by the time it was over. Some of the new parts included starting at three giant iPhones for half the show to read, eating Captain Crunch, and “rocking out” by reading more instructions on the giant iPhones. ... I am disappointed to say that I would never go to see this show again, and definitely will not be advising anyone else to go.

I'd echo most of that review. Everyone in our group remarked that pretty much every gag went on too long. That began before the show even started. In place of a person or recording reminding people to turn off their cell phones, they put up two digital read-outs with messages to that effect. Those read-outs started out identical, as if they were intended to show the same message to different parts of the theatre. Then they changed slightly, and eventually the read-outs essentially began arguing with each other. The idea of dueling digital message boards drew a laugh, and it would have been funny if they left it at that. They kept up the gag for more than five minutes, though, to the point that we were rolling our eyes when the show finally started.

Most of the first “act” involved the three principal cast members (the blue men) drumming on kettles covered with red and yellow paint. As they drummed paint sprayed all over the stage and into the front of the audience (where guests had been provided with plastic ponchos). This reminded me a bit of the ghastly show *Stomp* I saw a few years back in San Diego. It was better than that, though. The drumming wasn't quite so ear-piercing, and a band in the background provided melodious accompaniment. Spraying the paint was also amusing, but again it went on far too long. **[I got the feeling the troupe members brainstormed for ideas that they thought would be funny, but no one ever bothered to edit them down to a more streamlined show.]**

A major hunk of the show did indeed involve the cast eating Cap'n Crunch. They ate in a competitive way, throwing cereal at each other and catching ridiculous quantities of the stuff in their mouths. They also battled each other with increasingly large oversized boxes of the stuff. At first the concept drew a few smirks and giggles from me, but it just kept going on and on. There's honestly not a lot of ways you can vary eating Cap'n Crunch, and they ate it pretty much every way you can—multiple times.

In addition to Cap'n Crunch, they also ate gum and Twinkies. The Twinkie sketch included a black woman they recruited from the audience, who joined them for an elegant dinner of Hostess snacks. That scene also went on too long, and it ended with the blue men spewing fake vomit. From the balcony we could clearly see the brown goo emanated from a hole in their shirts rather than from their mouths.



**Paint drumming**

The drumming resumed with a somewhat more interesting variation. This time they drummed on PVC pipe. By using different lengths of pipe, they were able to produce different tones in their drumming. At one point they made a contraption that functioned like the slide on a trombone, with pipe that could be lengthened on demand to produce a whole range of tonal percussion.

The giant iPhones were funny at first, and as a 21st Century teacher I could see the commentary they were making—implying that people spend far too much time texting and too little time actually “living” their lives. They made their point quickly, but then the iPhones just kept going and going and going. **[As you can tell, that's pretty much the theme of the whole show. There were a lot of good ideas, but it needed some MAJOR editing.]**

Probably the most interesting part was what they called —the human paintbrush. Here also they theoretically recruited someone from the audience. Either the guy they recruited was a plant, though, or they substituted someone else for him backstage. What theoretically happened was that the guy was put in a body suit, hung upside-down from a rope, had paint thrown at him, and was then smacked into a canvas. The “volunteer” was presented with the artwork he had theoretically created to keep as a souvenir.

The finale did indeed have the giant iPhones give directions on the top ten ways to “rock out”. Most of the audience followed those directions faithfully, but those of us in the balcony just sort of sat back and watched. The ways of rocking out also went on too long, gradually building to their #1 way, which was to “shake your ...” They then completed that phrase with countless synonyms for “buttocks”—and I do mean COUNTLESS such synonyms. Again it just went on and on and on. It was like a bunch of fourth grade boys daring each other to be risqué without actually saying anything vulgar.

As we shook our rear ends (or as those of us in the balcony alluded to doing so) they started releasing streamers and balloons from the ceiling. Eventually they released several enormous globes that lighted up inside, and the audience spent about five minutes batting them around. Just like everything else, the spectacle was interesting, but they should have cut it off after about half the time. Judicious editing would have greatly improved this show.



#### PVC percussion saxophone

(All Blue Man Group pictures are from promotional sites on the internet.)

The show was performed without intermission, so it lasted less than an hour and a half all together. We waded through the club crowds as we made our way back to Belmont and soon caught a train back south to Jackson. We had a fairly long wait on the blue line platform, but we were entertained while waiting by a truly excellent jazz clarinetist. Eventually an O'Hare-bound train came, and we had an uneventful ride back to Rosemont. As we were making our way back to the suburban I got a text from Deb Kollasch that the other group had made it through their transfer and were started back on the blue line.

I found out later that transfer the *Rock of Ages* group made was far from uneventful. After leaving their show (which they all loved), they caught a crowded red line train that apparently had at least one heavily inebriated passenger. The Garrigan people were waiting by the door with that passenger, and before the door opened, he proceeded to throw up all over the door. Some of the vomit hit our captain's shoes, but fortunately he seemed more amused than angry.

Once they'd gone through the tunnel to the blue line, they saw another drunk. This guy was apparently trying to go up the down escalator, and he kept falling down over and over again. That's more "color" than I've personally seen on the 'L', but then it's rare that I've taken the trains late on a Friday night.

Back at the room I turned on my little netbook computer and listened to the web simulcast of WBBM, the Chicago news station I've listened to since I was a kid. There was a radio in the room, but it only offered pre-set stations, none of which was what I wanted, so I had to go online to get this local station. **[The pre-set radios are a feature Hampton Inn advertises, but I find them strange and unhelpful.]** The big news was about a little girl who had been kidnapped on an 'L' platform on the south side. Compared to that, the drunks our group encountered seemed a bit less disturbing.

## ☺☹☹ SATURDAY, JUNE 9 ☺☹☹ THE O'HARE AREA NEAR CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

I was up comparatively late today, as on pretty much all of this trip. We didn't play today until after 10:00, so there was no great rush getting up.

There was a huge mob at breakfast, including many students from other high schools who were also staying at the Hampton Inn for this tournament. **[The hotel where the tournament was being held was sold out, so the overflow had gone to this one. We'd actually chosen the Hampton Inn early on, when there was still room available at the main hotel. It was both cheaper and a nicer place to stay than the Sheraton.]** The breakfast area was also set up in a rather confusing way, with different foods scattered throughout parts of two different rooms. In spite of those issues, the Hampton Inn provided a very nice breakfast, one that was far more than "continental". I had scrambled eggs, a nice citrus salad, a biscuit, yogurt, two types of juice, and coffee. They also had sausage gravy and oatmeal, plus assorted pastries and cold cereals. Because of the crowd I just took my tray to my room, but with fewer people the tables in the breakfast area would have been very pleasant.

Most of the group ended up having breakfast in one of the hotel meeting rooms, and I eventually joined them in there and took some time to actually be a coach. I went through the game format they use at nationals, which is significantly different from what is used at most tournaments we go to. **[There is no standard format in quiz bowl, so it's important to know what will be happening in any particular tournament.]** I also reviewed some strategy they might find useful in our games. I'm not sure if the session did any good, but it did at least get the kids thinking about their games.

We piled in the suburbans and drove to the Sheraton. We'd find out later it was almost easier to just walk up there, particularly since parking was rather limited at both hotels. This morning we drove, though, and we were able to find a parking space in the lot that primarily served the Sheraton's restaurant. I stopped briefly at the desk to make sure no parking permit was necessary, and then the kids acclimated themselves to the building.

We still had about an hour before our first game, so I had the kids watch a match. The one we chose more or less at random happened to feature two teams we'd play later in the tournament: St. Edward High School from the Cleveland suburbs (one of the schools that was staying at the Hampton Inn) and Saratoga Springs from upstate New York. In this particular game St. Edward pretty much killed Saratoga Springs, and since the New York team was the first one we'd be facing, that made us feel good.



**Mr. Burrow and the seniors  
on this year's national quiz bowl team**

the local tournaments we go to around western Iowa, but it's the most casual I've ever seen at nationals. The kids didn't complain about being dressed up, and they certainly looked better than everyone else. **[Dress has become A LOT more casual at nationals in recent years. New Orleans continues to be the best-dressed location, likely due to a tradition of dressing up for events in the South. Chicago is by far the most casually dressed of the tournament sites, and these days almost everyone wears T-shirts and athletic shorts. That strikes me as very strange for a national competition.]**

Once the varsity team had played their two games, it was time for lunch. Since the kids had no suggestions, my plan was to drive down the Manheim strip and see what looked good to them. The bulk of the strip is south of the two hotels, but unfortunately it's literally impossible to turn left onto Irving Park out of the Sheraton and all but impossible to turn left out of the Hampton onto Manheim. Since most streets in Chicagoland are square, I figured I could make about a mile square, until I got to a light where the next major street to the south intersected with Manheim. That's more or less what we did, but it turned out to be a lot more complicated than a square. That's because the Tri-State Tollway runs through the area, keeping most of the area streets from going through. After a bunch of strange turns, we finally ended up at the strange interchange where Addison Street, Manheim Road, and the tollway all come together. I honestly thought I was going to be funneled straight onto the tollway, but somehow we ended up heading south on Manheim—precisely what I wanted to do. Eventually the kids spotted a Popeye's chicken place, which they said sounded good. We ate at Popeye's in New Orleans (the city where they were founded) last summer, so I guess this keeps up a quiz bowl tradition. This suburban location was hardly the "cultural experience" we had in the Big Easy, but everyone did seem to enjoy their lunch.

We'd actually parked in the lot for a Dunkin' Donuts next door to Popeye's, since it was not totally clear which lot went with which restaurant. To try to be nice to them, I went into Dunkin' Donuts and got an orange koolata (basically a slush). That made a very nice dessert.

