

We Moved A Lot In My Early Years

E. Hubert Bruton, 2007

We moved a lot when I was a little kid. From 1949, when I was three years old, to 1958, when I was twelve, we moved about ten times. Each move was meant to get us a little closer to prosperity but the reality is that we were just living out the old “greener grass” concept of life. I don’t remember San Antonio, TX., except for the first of two broken arms I would experience (the second being in Asheboro on a visit to my grand parent’s house), and Biloxi, Ms., which was just a name that mama use to mention. Camp Picket, Va., is were my sister Jane, was born. Then there was an Air Force base in Massachusetts, and an Army Base in Spartanburg, SC. All of these moves were connected with the military but I don’t remember a big truck loading or unloading our things. Georgetown, S.C., Gainesville, Ga., Palatka, Fl., Franklin, Asheboro, and Carolina Beach, N.C. were all related to dad’s civilian work. Each time we moved the family car, a ’49 Plymouth coop with no back seat but a huge trunk, would be packed with all that could fit into it and off we’d go, usually in the early morning hours before sunrise. In place of the back seat the coop had a place behind the front seats, like a big shelf, large enough for Jane and I to lay. I didn’t like riding that way but it was the only way for us.

I started the first grade in 1952 when we were in Asheboro, NC. The school was Sunset Elementary, a few blocks from our house which was just off of McCrary Street. I remember the teacher’s name was Mrs. Hardgrave. Before the end of school we moved to Georgetown, SC because dad had used his GI business start up money to open a news

stand. By the end of August, 1953, the business had failed and we moved to Gainesville, GA where he had found employment as a radio announcer. There I started the second grade.

Back then, Gainesville, north of Atlanta, was a very small town compared to today. I was a gold prospector back then at the age of seven. I had discovered that there was gold in the pebbles of our driveway. The old fellow at the donut shop around the corner would accept a hand full of these rocks in payment for a donut, two or three times a week. Of course, I never told my sister how valuable those stone were, and I never purchased a donut for her with that driveway gold. I discovered, much to my sorrow, one day that those little rocks were not as valuable as I first thought. I carried a sack full of the pebbles into the shop one day to buy a dozen for the family and the new clerk would not take my payment. Ah, another reality lesson learned on the road of life.

One day mama took Jane and me on a walking trip to the grocery store. It was only about five blocks from the house. When we came out of the store, she looked worried, and seemed to not know which way to go. I asked her what was the matter, and she said that she didn't know which way to go home. I told her that I did and she followed me to the house. I felt like a hero.

I walked to school but I really don't remember much about it. I mainly remember that it was there that I discovered girls. There was a cute girl in my class named Sarah. She had strawberry blond hair and walked the same route as I. One day I asked if she would let me carry her books and she said OK. At the age of seven I was in love, but it had to forever remain a secret. I only write it for you now because I know you won't tell. Of course the relationship was doomed to failure. A few days later she

let some other fellow carry her books and I was devastated. Our relationship was over, school was over, and we moved to Florida.

Palatka, Florida was a wonderful place for an eight year old boy. It is situated about 60 miles south of Jacksonville on the St Johns River. Among the palmetto palms and cypress trees I became Huckleberry Fin, boy adventurer. We lived in three different houses there, yet the town was so small that I was never far from the river. I had rafts and tree forts. I went on safari with my friends, David and Bucky.

Everyone called him Bucky because of his squirrel-like appearance. He was the genius of our group. His father worked for the town at the water works. I accidentally fell into one of the holding tanks once. They lived across the Atlantic Coast Line rail road tracks from the water plant. The house was surrounded by ancient oaks adorned with Spanish moss on nearly every limb. I thought it was a mansion. One day David and I went over to Bucky's house where we found him busily dismantling the lawn mower. He had a big round piece of plywood nearby. When we asked him what he was doing, he pointed to the plywood and said that he was building a flying saucer. David and I marveled as we watched him mount the engine on the plywood. He slid some bricks under the edges of the contraption then climbed aboard. He said, "I'll try it out first then I'll take you for a ride." David and I took several steps back. When Bucky pulled the starter rope the engine came to life and the lawn mower blade twirled beneath his flying saucer. We were all very excited. He reached down to the throttle to power up for launch and ran the thing to full blast. Nothing happened. He cut the engine off. Thinking very deeply for an eight years old engineer, he informed us that the propeller (blade) was on upside down. After this change he tried again. It still didn't get off the

ground. Bucky decided that there must be something in the supports that was holding the thing down, so with the engine still operating at full blast, he began rocking back and forth to cause the bricks to topple over. When they did the propeller jammed into the ground and began spinning the plywood platform. Bucky took flight. Who knew that a Briggs and Stratton 3 ½ horsepower engine could fling a 75 pound boy 20 yards. He flew like superman, arms out in front. He only needed a superman suit to look like super squirrel flying off of that invention. It was the irritating, high pitched screaming that didn't seem to fit the scene and told David and me that we didn't want to do this. Bucky landed well. He picked himself up off the ground and kind'a staggered, his big front teeth shining through a smirking smile, over to us. The flying saucer idea was a failure but it was a very entertaining adventure.

