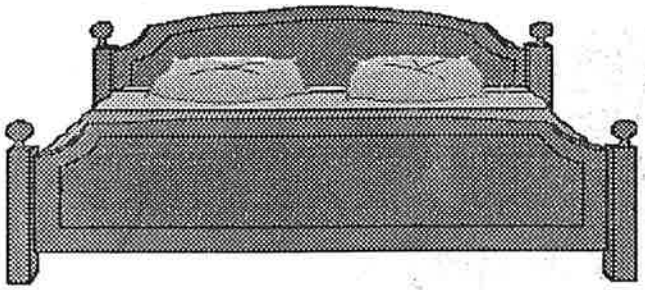
THREE MONTHS ON A BOX SPRING



A SELECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY

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"Like a long Christmas letter" JBF 12/26/96

THREE MONTHS ON A BOX SPRING

I. GOVERNMENT TRAPPER

Where have I been for the past thirty-one years? This long journey started in the summer of 1965, the summer Pat and I were married. That summer, after my third year at New Mexico State University studying wildlife management, I worked for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. I was thrilled to have landed that job, working for a fisheries biologist on the new Navajo Lake in northern New Mexico. I was close enough to my fiancé to run into town on Friday night for the weekend, and I was allowed to live in an empty Bureau of Reclamation construction house at the base of the new dam. My only furniture was a refrigerator, stove, kitchen table with one chair, and a box spring onto which I threw my sleeping bag. That three month summer job would lead to more than thirty years with he U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and a mostly wonderful career "watching out for the critters." That, I later found, could even be done from a bureaucrat's office at the Main Interior Building in downtown Washington, D.C.

The journey actually began in an area far removed from that stuffy, hectic office in Washington. It began when, still in college and pursuing a teaching degree to add to my wildlife management credentials, I received a note from my major professor in the wildlife school that a former classmate had quit his job with the Fish and Wildlife Service in Albuquerque. Although I was not entirely sure what his job was, I felt compelled to follow up on it. A call to his former boss, two hundred miles north of Las Cruces, resulted in an appointment to interview for the job.

That interview proved to be exciting, challenging, and profitable. I had no idea how to trap coyotes, but I was soon to learn. In a few short weeks, February 13, 1967, I was in Albuquerque, assigned to a large area of ranch land in central New Mexico, and expected to start making a noticeable dent in the coyote population. I found this to be a formidable, and largely frustrating, enterprise. Quickly gaining a high degree of respect for that much maligned mammal, I came to doubt that we would really win this battle of man against nature. The coyote is a survivor, wiley and opportunistic. The ones I was up against were also smarter than the trapper. That was the beginning of my journey, leading a long way from that lumpy box spring in northern New Mexico.

The lady who was by this time my partner on this journey, and I, had previously agreed it would be exciting if we were both teachers, had the same hours and vacations, and could spend our mutual time off together. My suddenly abandoning that plan must have been a shock to her, but I sensed she also felt the same excitement; this could be the beginning of an adventure. In fact it has proven to be. When she finished that year of teaching, I returned to Las Cruces. We stuffed our few belongings into a small U-Haul trailer, and feeling like the Beverly Hillbillies, we moved to Albuquerque.

After a few months, even before we both moved to Albuquerque, I was beginning to question whether this particular phase of "wildlife management" was where I really wanted to be and, perhaps more importantly, if I wanted to be a part of some of the management practices. I was already questioning the need to undertake extirpation of the coyote, based solely on the rancher's allegation

that "they are eating me up," and the doubt that we were really accomplishing anything anyway. These misgivings were exacerbated by two particular assignments.

The worst of these involved working prairie dog towns to control their damage to rangeland. Truly, they are capable of denuding the natural grasses in a large town. Needless to say, cattle ranchers are not enamored with prairie dogs. This assignment involved my spending two days on horseback, riding through a town with a sack of grain and a dipper, scattering grain which had been treated with strychnine. It does indeed kill prairie dogs. However my second morning revealed it also kills any other creature that eats grain. This includes songbirds and ground squirrels. The prairie dog town looked like Armageddon. I felt ill; I felt like an imposter. I had just finished four years in college studying "wildlife management," wanting to enhance wildlife populations. Now I was out conducting wholesale eradication of animals which bring enjoyment to people. I then learned that strychnine kills not only the first animal to eat it, but then the next one in the food chain as well. The euphemism, which sounds better than repeat killing, was "non selective control." I still didn't like it.

The other incident involved the use of poisoned horse carcases, tied to posts out on the desert, again as a coyote control measure. This was also used in higher elevations for bear control, although I was never involved in that activity. The incident which still bothers me, thirty years later, involved a horse carcass which had to be disposed of before spring when people started going out onto the desert. In this case that meant buried. On the desert where this occurred, the surface was what biologists call desert pavement. Digging a hole large enough to bury half a horse was a long term, difficult chore. The easiest place to dig out there was in the arroyo; deep sand, deep enough to bury a horse carcass. But what if a desert rain storm were to occur, as they often do in that environment? The arroyos turn into torrents, washing away anything loose, like sand. How long would that carcass continue to kill anything that chewed on it?