This afternoon it was the JV's turn to play, and they had two frustratingly close games. Both of the teams they played today were from Michigan. They explained where they were from using the imaginary mitten that Michiganders always seem to be compelled to use, while White Cloud is probably a bit further north than Carson City/Crystal, to an outsider it's probably best to just say both teams are from central Michigan.. Both of these (one of which was technically varsity and one JV) were from small towns that are very rural by Michigan standards (though nothing in the Lower Peninsula is really all that far from big cities). **[Carson City is less than an hour from both Grand Rapids and Lansing, while White Cloud is near Muskegon and Grand Rapids.]** We were matched well against both of these teams, and that made for two very close games. Unfortunately we ended up losing to Carson City/Crystal 225 – 185 (just two "Stump the Experts" questions) and to White Cloud by an even narrower margin, 225 – 215. The JV's narrow losses were almost more frustrating

than seeing the varsity get wiped out, but there was nothing we could do to change the outcome after the games had been played. I've seen coaches for other teams whine about bad decisions (even when they were ahead), but even if I'd wanted to be a bad sport, there was nothing about our losses that could be contested.

Before we left I'd spent quite a bit of time online trying to find a church I could take the kids for weekend mass. The final JV game was at 4:30, and almost every church in the western suburbs had its Saturday mass at 5:00, meaning we'd be late for it. Eventually I found the website of St. Eugene's church (and no, I have no clue who St. Eugene might have been **[apparently a pope from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century]**), which is located on the northwest side of the city of Chicago, about six miles east and north of the Sheraton. When our last game was finished, we piled into the suburbans and hightailed it over to Foster and Canfield. St. Eugene has an enormous parking lot, which also serves their school, and surprisingly we were among the first people there for Saturday mass.

St. Eugene turned out to be an absolutely immense church, probably the biggest church I've ever been to that wasn't a cathedral or shrine. The '70s sanctuary was set up almost as theatre in the round, with the altar on sort of a thrust stage and arc-shaped pews making about 250° of a circle around it. The place probably seats over 3,000 on Easter morning. It was nowhere near full today, but pretty much every pew was occupied somehow. There were probably 1,000 or so in attendance for our mass. Almost everyone here was white, and most were middle aged. There weren't a lot of elderly people, and the Garrigan kids were literally the only people under 21 except for the servers.

The church's best feature was its modern stained glass windows. It was bright and sunny, and the windows glistened in the light. There were also the statues and stations of the cross you'd find in any Catholic church, but they were dwarfed by the vastness of the space. The furnishings were all the blond wood you'd expect in a place of this era. All in all, it was certainly not the most beautiful church I've ever been to, but far from the ugliest as well. (Indeed to my eye St. Eugene looks far better than the much more famous Holy Name Cathedral downtown.)



**Kneeling before mass  
St. Eugene Church – Chicago, Illinois**

Mass itself was memorable, but not really in a good way. What stood out most was the strange and eclectic music they used throughout the service. Three of the four hymns were unfamiliar to our delegation, probably since they used a different missalette than the churches in north central Iowa do. **[St. Cecelia's in Algona has since done away with misallettes and switched to an actual hymnal.]** Strangely only one of the hymns seemed to fit the theme of Corpus Christi (the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ). That was the communion hymn, a dirge called "Taste and See" that was about as different as could be from the syncopated song with the same title we sometimes use at school masses. The final song, "Canticle of the Sun" is a common Catholic recessional **[actually it's more often sung at the start of mass]**, but strangely they sang only one verse of it.

The service music was even stranger, particularly after things we'd been told at school when the Catholic church made significant changes to the mass last December. We spent Advent suffering through responses in plainsong that to my ear seemed more appropriate for Lent. As part of the justification for that, the local priest said that the new decrees from on high require that all the responses be written as part of one common mass—that is, you can't pick and choose responses from different places. It was very clear, though, that St. Eugene did exactly that. One of the responses (the "Holy", I think) went back to the St. Louis Jesuits mass that was popular at the time I went to Garrigan (upbeat tunes that are still some of my favorite liturgical music, even with the words altered to fit the current regulations). There was another response from the Mass of Creation that until quite recently was the standard in most of the churches near Algona and yet another that would have been at home in those boring Advent masses. I rather like using eclectic music, but it was most definitely not what Fr. Girres said they had been told to do in the Diocese of Sioux City.

**[Fr. Girres had likely gotten his direction from the Bishop in Sioux City rather than from Rome. Bishop Nickless is conservative in most things, and he's particularly old-fashioned with regard to the liturgy. He idolized Pope Benedict and likely took any suggestions that Pope had as Gospel. Things have opened up quite a bit since Pope Francis took over, and Fr. Girres has also softened a bit thanks to St. Cecelia's ongoing relationship with a parish in Haiti, where the liturgy is truly joyous.]**

This mass also included a liturgical part that I don't think was included at any mass I've ever been to before. That is the "sequence" a lengthy passage that was pseudo-chanted by the congregation before the gospel. It definitely is lengthy. There were long and short forms (which reminded me of the Palm Sunday gospel with its optional parts), and even the short form took about three minutes to get through. In researching "sequence" while preparing this, I found that the main purpose appears to be filling the time while the priest or deacon makes his way to the lectern. Since 1570 the sequence has only been used at Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and All Souls or masses for the dead. I'm pretty sure it either is optional or was optional until the changes made this year, because I've been to masses on all of those occasions in the past, and the sequence was never part of them. Instead at those services, the cantor or choir sang a verse of the "Alleluia" specific to the occasion. I suppose the rambling poem was supposed to make the day "special", but all it really seemed to do was make people look at their watches.

Strangely, the homily had pretty much nothing to do with Corpus Christi. The pastor remarked that tomorrow was graduation day for the eighth graders at the St. Eugene School. Going off to high school is often a time kids wander away from the church, he said, and he urged the congregation to pray that those kids would keep to the straight and narrow. I couldn't help but notice again that the only students in attendance at tonight's mass were from Garrigan. I wondered if any of the St. Eugene's kids go to Catholic high schools, which would be much more expensive in Chicago than they are in northern Iowa. I also wondered if anyone in their teens attends any of the weekend masses here. Obviously the eighth graders will tomorrow, but I do wonder what happens after they graduate.

As is always true at mass, the homily was followed by the Prayer of the Faithful, the list of intentions to which the congregation responds "Lord, hear our prayer." Most of these were the sort of thing you'd expect—prayers for those in the parish who are ill or who recently died, and prayers for those eighth graders who are graduating. The one that stood out was a lengthy diatribe that ended with a prayer that "Obamacare be repealed". I couldn't join my voice in that response. I certainly do understand why Catholic institutions would not want to pay for insurance that covers things they do not believe in (it makes good sense to me that my insurance at Garrigan has always excluded birth control and abortion), but repealing the whole law seems to me like throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I've always respected Catholics for their long tradition of wanting to help the poor and needy, and to me universal insurance is one of the best ways of helping those in need. It's not really a surprise that it's mostly Catholic politicians who have been leading the fight for national health insurance for decades. Instead of rejecting the entire law, shouldn't the church just work to exclude those things they disagree with? I'd think in doing so they could be a force for the much-needed compromise that no one in Washington can seem to find. Moreover, I just don't think a church service is an appropriate venue for politics. That seems to put me in the minority these days, but I tend to agree with Jesus when he said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God with is God's.

In spite of the big crowd, communion went very quickly. There were many aisles in the sanctuary, and they had stations set up in all of them. They also appeared to be distributing only bread, rather than both bread and wine. While that seemed a bit odd on "the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ", it did keep the lines moving. I was one of only a handful of people in the church who didn't take communion, but even so they got through everyone before a single hymn was over.

We didn't have a real dinner tonight. Instead, after church we drove over to the Dominick's supermarket next to the Cumberland 'L' station. **[The entire Dominick's chain has since gone out of business. This location is now part of a smaller chain called Mariano's.]** I've been to that store numerous times, including on at least two previous quiz bowl trips. I picked up a box of flatbread, some cheese, a pre-packaged chef salad, and some juice and made my way to the self check-out stand. I was done with my shopping in less than ten minutes. Unfortunately most of the group bought out the store, and it took the better part of an hour before everyone was done.

A couple of things caught people's eyes as we waited for others to finish with their shopping. This Dominick's happens to have a rather small parking lot, and they have additional parking underground. From the entrance an escalator leads down to the underground parking. What caught the kids' attention was a separate escalator for carts. I've seen similar devices before in London, New York, and even at the Target in downtown Minneapolis, but this was the first time any of the kids had seen a cart escalator. The other thing that caught the kids' attention was one of the checkers, who was a dead ringer for recent Garrigan graduate Joe Farrell. While I don't think Joey has any relatives in Chicago, this guy really could have been his twin. **["Weatherman Joe" wanted to be a TV weatherman before he was even in high school. He studied communications and meteorology in college. As a college student he kept green screen TV production equipment in his apartment and produced his own forecasts, which he distributed through social media on the internet. A year ago Joe was hired as a reporter and weekend weathercaster for a TV station in Sioux Falls, and his mother (a former Garrigan teacher) tells me he's "living the dream".]**



Joe Farrell



"Da Guyz" team in "Who Wants to Be a Game Show Host"

We rushed back to the Hampton Inn and dumped our stuff there. Then our varsity captain and I headed back to the Sheraton. We were going there because Philip had signed up for the "Who Wants to Be a Game Show Host" competition. For several years now, they've had this competition on one of the evenings at nationals. Graduating seniors can try out to win a "job" (basically a low-pay internship) at next year's tournament. They have coaches play a game against each other, and the kids who signed up for the competition take turns reading the questions. Anna Kollasch expressed interest in this last year, but unfortunately our schedule didn't allow for her to do it. There was nothing pressing we had to do this evening (I'd originally scheduled our team meal for tonight, but it was easy to change that), and Philip's audition provided some interesting entertainment.