Life was one adventure after another and I hope to share these in the future. Some of these adventures were very risky and as I look back on them I am completely aware that people often expire from a terminal case of adventure.

Shortly after our move to Palatka the old Plymouth moving van car was traded and a series of second hand Studebakers came into our life. It looked as though we were where we were meant to be. Sadly, it was not to be. We lived in Palatka, what for us was a long time, three years. During this period I decided that I wanted to be an astronomer when I grew up, but alas I failed the fifth grade. Thank goodness we moved to Franklin, NC.

We only lived in Franklin a few months. We rented a house way up on the top of a small mountain. It was a wonderful place with woods all around. Behind the house there was a beautiful pasture with sheep. I really liked messing around with these

animals. The shortest way to town was through the sheep pasture and I often went that way.

One day Jane and I were pretending to be mountain climbers at the base of a big and steep clay hill. I had a hatchet that I was using to cut steps into the clay. Jane was standing very near to the place where I was making the cuts. As I swung to make a cut I accidentally made a full powered swing that hit her ankle. Blood spurted out of the wound. From my Cub Scout days I understood that an artery was cut. Some kind of “other world” awareness came over me. I showed Jane the pressure point on the inside of her thigh and told her that I was going to get some help. I ran down the hill to a garage where I finally convinced some men to come help my sister. They carried her home and then took mama, sis and me to the hospital where her ankle was stitched up. The doctor told me that a large vein, when cut, can act like an artery also. This was another one of many real life lessons learned the hard way.

I started fifth grade for the second time in that lovely mountain town and got up the courage to ask a cute girl named Beth to go to the movie with me. Unfortunately, a few days later, the day she told me that her mother would let her go, mama told me that dad had gotten a job in Wilmington, NC. We would be moving on Saturday. I had to brake my first date. The pattern of my “boy / Girl” relationships was already forming.

By this time we had a Nash Rambler. One can imagine how little we moved to Carolina Beach. I remember getting motion sickness in the back seat for the first time.

It didn't take me long to warm up to Carolina Beach. We moved into a cottage across the street from the ocean. It was “off season” so dad got the place for a very small

rent. I quickly got accustomed to walking on the beach and messing around with my new friends.

We lived in three different houses there and when I was in the sixth grade, mama and dad divorced. It was a difficult time for me, but I think I was better equipped for it than Jane. I was already an independent little cuss. She was not so.

We stayed in the area and I eventually graduated in 1965 from New Hanover High School. I didn't fail any more grades but summer school helped prevent that.

A major impact on my personality resulted from the summer visits to my mother's home, my Scarborough grandparents on Ocracoke Island. It was years before the ferry and large quantities of cars came to the island. Ponies still roamed freely there and a boy could too. The main way of getting to the island was by the mail boat that ran down the sound to Atlantic. It tied up behind Winston Hill's store. There was an old compressor out side that constantly ran to cool the milk and other things. Its steady beating made the whole dock come to life. There was excitement in the air when the mail boat arrived. There was no electricity, running water or inside toilets in 95 percent of the houses as late as 1959. Only those who lived near the ice plant could get electricity because they were close enough to have a wire run from the diesel generator that make ice for the fish houses. There was a gentle innocence that I was not aware of until it had been lost forever. I will write more about these memories later. The important thing to know here is that I loved being there.

I think the moving, leaving stuff and friends behind affected me in three ways. First, I am not so dependant on material things. I know that necessary things of life can be replaced. The loss of things has never been a problem for me. The second affect on

me is my ability to make friends. I am usually wide open when it comes to meeting people. I seem to be able to size people up rightly, quickly. The result of all this is that the friends I have tend to be very good, honest and delightful people. The other characteristic of these friends is that they are often oddball characters. The third thing that might be attributed to these moves is that I have an imagination. I can see someone walking on the street and build a whole life scenario around their image.

The down side to all of this is that even at my mature age of sixty I am still unsettled. I crave adventure. Perhaps I'll look at the end of life as another adventure.

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