The posts to which the meat was tied were to be marked with a large red sign warning people of the nearby poison. That worked well unless, as one letter in our file stated, "While I was reading the warning sign, my dog ate the meat". I don't know how that letter was responded to.

In spite of the feelings I had about the work, there was occasionally some welcome humor as well. I had established trap lines which ran several miles across various ranches east of Albuquerque, in a small valley near Edgewood. This area was just beginning to be settled by people looking for ranchetts, but there were still large areas where the coyotes and bobcats roamed freely. I found a "run," where coyote tracks were fresh every time I came by in my assigned International Scout. Thinking this would be a prime place to catch a marauding coyote, I carefully dug the hole for the trap, armed the trigger mechanism and placed the trap in the hole. Next I covered it with a small piece of canvas and sprinkled it with just enough soil (in this area actually just sand) to disguise the hole. Then. as an unrefutable temptation to get nosey and step on the trigger, I sprinkled the "set" with a few drops of ocelot urine from my once empty Worcestershire bottle. What red blooded American coyote could refuse such a chance to leave his own scent, I thought. This one refused.

Not only did he refuse to step on the trap, he dug it out of the hole, turned it over without setting it

off, and urinated on it. Up yours Mr. government trapper! As I said, I had already developed a feeling of fond respect for the coyote.

Another one of those "...gee I really wish I hadn't done that..." memories I have of the period I was trapping coyotes, involved a late afternoon as I was driving the Scout back to the highway after running my trap line. I headed cross country, which in itself was not unusual, but I tried to go through an old, abandoned farmstead. The Scout came to a sudden and very definite stop. There had been no noise to indicate that I had hit anything, so I looked underneath. There was the remains of a large, loosely rolled tangle of ancient baling wire. Although loosely rolled moments before, it was now very tightly wound around the drive shaft and braided into the u-joints. The vehicle wasn't going anywhere, and neither was I. The sun, however, was going somewhere: down. Looking at the tangled mess under my only transportation, it appeared that I may get to spend the night listening to a coyote serenade, performed by the very critters I had earlier been trying to silence forever.

Tools? My vehicle contained a pile of traps, a small folding shovel, a reasonably sharp ax, and a bottle of ocelot urine. I spent the remaining daylight, and into the early twilight, cutting the wire by chopping it with the ax, and scolding myself for trying to take a shortcut instead of staying on the road. I arrived home somewhat late that evening, hungry but having learned yet another lesson.

An ancillary duty of mine was to meet with local conservation groups to answer questions they might have about our program. Ideally, I was to convince them that what we were doing out there on the desert and ranch land was right and proper. The catch in this was that I didn't fully believe it myself. It was very difficult for me to look them in the eye, defend what we were doing, and feel good about myself. Again, the feeling of being an imposter.

In fairness to the Fish and Wildlife Service, I need to recognize that in December of 1985, congress transferred the Animal Damage Control function from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture. That is where it should have been all along, since the historic focus was on ranching. Today the concentration is much broader, the use of poisons such as strychnine has been outlawed, and there is an effort to work with more urban issues such as airport bird strikes and agricultural field bird depredation. To me, this is a welcome change.

At about this time I began to look in earnest at finding something else to do, that I could feel good about. I talked to the City of Albuquerque, but they really didn't have anything to offer in my field. The Department of Game and Fish was not hiring. I did want to stay with the Fish and Wildlife Service, but could not continue doing the same thing and still live with myself. I decided to "look in my own back yard," and explore within the Service. That was a serendipitous thought, one that led me to a new world of experience, and a wonderful life with the wildlife. I decided to explore the division of Refuges, and see what National Wildlife Refuges might have to offer me as a career. That has proven to be a most fortunate decision.

One morning, when I was not out running my trap lines, I walked acress the street to speak to someone about possibly transferring into the Refuge Division. The secretary led me into the office

of the Assistant Regional Supervisor for Refuges, who greeted me very warmly. I explained to him what I was doing now, that I did not feel comfortable with it, and that I would like to transfer into the Refuge Division. His interview was very pleasant, and very brief. It consisted of three questions:

Q: "What kind of refuge would you like to work on, breeding, migratory, wintering?
A. I don't know, it doesn't matter, I just want to get onto a refuge.
Q. Geographically, where would you like to go? With refuges all over the U.S., do you have a preference?
A. No, I don't have a preference, most any place would be fine.
Q. Do you have any children?
A. No, we have only been married a couple of years, and have been in school.
Q. Young man, I have a place for you."