Before the event, though, we had a lot of time to kill. One of the tournament officials had told us "Who Wants to Be a Game Show Host" would be at 8:00, while another said we should be there no later than 7:45. Predictably the room where it was scheduled was running late, and it was in fact closer to 8:30 when they finally started

the event. Then, because there weren't enough adult volunteers, they spent quite a while coaxing people from the audience to participate in the mock game. I had signed up, and I ended up on a team with two rather jock-ish coaches and "Dave, the Tech Guy", who had been drafted from the audience. I'd visited briefly with Dave while we were waiting to go in. He was accompanying a group from one of the Ohio schools. He wasn't their coach, but just came along because they needed a male chaperon. He definitely didn't want to play, and it took more than a little coaxing to get him to come up and fill out the team.

One of the jocks quickly assigned himself to be captain of our team (though he ended up being the one person who didn't actually answer any questions), and he named us "Da Guyz". I suppose that was a play on the stereotypical Chicago sports fans who refer to "Da Bears" and "Da Bulls". Our opponents were four female coaches who called themselves "The Ladies Club". Three of the four women pretty much just sat there, but their captain (a gray-haired, nasal-voiced woman named Sue) more than made up for the others' silence.



Philip Detrick and "Uncle Ernie" (Ernie Anderson, a radio DJ who was one of the main tournament readers) at the "Who Wants to Be a Game Show Host" audition

dominate, but eventually our team managed to score some points as well. Most of the time I was slow on the buzzer myself (something I'm sure my students could relate to). I did manage to buzz in quickly on one question though (identifying Alberta as home of tar sands and the Athabasca River), and I also helped out on a several of the bonuses. We were still behind going into the final question, and it turned out that the star was "Dave the Tech Guy". That correct answer to the final question was "Windows 7" (Microsoft's latest operating system [I'm writing this revision on Windows 10, but I still use Windows 7 at school.]), so that played directly into his strength. Every point counted, and I was proud to contribute to a win.



Unfortunately Philip didn't fare as well as "Da Guyz" team. Sitting on the end, I could hear the big wigs conferring after the game. It could tell that Philip was one of the people under serious consideration (as he should have been), but it was also kind of clear their preference was for a girl. There aren't a lot of girls in quiz bowl, and in fact just two had auditioned in this contest. One of them was probably the worst single entry in the contest. The other, a girl from Palisade, seemed quite forgettable to me, but she was the ultimate winner.

[They do seem to have taken an "affirmative action" approach to casting the student workers at recent tournaments. There have been lots of girls and people of color, but I don't recall seeing a single white

Once the room was available the host for the evening (Ernie Anderson, a happy-go-lucky DJ from West Virginia who has been a reader every time we've been to nationals) explained that all the students trying out should introduce themselves, telling where they were from and what they would be doing in college. Each of them would then read four questions in the game.

Philip had been the first person to sign up for the competition, so he was the first to audition this evening. He did a decent job. His introduction went very well (particularly for being the first one up), and he read through the questions smoothly, with only one minor mispronunciation. He was in control of the game, and he was also by far the best dressed of the candidates.

One by one, several others came up to audition as well. Not surprisingly, most had more impressive future plans than Philip. Instead of majoring in musical theatre at a small college in Iowa, the others were headed to Ivy League schools with more traditionally academic majors. The bulk of them came from just two different schools: Palisades High School: in Grand Junction, Colorado and the University of Detroit Jesuit High School (which would end up being the overall winner of this year's tournament). Both schools obviously had every single person on their teams audition, and it honestly got a bit old listening to all of them.

The game itself turned out to be very close. At first I thought the women (or more specifically "Sue") would



**male. It's fairly universal that the student readers are bad; pretty much all the players complain about them. So, perhaps it's a good thing that Philip didn't make it.]**

We went back to the Hampton Inn, and most of the group congregated in the breakfast area to eat their snacks. (I'm not sure why they couldn't have their dinner in one of the guest rooms, but that's what they did.) When they were done eating, most of the kids spent some time swimming in the hotel pool.

I stayed up until after midnight working on my little netbook computer. I had taken literally hundreds of pictures at a baseball game earlier in the week, and I needed to re-size and crop them and then put them together on web pages. During the school year my students do pages like this. I don't have computer students in summer, though, and baseball deserves to have their action shots up there just as much as football or volleyball. Even working for a three-hour block, I didn't come close to finishing everything. Eventually I got tired and decided to settle in for the night.

## ☺☹☹ SUNDAY, JUNE 10 ☺☹☹ CHICAGO AREA, ILLINOIS

The breakfast area was jammed again this morning, so again I took my tray back to my room. Today they had sausage patties in addition to the scrambled eggs. While I'm not a huge fan of sausage, it did make for some variety.

Our first game wasn't until 10:30, so around 9:30 we walked as a group over to the Sheraton. The JV team started off our day today. They began by playing a JV team from St. Edward, the Cleveland-area school that was staying at our hotel. At Garrigan, our arch-rival is also called "St. Ed's" (though the Ft. Dodge school is Edmond, not Edward), and like the school we were playing today their principal school color is green. The kids were definitely motivated to beat them. Unfortunately neither team played very well, and we ended up on the short end of a 185 – 105 score.

At 11:30 the JV played their fourth game, this time vs. Father Dueñas Memorial High School. Father Dueñas is the first-ever competitor at nationals from the island territory of Guam. The school's namesake was a Filipino priest who was martyred during the Japanese occupation of the island in World War II. Their team was made up of stocky native island boys who looked like they should be playing football rather than quiz bowl. They definitely knew their stuff, though. When one of our parents asked before the game if they'd traveled to the mainland before, one of them noted that they had just been in Washington for a national history competition. They were an all-senior varsity team, and history was far from the only subject they knew well. Our team lost 275 – 120, and that was actually one of the closer games Fr. Dueñas played.



**Father Dueñas Memorial School – Guam  
(The Boys Chapel is in the photo at right.)**



**[Father Dueñas has done quite well at national quiz bowl in the years since we played them. They've also excelled in national math and science competitions. I visited their website in preparing this revision and was intrigued to find they require an admissions test and comprehensive academic tests at the end of each year. Their tuition, while three times what we charge at Garrigan, is actually fairly reasonable compared to private schools around the country. There appear to be additional fees for virtually everything, though.]**

Much of the group spent lunch snacking on more of the stuff they bought last night. I joined a couple of the boys in walking over to a BP station between the two hotels that included a Subway and a Dunkin' Donuts. For those who don't know, I should point out that Dunkin' Donuts has surprisingly good savory items on their menu. I had a hot ham sandwich that came on a fresh buttery croissant, and it made a delightful lunch. It's probably good that you can't find Dunkin' Donuts west of the Mississippi. **[There are now Dunkin' Donuts locations in Des Moines, Ames, Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, and even Mt. Pleasant, but fortunately there's not one near Algona yet.]**

I did a bit more work on the baseball action shots and then took my netbook computer with me back to the Sheraton. In our first game of the afternoon the varsity team played Warner Public School, a tiny rural school from Oklahoma. It was a team we probably should have stood a decent chance against, but we didn't have much luck with anyone on this trip. The team ended up losing 210 – 145.

At 3pm both the varsity and JV teams played at the same time. The varsity played a school called LAMP from Alabama. While they told our kids they were just a public school, in fact LAMP stands for "Loveless Academic Magnet Program" and is a school for gifted students in Montgomery. National publications have listed it as one of the "top twenty elite high schools" in the United States. It's not really a surprise that we lost to them 310 – 130.

I chose to watch the JV game in this time slot. They faced a team just called LaGrange on the schedule. LaGrange is a small town in northern Georgia, and if we were playing LaGrange High School, there's a good chance we might have beaten them. Instead we were playing "The LaGrange School", a private academy that is essentially a modern-day boarding school. Their website notes that tuition there costs just \$235.72 a week, but if you do the math that works out to almost \$8500 a year—plus room and board. **[As of 2018 it's \$9,490.]** Garrigan's tuition has gone up a lot in recent years, but it's still just a fourth of that amount. Not surprisingly, LaGrange was the most stuck-up team we played. I'd love to have beaten them, but unfortunately we lost 265 – 145. A small consolation was that LaGrange went on to win the JV championship at the tournament.

The varsity team had back-to-back games, so the second the JV finished their LaGrange game, I dashed down the hall and snuck into a game vs. Sand Rock, Alabama that was already in progress. Though only about ten minutes had gone by, they were already well into the bonus round. Our captain gave me a thumbs up, indicating that they were actually winning the game at that point. Things got a bit closer after the lightning round, and then in the "Stump the Experts" round question after question after question went unanswered. The final score was 145 – 110, our one and only win. It was a narrow win vs. a less than stellar team, but we'll take it.

Even with our kids playing twelve games total, there was still a lot of down time. It seems like they always spread out the games so the breaks are never long enough to actually do much of anything. We spent a lot of time just sitting around bored outside the Sheraton's meeting rooms. In the process I felt kind of sorry for the hotel's guests who weren't associated with the tournament. There was, for instance, a wedding taking place at the Sheraton today (strange for a Sunday), and the happy couple and their attendants had to elbow their through the throng of bored teenagers on their way to the ballroom.

The hotel was also set up so that the meeting rooms were mixed in among ordinary guest rooms. I definitely hope those rooms were unoccupied, because with all those kids out in the hallways, it would have been loud and annoying for anyone to have been staying in them. I happened to use those guest rooms to my advantage, though. When I turned my computer on between games, I found out that in addition to the usual paid wireless internet, they had a special promotion during the month of June where Google was offering free internet to hotel guests (though why they'd choose to pay for what they could get free, I have no clue). The Google service was not password protected, but it did prompt me to enter a room number. I had noticed earlier that Room 107 was across from the Edens Room (strangely, most of the Sheraton's meeting rooms are named after Chicagoland expressways), so I typed in 107, and the service immediately connected. I found out later that pretty much all the kids had entered that same room number on their phones, tablets, and the like. Obviously they didn't set any limit on things, because there had to have been dozens of devices logging in as Room 107.



**Garrigan kids playing a card game between games at nationals**

After logging in, I used the time between games to upload all the baseball pictures to the website. While there was no great rush in getting them uploaded, it would turn out to be a good thing that I did.

Our next game was an interesting match-up. In all the years we've gone to nationals, we'd never before faced an Iowa team. In fact, most years we were the only team from Iowa in the tournament. This year, after traveling all the way to Chicago, we found ourselves facing a team from Newman Catholic High School in Mason City, the "big town" where people from Algona go to shop. It's just an hour away and literally just down the road from us. Newman was actually built at the same time and to the exact same floor plan as Garrigan (strange, since they're not even in the same diocese). Though the two schools have since been renovated in different ways, the buildings are still eerily similar. While Garrigan doesn't have nearly the rivalry with Newman that we do with St. Ed's, we do face the Newman Knights in pretty much every sport, and we also see them multiple times throughout the year at area quiz bowl tournaments. **[The rivalry with Newman has actually increased in recent years, since they're in the same athletic conference as Garrigan and also in the same class in almost every sport.]**

Normally I'd say playing Newman would be a good thing. While Mason City is quite a bit larger than Algona, the school has almost exactly the same enrollment we do and really is a lot like us. Unfortunately our JV team was playing a varsity team of mostly seniors from Newman. The Newman team wasn't outstanding, but they were good. A different mixture of our kids might well have beat the Newman team, but the ones who were playing this game didn't. The Knights (a team that actually included the son of one of my former students) ended up beating our JV 245 – 135.

In our final game, the varsity played Daviess County, a school from Owensboro, Kentucky. They were a very good team and would almost certainly have beaten any combination of Garrigan kids I put against them (probably including the much more successful group we had at nationals last year). Something frustrating in this game was the lightning round. Our captain, the future musical theatre major, chose a lightning round on drama. Somewhat predictably the questions involved identifying the playwrights of plays that were well known a generation or two ago, but that most of today's kids haven't even heard of. I think our kids got three questions correct, and the other team cancelled out some of those points by identifying one or two others. They then chose a category that boiled down to responses that all contained "el"—things like El Paso, El Dorado, and El Niño. That was a far easier lightning round, and I think they got nine out of ten answers correct. The one I recall them missing was El Al Airlines, and our kids didn't get that either. While we still would have lost, the score would have been a lot closer than 370 – 105 had we chosen a different lightning round. There's always a lot in quiz bowl that comes down to luck, though.

We went back to the Hampton Inn, and everyone changed into more casual clothes. Then it was time for our "official" team dinner. My original plan was to take the kids to the Rosemont location of Giordano's, an Italian chain with restaurants throughout the Chicago area. I called during one of the breaks between games, and a rather rude woman told me they weren't taking reservations for this evening. (It turned out there was a big music festival in Rosemont, which was probably the reason for that.) So, I checked out other locations of the chain and eventually made an 8:00 reservation at the downtown Giordano's, which is on Jackson Street kitty-corner from what used to be the Sears Tower (which is what the guy on the phone still called it in giving me directions).



**At the Jackson blue line subway station – downtown Chicago**

So, instead of driving to a restaurant in Rosemont, we instead drove to the CTA park-and-ride there. We boarded an 'L' train and rode downtown. Our car was empty for most of the ride, and the bulk of the group seemed to enjoy the ride. One of our students, though, is very strongly affected by sound. The trains run fast through the stretch of subway just west of downtown, and it gets VERY loud in that section. This kid was in obvious discomfort and was literally holding his hands to his ears all through that stretch.

They've done track work that has taken away the slow zones on the O'Hare branch of the blue line, which makes the trip downtown about ten minutes faster than it used to be (35 rather than 45 minutes from Rosemont). Because of that we got to the restaurant well before our reservation time. I rather sheepishly asked the hostess if we could be seated, and surprisingly they were in fact ready for us. The waitress was taking our drink orders at 7:45, a full fifteen minutes early.



**Adults in the group enjoying Chicago-style pizza**

While Margaret tells me I took her to Giordano's at some point, if I did I certainly don't remember it. I'm pretty sure this was the first time I'd ever been to any of their locations. It was a pleasant restaurant, and a good place to go with a big group. They specialize in Chicago-style pizza (deep dish pizza with meat on the bottom and tons and tons of cheese above it), but they also serve a wide variety of other Italian entrees (I had lasagna) as well as American-style "bar food". The prices are reasonable, and they refill soft drinks endlessly. It's a bit on the loud side, but not to the point of being annoying. We had a nice dinner, and so did a number of Hispanic and Middle Eastern families who were sharing the dining room with us.

I put the meal on my credit card, since the school card wasn't working. It will actually be paid by my superintendent. He and his wife have provided money for the kids to enjoy a nice team meal for several years now, and we certainly appreciate their generosity. **[Unfortunately Gene died of cancer a couple years after this trip. I certainly miss him.]**

After dinner I walked the group over to the Quincy 'L' station, which just a block or so away from the restaurant. Quincy is one of the oldest 'L' stations; it looks rather like an old-fashioned train depot up in the sky. We caught a brown line train, and rode it around

the loop. It's always fun to ride past all the sky-scrappers at second-floor level, and the area looks different at night than it does during the day. We took the escalators downstairs at Clark & Lake and caught a very full blue line train. It was standing room only when we left downtown, but eventually things emptied out and we were all able to get seats.



ABOVE: Riding the blue line train  
BELOW: "Savor complexity" ad



Like many transit cars these days, this one had all its advertisements bought by a single sponsor. In this case, the sponsor was Amstel Light beer. They had placed signs above the seats, beside the doors, and even on the ceiling. The theme of these ads was "Savor Complexity", presumably trying to imply that their beer had a complex taste rather than the simple, plebian flavor of standard American beers. The ads really didn't feature the beer at all, though. Instead they described various everyday things in extremely complex ways. The one on the ceiling showed a vast web that attempted to show the relationship between various divisions of rock music. Not being a true aficionado of all the strange sub-genres, I can't say whether it was accurate or fanciful, but it definitely was interesting. The ad above the seat across from me gave a collection of fun facts about traffic lights—like the fact that there are 2,732 of them in the city of Chicago or that the average person spends two weeks of his life stopped at red lights. I photographed another ad that gave excruciating minutia about the life of pigeons, and there were other signs that savored complexity by giving trivia on various other topics. Reading all those signs did make time pass more quickly as we made our way back to Rosemont.

Our return trip actually took a bit longer than it had taken to get downtown. That's because they were doing overnight maintenance work at the Cumberland station, one stop east of Rosemont. In that section only one track was open, so we had to wait for an inbound train to leave the station before we could proceed. We'd had a similar delay on our last trip to Chicago, but fortunately this one went more quickly than the delays we had then. **[This type of delay is extremely common in Chicago, and it's fairly frequent on every other rail system that's open twenty-four hours a day. Systems that shut down overnight can do their repairs then, when customers don't notice it. When the trains run around the clock, though, individual pieces have to be shut down from time to time for maintenance.]**

As we turned out of the Rosemont park-and-ride, we saw lots of flashing lights. Police had pulled over several vehicles just south of the station. I'm not sure what was up, but fortunately our suburbans were not stopped.

We passed the flashing lights cautiously and proceeded south and west. It was after eleven when we got back to the hotel. The kids stayed up quite a bit longer, but I think most of our group got a decent night's sleep.

☺☹☹ MONDAY, JUNE 11 ☺☹☹  
CHICAGO AREA, ILLINOIS

The kids all slept in today, but I was up earlier than normal if anything. I went down to breakfast and was pleased to see there was ham (just about my favorite meat at any meal) among the offerings this morning. Then I went out for a brief walk, mostly stopping at the BP station where I picked up some juice I'd enjoy in the evening. **[It occurs to me as I write this that I really should take extra juice from breakfast and keep it in my room (likely in a refrigerator) for the evening. I just might do that when I travel this coming summer.]**

It was around 9:30 when the group gathered in the lobby. The up-side of having been eliminated from playoffs was that today was an entirely free day we could use for sightseeing. We went in three groups over to the Rosemont park-and-ride. This morning I took a different route, heading up to I-190 just east of the airport and then taking the interstate east to the 'L' station. That went much quicker than the route we'd taken on city streets earlier. Unfortunately the interchange at Rosemont doesn't have a westbound entrance, so we'd have to take streets to get back to the hotel.

We soon caught a train and rode south to Clark & Lake, where we made our way upstairs and transferred to the green line. Several in the group seemed surprised that I knew Chicago transit as well as I do, but different 'L' lines really are second nature to me. At one time or another I've been on literally every mile of track in the CTA system, and I've been outside in neighborhoods (both good and bad) near most of the stops. I've done my research when taking kids to other cities as well, but in I'm definitely more confident on the Chicago 'L' than any other transit system in America.

When we arrived at the Roosevelt 'L' station one of the chaperones and one of the students in the group announced that they had to use the bathroom. What they actually asked was where they could find a restroom in the station. There are no public restrooms in CTA stations. Supposedly there were decades ago, but they quickly became squalid and were closed. I knew we had just a short bus ride left in our morning journey, but the two made it clear they needed a toilet now, so finding one took precedence over catching the bus. I walked them over to a Starbucks just east of our bus stop, but unfortunately the coffee bar didn't seem to have any facilities. So we crossed the street to a BP convenience store. They did have toilets, and the bathrooms were actually surprisingly well kept up, given the rather gritty surroundings. **[It's amusing that I described the area around the Roosevelt 'L' station as "gritty". That would have been an apt description when I first came to Chicago years ago. The South Loop neighborhood around Roosevelt has rapidly gentrified, though, and today it's filled with toney condos and the sort of businesses (like Starbucks) where the people who live in those condos spend their money. It's a very nice area for at least a mile in every direction.]**

Since I was there, I used the restroom myself and then browsed through the shop in an attempt to be an actual customer. I bought a bag of chips and an over-sized can of Pepsi with artwork on it featuring Michael Jackson. I was wearing cargo shorts, and I was able to put the can in one of the pockets—allowing me to save it for my collection.

Once those in need had also used the restroom, we made our way past some construction and back to the bus stop. Perhaps needless to say the bus our group wanted had come and gone while we were at the convenience store. I think the next one was probably late, because the group killed a total of about half an hour before we were on our way again.

They've changed the bus routes in this area. It used to be that the #12 Roosevelt bus went east from this station to the museum campus. I remember Margaret and me taking that bus when we were here a few years ago at Christmas. I'm glad I checked on line before this trip, though, because I know that now the Roosevelt bus terminates just east of the 'L' station. To get to the museum campus you have to take bus 146, which runs a convoluted route coming all the way from the north Lake Shore Drive and winding through downtown before heading east on Roosevelt. Eventually that bus came. It was standing room only, but fortunately we only had about a five minute ride to our destination, a stop that serves both Soldier Field and the Field Museum of Natural History. **[There's also a free trolley that runs between the 'L' station and the museum campus. That's what they really intend tourists to take. The bus is designed to make easy connections with all the other 'L' routes and with various buses downtown—which makes it convenient for workers.]**

After scanning a list of things to do in Chicago, the kids had chosen the Field Museum as one of their "must sees". I can't say it would have been my first choice, but of course the trip is for them, not me. We made our way past the slow and inefficient ticketing area, and then we met as a group to decide how long people wanted to stay in the museum. There was quite a bit of argument about that. One of the kids made it clear he would prefer to spend as long as possible, suggesting a departure time about five hours from when we arrived. Many of the others sensed they would be bored to stay that long and suggested just we stay just a couple of hours. After a bit of discussion, the group consensus was a compromise between those two times. My bet is no one was really happy (and I was certainly bored myself well before our scheduled departure time), but at least it was a decision.

The standard admission price allowed access to one film or special exhibit at the museum (and choosing which they wanted to see caused the biggest delay at ticketing). Most of the kids chose an exhibit called "Extreme Mammals" which they seemed to like. I instead opted for a 3-D movie about ancient Egypt. The film was interesting, if perhaps a bit too long. It mostly focused on how Egyptian artifacts were discovered and what scientists do to make sense of them. There was absolutely no reason for the movie to be in 3-D, and frankly I found that aspect of it annoying.

I've seen the Field Museum several times in the past, and it honestly hasn't changed much since I was here last. I spent quite a bit of time on this trip admiring the older galleries, where elegant hardwood cases house samples of rocks and insects. I was really admiring the display cases as much as what was in them. They really are beautiful, and they fit well with the classical architecture of the museum. I really hope they don't replace these with more "gee whiz" exhibits. **[The trick really is to find a balance. They need to keep some of the old and find some stuff that will interest younger patrons.]**

I also made the rounds of all the famous exhibits. I saw "Sue", the big dinosaur skeleton that is probably the museum's most famous exhibit. They apparently recently discovered that Sue is in fact male, though they've kept the name (perhaps in line with that old Johnny Cash song about a boy named Sue). I also walked through the "strange lands and funny peoples" exhibits about life in the Pacific, Asia, and Africa. All those exhibits seem forever trapped in a time warp, as if nothing has changed in the Third World since about 1975.

The entrance to the Pacific exhibit features a mosaic map of Oceania that you can walk on. As I did so, I pondered just how long it must have taken the team from Fr. Dueñas to get all the way from Guam to Chicago and how much their trip must have cost. I know how long it takes to get from the Midwest to Hawaii (longer than it takes to get to Europe), and the trip from Honolulu to Guam would be about the same as going from New York to Los Angeles. I also pondered how long it took my father to travel between the different islands during World War II. The Pacific really is enormous.

(In preparing this travelogue, I had to answer the question about travel to Guam that I was pondering at the museum. So I checked on Orbitz, and the cheapest round-trip fare I could find from Antonio Won Pat International Airport in Hagåtña, Guam to O'Hare was \$1621—for travel about three months after booking. Eastbound you leave Guam on United Airlines early Thursday morning, stop in Honolulu, and arrive in Chicago early that same afternoon—but 21 hours after departure. On the return trip you leave Chicago at noon

on Tuesday and arrive in Guam at 1:48am Thursday. Again there's a stopover in Honolulu, and the total travel time is about 22 hours. They also offer several two-stop itineraries (mostly GUM—HON—LAX—ORD), and if you don't like Hawaii, you can instead choose to change planes in Tokyo, Beijing, or Auckland—with travel times as long as 36 hours one way.)

[It's actually become easier to check multiple airlines online in recent years. In 2016 the cheapest and shortest routing from Guam to O'Hare is on All Nippon Airways, with a connection at Haneda Airport in Tokyo. (Interestingly, I've been researching flights to Australia, and there's a good chance that if I ever do fly to Sydney I'll also fly with ANA and make a connection in the Tokyo transit lounge.) That takes 17 hours and costs \$1,718 round trip, which is about three-fourths of what it costs to fly to Australia. The American carriers are mostly around \$1,800 these days. It's important to note, though, that Guam is considered a domestic destination, which means that "basic economy" fares on United, American, or Delta don't include luggage (not even a carry-on) or any other amenities. If you plan to bring any bags at all, the round-trip would be about \$100 more.]

[My father, of course, would have traveled by ship during World War II. My brother Paul recently took a cruise to Hawaii, and it took the better part of a week to get there from California. Presumably it would take three or four more days to reach Guam. There are times in the past I've toyed with the idea of seeing some of the islands that were famous during the war, but unless I win the lottery, that will never happen. Round-trip airfare to any one of them from the U.S. mainland is around \$4,000 round-trip. I could theoretically fly to a base (most likely Guam or Tokyo) and fly to individual islands from there. Each of those side-trips would be around a thousand bucks, though—not something I could come up with on the spur of the moment.]



**“Sue” and other displays at the Field Museum**

I made my way quickly through the Arctic exhibition and went down to the ancient Egypt display. I'd seen the mummies before, so it didn't take me too long to go through there. While I was there I saw the kid who had wanted to stay all day. He was reading every single sign and gawking in detail at every artifact. At the rate he was going, I could see how it would take him hours to see the whole place.

One display that sounded like it should be interesting was about DNA. That turned out to be a disappointment, though. The bulk of it was a glassed-in area where scientists were supposedly working on extracting DNA. They were fiddling with test tubes and pipettes, but there was nothing explaining what they might actually have been doing. It was also a bit disturbing to be looking in on people while they were working, almost like I was at a zoo where the animals on display were humans. Around the glass cage were a few signs explaining how DNA worked, but there was nothing there I hadn't learned from watching various crime-solving shows on TV.

I bought a cute little souvenir at the Field Museum. Scattered around the basement they had several old injection molding machines that dispensed cheap plastic toys. Many years ago I bought a little plastic polar bear from a similar machine at the Brookfield Zoo west of Chicago, and it's become one of my perennial Christmas decorations. At the Field Museum I picked up a little green dinosaur (which looks remarkably like the Sinclair mascot), which makes a cute little addition to the knick-knacks in my living room. **[I ended up taking the dinosaur to school, and it quickly got destroyed as kids played with it. I think the thing cost 50¢, and I probably did get that much value from it.]**

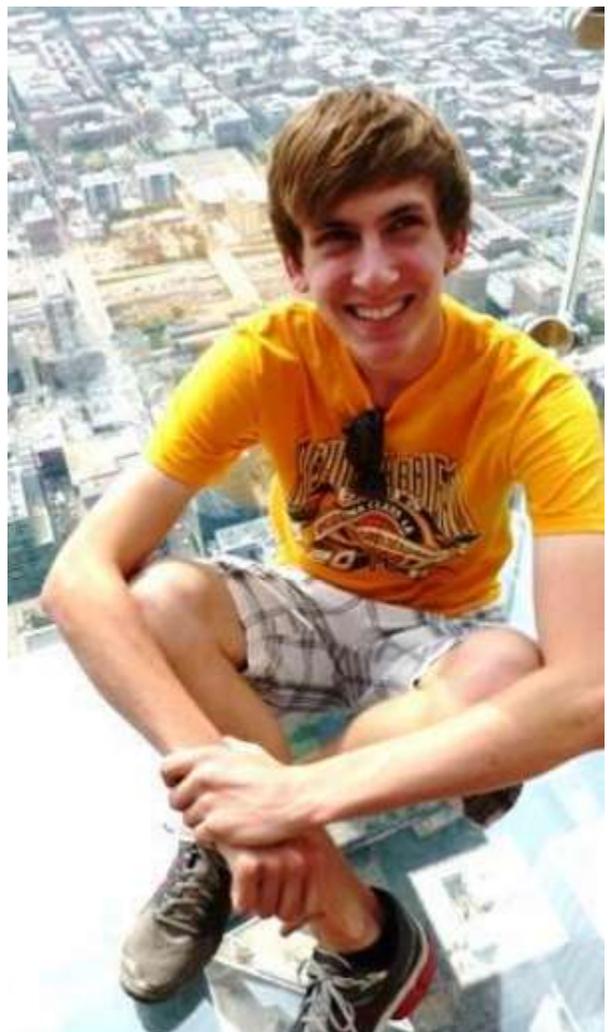
We left the Field Museum a little after 2:30 and made our way to the westbound bus stop. Before too long a bus arrived, nearly as crowded as the one we'd come in on. We stayed on this one a bit longer, passing Roosevelt station and continuing north on State Street to downtown. We exited just past Jackson Street and then walked west to our next destination, Willis Tower.

I'm really not sure why a British insurance company saw fit to buy the naming rights to the building everyone still calls the Sears Tower, but for three years now it's had their name. It's been twenty years since Sears had any offices in the building, though, so I suppose it can be called whatever they want. These days this is nowhere even remotely close to the tallest building on earth (which since 2007 has been the mammoth Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is about a third again as tall). It's still the tallest building in America, though **[it's since been surpassed by the new World Trade Center in New York]**, and the kids all wanted to see it.

These days before you can even buy tickets to go up in the tower, you have to go through a metal detector and x-ray like you'd find at an airport. The security is friendly and efficient, but it is a sad sign of the times that everyone who enters the building has to deal with it. Once we made it past security, we paid our admission (\$17, I think) and then proceeded to an exhibit hall whose real purpose is to slow down the crowd so not everyone is upstairs at the same time. We quickly wandered past the exhibits and then killed time in watching a movie on the history of the place. The movie had changed slightly since the last time I was here, but I can't say I learned anything new from it. (They actually sell more expensive tickets that allow you to skip the exhibits and movie; it's kind of strange to pay more to get less, but of course what you're really doing is cutting to the front of the line.) Once the movie was over, we made our way to the elevators that whisked us up more than 100 floors in the sky.

They've done major renovations on the skydeck since I was here last. The biggest change is a glass deck that hangs out from the west side of the building, more than a thousand feet above Wacker Drive. In preparing for a trip Margaret and I will be making to Toronto at the end of the summer, I found that they stole this idea straight from the CN Tower, and apparently other tall buildings (the latest being the Space Needle in Seattle) are joining the glass floor bandwagon. There are actually three such ledges at Willis Tower, but one of them is occupied by a professional photographer, which leaves a line of people waiting to step out at the other two. Eventually we all did, and I must say it is a strange experience. While I knew the engineers had seen to it that the ultra-thick glass that was cantilevered from the side was perfectly safe for supporting my weight, it was still weird to look straight down at buildings and streets. **[It's kind of strange that they chose to put the glass ledge on the west side of the building. That is the side that has the least impressive view. The west side of Chicago is very much "the hood", and most of it isn't even close to gentrifying. The photos would be much nicer if they'd placed the ledge north or east, so you could see the skyline in the background.]**

They have a gift shop on the sky deck, with surprisingly reasonable prices. I picked up a coffee mug there as well as a couple of candy bars that featured the tower on their labels. We then made our way down to the basement, where we were greeted by another gift shop, and then another, and then another. I completely ignored all of those, but several in the group spent lots of time browsing through them (and particularly enjoying free samples of candy in the final shop). While we were waiting for everyone to finish their shopping, I did drop a couple bucks for another souvenir—an injection mold plastic Willis Tower which now stands beside the dinosaur on my living room bookshelf. **[That also got destroyed by kids at school. I replaced it on another trip to Chicago, and the replacement has also been destroyed. While I'm happy to blame them, the destruction isn't entirely the kids' fault. The plastic they use in those injection molding machines is very brittle, so even handling them casually tends to make the little sculptures crumble. I believe the polar bear I got at Brookfield Zoo in decent shape, but all it ever does is go from a storage box to my Christmas tree.]**



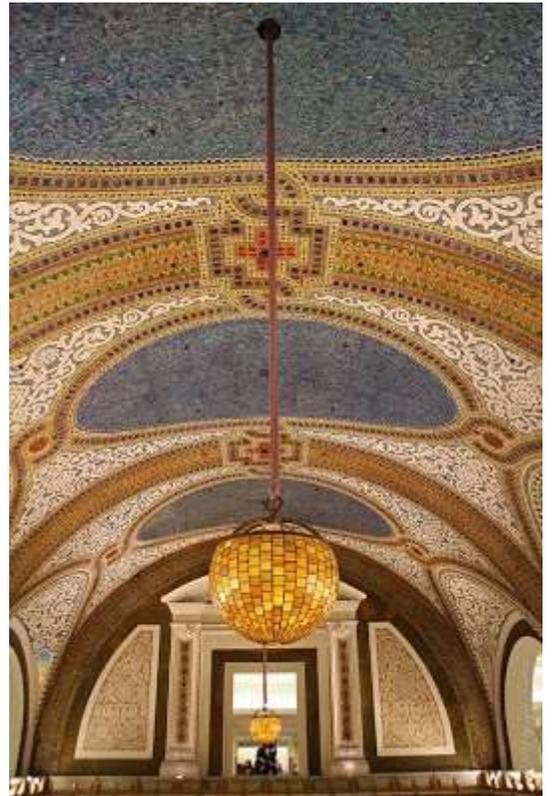
The glass ledge at Willis Tower

After more than half an hour in the gift shops, everyone finally assembled, and we could leave. I walked the group back to Quincy station, and we took the 'L' around the loop to Randolph. We got out there and made our way into Macy's, the former Marshall Field's flagship store. Both the kids and adults were impressed with the enormous department store, and especially the beautiful Tiffany mosaic ceiling over its atrium. No one bought a thing, but I think pretty much everyone was glad to see the place.



We exited to the subway and took the red line north to the Chicago stop. The kids who had been there on Friday requested to go back to Water Tower Place, so we returned there this afternoon. We again had a group conference on how long we should stay, and the kids decided on about two hours. That was about an hour and a half longer than I would have preferred, but it gave them time for the shopping they wanted.

The rest of the group ate at Water Tower Place, but I was rather unimpressed with the options there. I instead went to a place we'd passed on there from the subway station. It was part of a local chain called Soupbox. It's not too hard to figure out what their specialty is. I had a large bowl of potato soup, together with what was probably the best grilled cheese sandwich I've ever had. It was sourdough bread and real cheddar cheese, with crispy



bacon thrown in. It was buttered liberally and then cooked in a sandwich press. There was certainly nothing healthy about my dinner, but it tasted very good.

I spent an hour or so just walking through the neighborhood. While it's tourist central, this is honestly one of my least favorite parts of Chicago. The area comes across as too crowded and too pretentious. I did at least get some burn some of the calories from the cheese and potatoes walking through it, though.

On the ground floor of Water Tower Place there's an Asian fast food place called Wao Bao, and I stopped there after my walk. I'd been there before, and I knew one of their specialties is homemade ginger ale. While it's overpriced (around three bucks), the stuff really is quite good.

After a refreshing drink I browsed through the Water Tower Place Macy's. While it occupies seven floors, there's really nothing in this store you couldn't find in the department store than anchors any mall in America. It definitely lacks the atmosphere of the State Street location. I did end up buying two pairs of dress socks, which will replace some I've had that were on their last legs.

Eventually the group re-assembled and we walked back to the subway. We took the red line back down to Jackson and walked through the tunnel to the blue line platform. On the blue line platform we were entertained by a Chinese couple who were playing some strange instrument I'd never seen before. Eventually a train came, and we made our way north to the Western Avenue stop.

The dinner at Giordano's yesterday had come to less than the amount my superintendent and his wife had donated, so the group would now be enjoying dessert. The last time we'd been in Chicago for quiz bowl, the kids enjoyed ice cream at Margie's, a classic candy store and ice cream parlor that has been in business since the '20s, and this group wanted to go there as well. Margie's has recently opened a new location in a much nicer neighborhood. The kids wanted to go to the original place, though—the same place the Beatles went to back in the '60s. That's why we exited the 'L' at Western and Milwaukee. **[The kids were definitely right to choose the original Margie's. If the goal is just eating, the two Margie's locations are interchangeable. The new one has almost no personality, though. It seems a lot like that Starbucks we'd been to earlier today. The original location really is a step back into yesteryear, and it's always worth the trip.]**

While the place looks like a dive, Margie's is busy pretty much every night in summer. It was packed when we arrived, and we had to split into smaller groups to have any chance of being seated quickly. The group I was in was the first to be seated. Unfortunately, they attempted to seat four of us at what was really a booth for two. We crammed in, but there was literally no room to move. Eventually the waiter re-seated us at a larger booth and put a person who had come by herself where we had been sitting.

Margie's really is a fun place to eat. Their sundaes are served in shell-shaped dishes on top of silver trays, with silver gravy boats filled with hot fudge or caramel on the side. None of the kids had experienced an ice cream place that served things quite so elegantly before (and I'm not sure I ever have other than at Margie's), and it all comes at about the same prices you'd pay at Dairy Queen. **[While the ice cream is good at Margie's, it's far from the best I've had. It's the presentation that makes their desserts special. Having ice cream at Margie's always makes me think of my mother describing the treats she would save up to have when she was a little girl. It really is something out of another era.]**



**ABOVE: An extremely large strawberry soda  
RIGHT: A typical sundae**

**Margie's Candies – Chicago, Illinois**

I gave the kids cash to pay their bills and bought myself some candy (which will be reimbursed by the school) to make up that amount. I like Margie's chocolates, because they're tasty without being pretentious. **[Each time I'm in Chicago I'll buy either a box of truffles or some English toffee at Margie's.**

**It's not cheap, but it doesn't break the bank either—and the candy is extremely tasty.]**



After everyone finished eating, we made our way back to the 'L' station and caught a train back to Rosemont. We again had a delay around Cumberland, but we still made it back fairly quickly.

Back at the hotel most of the kids stayed up quite late. The other chaperones watched them, so I was able to get to sleep fairly quickly. **[It was kind of nice that the other chaperones were mothers who were interested in watching their own kids. They enjoyed being down by the pool with them, and it freed up my time.]**

☺☹☹ **TUESDAY, JUNE 12** ☺☹☹  
SCHILLER PARK, ILLINOIS TO ALGONA, IOWA

I was up at 6:15 this morning. The kids were all still sleeping, so I grabbed the account folios that had been placed under their doors. I was pleased that the bills were all correct—even if they weren't on the credit card they were supposed to be. I then went downstairs and was surprised to find the breakfast room empty. It was early for breakfast, and many of the kids from other high schools had already left.

Check-out was efficient, but some in the group (particularly one of our chaperones) were slow in getting their stuff loaded up. Eventually, though, we were able to be on our way. We locked the back of the vehicles and drove back to the Rosemont park-and-ride. The lot was surprisingly empty, and we were able to park closer in than we had yesterday. While we were waiting for the 'L', I took a moment to snap a picture of the suburbans in the parking lot.

We took the train downtown to Washington and exited to the pedway. Because some in the group were a bit slow in getting ready, we had just missed a train we might have connected to,



**School suburbans at the Rosemont park-and-ride**

so we were in now in no particular hurry. I stopped to get a cream puff from the Beard Papa stand in the pedway, and a couple of others in the group used the restroom in the new Block 37 mall before we continued on our way. **[Beard Papa, a Japanese chain that Margaret and I had patronized in Hawaii, has since closed its Chicago location. The location where they used to be has gone through at least three other incarnations since then. I believe it's now an organic juice place.]**

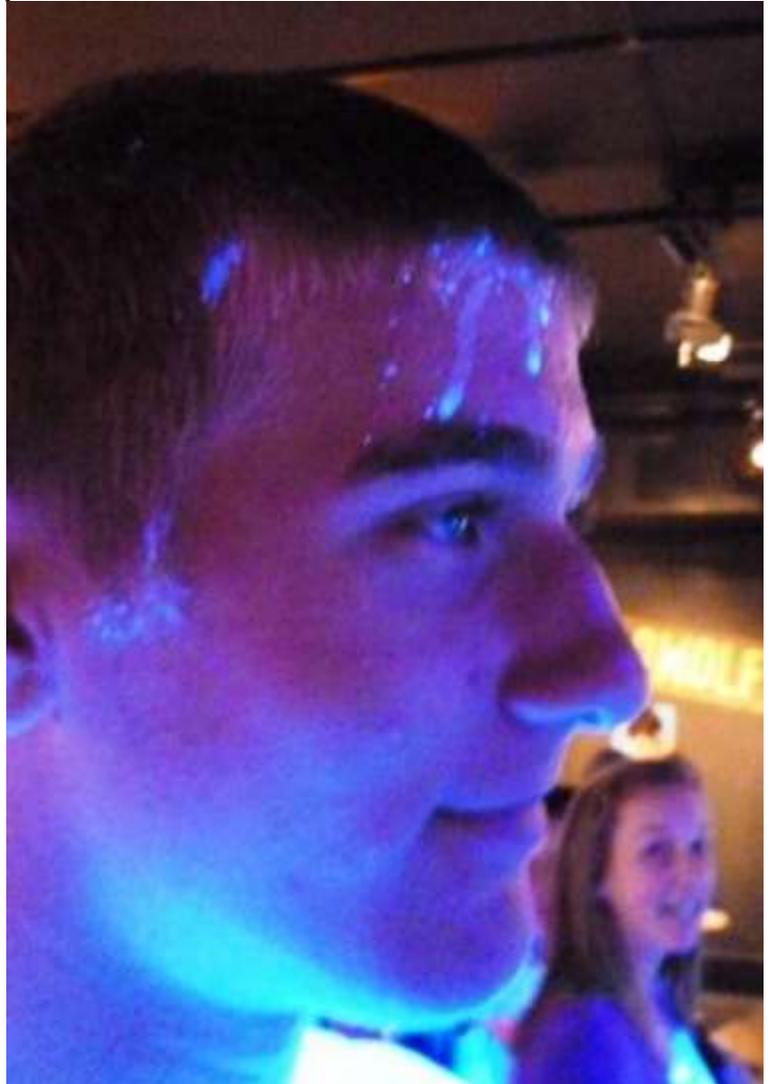
We walked east through the underground pedway to Millennium Station, the commuter train terminal beneath Millennium Park at the east end of downtown. We still had about twenty minutes to kill, so the rest of the group used the restroom there. Eventually we boarded a southbound Metra Electric line train. Long before the trip I had bought Metra passes, and when the conductor came around I presented them to him. **[It's gotten easier to buy Metra fares. If I were to repeat this trip today I'd just use the Ventra app on my phone, which automatically debits a credit card.]**

This train trip only lasted about fifteen minutes. We got out at the station called 55—56—57, whose platform extends for two full blocks on the south side. We exited to the front of the train (57th Street) and made our way about two blocks east to today's destination, the Museum of Science and Industry. We had bought tickets for the museum in advance. That was good, because it allowed us to skip a line and enter immediately. Interestingly, while the tickets were highly secure and had a complicated code designed to be scanned by a laser reader, the guy at the entrance just looked at them quickly and waved us in.

In addition to the museum as a whole, our \$25 tickets entitled us to see a special temporary exhibition based on the TV show *Mythbusters*. **[This exhibit is still making its way to science museums around the country today. More than once since this trip I've been planning journeys of my own and come across *Mythbusters* when I researched museums in other cities. It's almost as ubiquitous as "Chocolate" or "Body Works".]**

While there were some things that were disappointing (like the fact that it was called "*Mythbusters: The Explosive Exhibition*", but there was almost nothing at all about explosives at all), overall this was very good and well worth its additional cost. The show investigates whether various "myths" sent in by viewers are true or false, and in the museum they had lots of interactive displays where visitors could re-enact the show's experiments for themselves. In one, for instance, they tested whether people got wetter when they walked or ran through rain. (The answer, by the way, is that there's basically no difference, so there's no reason to rush the next time you're in a downpour.) They had people walk or run through a long tunnel as water gently sprayed overhead. The water happened to include a special dye that made it glow under ultraviolet light. At the end of the tunnel they had a black light where people could compare how wet they'd gotten. In another display they had people change clothes into a phone booth, proving that Superman couldn't possibly don his costume as quickly as he does on film. There were countless other displays, and both kids and adults enjoyed playing with all of them.

At the end of the *Mythbusters* exhibit was a stage area where they did a live demonstration. For the show they recruited volunteers from the audience and tested their reflexes. Our varsity captain (the same kid who tried out for "Who Wants to Be a Game Show Host") ended up being the chosen recruit for the demonstration we saw. The myth they were testing was whether it is possible to dodge a bullet. Of course, they didn't shoot real bullets at the audience. Instead they used paintballs. Paintball pellets can still be dangerous, though (similar to getting hit by a BB), so they had our captain dress in a padded suit and hold a plexiglass shield in front of him. They simulated shooting from different distances and gave audio and visual cues to which he was supposed to react in order to dodge the "bullet". They showed that from a sufficient distance it is indeed possible to dodge a bullet and (surprisingly) that we respond quicker to what we hear than to what we see



**Glowing with ultraviolet dyed water after trying to out-run the rain**

Not surprisingly, the *Mythbusters* exhibit exited to a gift shop selling merchandise themed to the show. A lot of it looked interesting, but it was all absurdly expensive. They had coffee mugs for \$20, and even pencils with the show name were five bucks. The stuff that I might have actually wanted to buy started around \$50 and just went up and up. I don't think anyone in our group bought a single thing there. Someone could do an interesting economics experiment to see just how much more that gift shop could sell by lowering their prices a bit.

After finishing *Mythbusters* we spent the morning going through various exhibits at the Museum of Science and Industry. I think just about everyone would have preferred to have more time here and less at the Field Museum. Unfortunately we were a bit rushed, because we had to head all the way back home by tonight. The Museum of Science and Industry was one of the first interactive museums, and they've done a good job of keeping things updated so today's kids find it as exciting as I did decades ago. You could literally spend days here, and we barely scratched the surface in a couple of hours. Probably the most interesting thing I saw was their exhibit on DNA and genetics—which was **much** more detailed and far more interesting than what I'd seen yesterday. I also saw a fascinating display on wave generation and tsunamis. Beyond that I just sort of wandered around and saw what I happened to see. It was all most interesting. **[The Museum of Science and Industry does an amazingly good job of catering to all age levels. It helps that the place is almost indescribably enormous. You could literally spend days there and not see everything.]**

We left around 12:30. I checked my Metra schedule and found that we needed to rush back to the station, since we'd either catch a train around 12:40 or wait nearly an hour for the next one. **[The schedule for the Metra Electric line has always seemed weird to me. They run about three trains an hour, with a combination of local and express services. Instead of staggering those trains throughout the hour, though, they run all three back-to-back and then have about a fifty-minute wait until the next set of trains.]** We did make it in time, and in fact when we got to the station the train ended up being late. When it arrived we boarded, and the kids had fun riding on the upper level as we made our way back downtown.



**Preparing to be hit by paintballs**

Our group was smaller for the last leg of our trip. The Bernhards had driven to the Museum of Science and Industry and were going home on their own. The Frideres left us at Millennium Park. They wanted to stay downtown and at least briefly see the lakefront. The rest of us walked back over to Dearborn Avenue and made our way down to the subway. This time there was a singer on the platform who was playing guitar and singing songs from the '60s and '70s. Eventually a train came, and we had an uneventful ride back to Rosemont.

That uneventful ride suddenly became very eventful when we got back to the parking lot, though. When I went around to the driver's side of the blue suburban to unlock the door, I quickly saw that the lock was damaged. Someone had obviously pried it open. At first I thought it was just vandalism, but it soon became clear that a thief had broken into the suburban. After prying open the lock, they'd obviously pushed the buttons that opened the other doors. They'd then gone through all the bags that were in the vehicle. Those bags were open, and clothes and other personal belongings were scattered throughout the back. The kids who were riding in the blue suburban spent quite a while re-packing things, and they determined that as far as they could tell none of them was missing anything.



**Damaged lock to the blue suburban – Rosemont park-and-ride**

My brown suitcase had also been gone through, but all of its contents (basically dirty clothes) also seemed to be accounted for. There was one thing

missing, though—my red book bag. I'd filled that bag with all the stuff I didn't want to lug around all day in the city. That was quite a lot of stuff, and it had quite a lot of value. The main thing I knew was gone was my netbook computer. That computer cost about \$300 new three years ago, and I can't imagine its pawn value was enough to warrant burglary. Apparently the thief felt otherwise, though.

I wasn't entirely what I should do about this. After the kids determined that all their stuff was there (they, of course, had carried all their valuable electronics with them) and that the black suburban (which is newer and has a car alarm) was not touched, I talked with the other chaperons. Eventually I went back into the 'L' station and reported the break-in to the guy in the ticket kiosk. He advised me to

call 911 and noted that “it’s too bad—there’s been a bunch of break-ins here lately”. It’s interesting that we’d had no problems in rough neighborhoods (like the area where Margie’s Candies is located), but we’d been burglary victims in a ritzy suburb.

I was a bit hesitant to call 911. I’ve only called the emergency number once before in my life (when a kid was knocked unconscious at intramural basketball), and I didn’t really think of a burglary that had already happened as an “emergency”. The operator seemed to find the call appropriate, though. She took my information (though I was not able to give her the specific space where we were parked, which she wanted), and she said an officer would be responding shortly.

It amazed me how quickly an officer did respond. It was probably fortunate that the break-in happened in Rosemont rather than a mile east in the city of Chicago. In the city a car break-in would be a very low priority, and we might have waited hours. In the suburbs, though, it was about ten minutes before a black and white pulled up behind the suburban.

**[While the response was almost certainly quicker in Rosemont, it actually might have been better if we had parked at the Cumberland station in Chicago. All the park-and-rides that are located in the city proper are equipped with security cameras, so if we’d been robbed there, we’d likely have had footage of the incident. There were no such cameras in Rosemont. In retrospect, what we probably should have done is leave our bags at the hotel for the day. (Almost every hotel will keep bags at the desk on request, usually free of charge.) That never even occurred to me, though.]**

The young man who responded (Officer Daniel Gabb) was very pleasant, but of course there was pretty much nothing he could do after the fact. He took down my details and filed the report. He then gave me a form on which I could record the serial number of the computer and also report additional property I noticed later was missing. He assured me that stolen property often does turn up, though I’m pretty certain it was long gone by the time we got back to the parking lot. Like the CTA agent, he also noted that there’d been a lot of break-ins in parking lots around Rosemont in recent months.

I sent in the supplementary report four days later, and it amazed me just how many things there were in that bag and how much value everything added up to. The Swiss Army book bag itself cost about \$60 (and, looking in stores will cost closer to \$80 to replace). **[I never did replace it.]** The other truly valuable thing in the bag was prescription bifocal sunglasses. My bet is the thief just threw those out, but they cost me \$159 a year ago (which is actually extremely cheap) and will likely cost more than that to replace **[about the same actually—and they’d actually be even less today]**. I also had an envelope with about \$175 in scrip cards. Most of those, though, would be worthless to anyone in Chicago. They’re for businesses like Casey’s and Hy-Vee that don’t even exist there. **[There is, however, a big market in selling gift cards online at discount prices.]** I also found out after I got home I was missing the charger for my cell phone, and I’d find that replacing the charger cost nearly as much (\$15) as buying a whole new Tracfone. **[This was, of course, before I had a smartphone and I think before Tracfone even operated with smartphones.]** The other missing items I included in the police report were: a wireless mouse, a flash drive, my grey Garrigan baseball cap, a USB cable that connects my digital camera to a computer, the power cord for my rechargeable electric shaver (without which the shaver is pretty much useless), a cheap web belt, a variety of personal papers (like the —Summer Running Clubll calendar on which I’d been recording how far I’d walked each day), and \$6 in cash and coins that was intended to be used for tolls on our trip back to Iowa. When you add everything together, I’m missing about \$750 worth of stuff just from that one book bag and its contents. It can’t possibly be worth anywhere near that much to whoever stole it, though.

Since filing the official report, I’ve noticed even more things that were in that bag. For instance, I’d picked up some postcards at Willis Tower, and apparently they were in that bag as well. Fortunately none of the kids has indicated that anything of theirs was missing, so I guess it was just my bag that was taken. **[It’s actually hard to believe that nothing was stolen from the kids, but none of them ever did mention anything.]**

I’ve travelled a lot, but this is the first time my travels I have ever made me the victim of a crime. I’ve been to lots of questionable neighborhoods in places like New Orleans, Memphis, and Los Angeles (not to mention Vancouver, Mexico City, Madrid, or Paris), and I made it through all of them unscathed. In a squeaky clean suburb full of upscale hotels and office parks, though, I was a crime victim. The other adults noted that the crime they expected to happen on this trip was that the grandmother who was traveling with us would have her purse snatched. Wherever we went, she dangled her purse loosely beside her, practically an invitation for someone to take it. That never happened, though. Instead, we’d parked our vehicle in what everyone thought was just about the safest place we’d been to, and it was burglarized. **[Knock on wood, I’ve not been a victim of crime anywhere else in my travels. I’ve always had fairly good street smarts, and this incident taught me that I need to be aware not just of my own personal safety, but also of possessions I leave unattended.]**

It took a little over an hour from the time we got to Rosemont to the time Officer Gabb finished his report. By that time several people (myself included) badly needed to use a restroom, so we stopped at a McDonalds just a couple blocks north of the park-and-ride. It was a bit awkward exiting McDonalds, but eventually we wound our way up to Higgins Road. After a bit of a wait we turned left on Higgins, and before long we were back on the Northwest Tollway.

Traffic was heavy on the tollway, but it moved right along. I was a little worried about whether the door was closed properly after having been pried open, and I noticed the noise of every bit of wind as we drove along **[and it was very windy, which created a lot of unusual noise]**. Nothing seemed to happen with the door, though, and we made our way westward to Rockford and onto U.S. 20.

We stopped for gas at a Citgo station in the town of Stockton, which is almost dead center east to west in the middle of Illinois. While it would have been cheaper to wait until we got to Iowa, I wanted a break. What’s more the \$3.59<sup>9</sup> gas seemed cheap compared to \$3.99, which was the standard price in the Chicago suburbs. **[I checked while writing this revision, and in March 2018 gas is \$2.50 — \$2.55 a gallon in suburban Cook County and no more than \$2.59 in the city itself. It’s currently \$2.49<sup>9</sup> in Algona, so Illinois prices aren’t much more. The nature of gas prices is something I don’t understand at all. It’s really weird that gas is more than a buck cheaper than it was six years ago, and when adjusted for inflation it’s WAY less than it was back in college.]**

We drove west to Dubuque and then on to Dyersville. We exited there and had dinner at Hardees. We then made a long haul down highway 20, passing Independence, Waterloo, Iowa Falls, and Webster City. We exited onto highway 17 and made our way up to Eagle Grove, where we stopped at Casey's for a bathroom break. We then took a round-about way (on county roads I don't think I've ever been on before) to the Bertes' home. We dropped them off, and then it was just a short hop back to Garrigan.

We got back to Algona about 10:15pm. That's probably the latest we've ever gotten back from one of these trips, but after taking time to file a police report, it really wasn't that bad. The father of the freshmen twins happens to be our local county sheriff. He took a look at the lock on the blue suburban when we got back and said something like, "Yep, they sure knew what they were doing." I suppose that's better than having amateur thieves.

The kids unpacked all their stuff and went on their way. I then took the my stuff, left the keys at school, and went out to my own car. It was right at 11pm when I finally got home. It was a long day, and I must say it was good to be back.

## ☺☹☹ SYNOPSIS ☺☹☹

As the font I chose for the headers is supposed to indicate, this was a trip that brought out many emotions. Since returning home, I've had several people ask me how the trip went, and my first reaction has pretty much always been to change the subject. After all, we won just one game (out of twelve), and the highlight was a burglary. While there were parts of the trip that were very enjoyable, overall it's not something I want to dwell on.

I hope that the next time we go to nationals we'll have a group with a chance of being more competitive. I'm also pretty sure I won't be taking a JV team again, since all that seemed to do was create frustration. **[Only a couple years later we'd make playoffs at nationals for the first time ever. We've never taken a JV team again, and I doubt we ever will.]**

I'm slowly dealing with the aftermath of the burglary. I've finished all the paperwork and I'm in the process of gradually replacing the stuff that was stolen. It's possible that the school's insurance might eventually help with the cost of that, but I'm certainly not going to hold my breath until that happens.

**[Aside from an acknowledgement that they'd received my list of stolen items, I never did receive any further communication from the Rosemont police department, and of course I never got any of the things that were stolen back. I replaced the stolen netbook computer with a used, reconditioned Dell laptop I found on the Sears website. My superintendent told me to pay for that with the school credit card, which I did. I suspect, though, that it wasn't the school's insurance that covered the loss. Instead, I'm fairly certain the charge was reimbursed out of Gene Meister's pocket. The blue suburban was out of service most of the summer while they dealt with getting the door repaired. The following year the school replaced that vehicle.]**

I did some checking, and it was interesting to find that while Rosemont has a very low rate of violent crime (murder, assault, etc.), property crimes there are actually higher than in much of Chicago and about double the rate in Illinois as a whole. I'm not sure what I might have done differently if I'd known that, but it is interesting. You certainly can't judge the safety of a place just by what it looks like. ... And in retrospect, a parking lot where the car owners are away all day (and that, we'd find, has no security cameras) would certainly be a gold mine for a thief.

I suppose I'll wrap this up before I start getting mad again just typing. On the whole this wasn't a bad trip, but I certainly hope my future travels are less eventful.