II. DUCK WATER

That "place" proved to be unlike anything we could have imagined, and certainly unlike anything we wildlife students had studied. That "place" was Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, sixty miles of secondary (sometimes questionable) gravel road southwest of Dugway Proving Grounds on the extreme southern edge of the Utah salt flats. Just getting there was an adventure.

After the moving truck was loaded, and a last inspection made of our little rent house, we set out in a heavily loaded 1963 Corvair for Fish Springs, not really knowing where it was or how long it would take to get there. We spent our first night in Farmington, New Mexico, visiting relatives in our home town, and saying our goodbyes, for how long we didn't know. Then, with our dog Taco, we were off for our adventure, first stop Provo, Utah. Overnight in Provo, then northwest to Tooele where we bought groceries to get us through at least a week. Feeling pretty good by now, and knowing we had the majority of the trip behind us, we headed for Dugway Proving Grounds, a high security military establishment seventy miles away.

Eventually we did reach the gate to the Proving Grounds, where we explained to the spit-polished guard who we were, and where we were going. He was not impressed with who we were, but was very polite, saying he knew of the refuge. "If you will follow that gravel road 'out there,' you will reach where you are going." In other words, we were not going <u>through</u> the proving grounds on the paved road, but were welcome to drive <u>around</u> it on the gravel. So again, knowing neither distance, nor firm direction, we left with high spirits and resolute determination.

After not too long a time, when we got a look at the sparse desert and endless horizon with nothing but more of the same on it, both spirits and resolution began to dissolve. In addition, Taco had become nervous and irritable because of the gravel pounding the bottom of the car, which was not far above the roadbed due to the amount of belongings packed in it. I had even packed some small items in the hubcaps to save room inside the car.

As we continued into the desert, I began to sense a degree of anxiety in Pat as, I suspected, she began to wonder what she had gotten herself into with this biologist guy. We continued on, stopping occasionally while I would break out the binoculars to survey the expanse, looking for anything over which I might be able to report "there it is"! On the fourth stop, I saw trees out across the desert, and was able to state confidently that I thought that must be the place. Wouldn't a wildlife refuge have trees? We continued on, eventually coming around the last curve and sighting the headquarters area, whereupon Pat burst into tears and announced with unmistakable resolve "I'm going back on the pill." This would later prove to be a sensible, even if moot, exclamation.

The headquarters area at Fish Springs consisted of the office and a three bay vehicle garage, a four bay shop building, an oil house, generator house, bunk house, and four residences. Only one of the residences was occupied, by the Manager and his wife. We were assigned to the residence next door, a nice brick three bedroom house. It was the nicest home we had lived in, and was perfectly adequate for the two of us. Since the moving truck would not arrive for another four days, we moved into the bunk house, a multi bedroom dormitory built for summer students who worked on the refuge.

That evening we enjoyed dinner with the manager and his wife. She was a very resourceful woman who was able to keep busy with her own interests, help out on the refuge when needed, and maintain a positive attitude although living on the south edge of the salt flats with no other families for over thirty miles. We were to become very close to this couple, establishing a friendship which has lasted for almost thirty years.

That night we collapsed, exhausted, into the bunkhouse cots, and went to sleep in almost total silence. The only sound was the generators, which ran twenty-four hours supplying us with power. Like people being accustomed to a freight train going by, we came to hear the generator's deep-throated throbbing only when they went down, and we sat straight up in bed asking "what do I hear?"

The quiet was so intense, so complete, that only five days after we arrived, Pat said "I would like to hear some noise, any kind of noise." So, for the first time, we turned on a radio. We were so far out in the "wilderness" however, that radio reception was full of static, but it was noise! We eventually came to be jealous of our silence, sometimes resenting refuge visitors for disturbing it.

One of the "disturbances" which occurred infrequently was not from random refuge visitors, but helicopter pilots flying security checks on the perimeter of the proving grounds. We would hear a small helicopter buzz the houses, make a circle, and return to land on our short runway. The buzz meant "we are coming in, put on the coffee." So we had official visitors on those days, but did not resent them because the proving ground was the guardian angel for the refuge. Most anything we needed was quickly provided by the military, including commissary and hospital privileges. Since we didn't have communication of any kind with the rest of the world, we maintained radio contact with the proving ground security forces. A cup of coffee was a small price to pay for our own guardian angels.

On October 26, 1967, two days after we had arrived at Fish Springs, Pat mentioned that she thought

she might be pregnant. Of course we wondered if that were true, but living where we did, we didn't just call and make an appointment with a doctor. But on November 3, she became concerned over some physical signs, and we made our first trip to Tooele, approximately one hundred twenty miles away. We were able to get a doctor's appointment, and Pat had an examination. When she came out of the doctor's examining room, she was beaming with the broad smile of a very happy lady, and seemed not to be touching the ground. In seven and a half months, we would be three. We were both equally thrilled. So much for going back on the pill; birth control is not retroactive.

While the quiet solitude, and occasional romantic rides around the refuge were special, there were drawbacks too. Only once every two weeks did someone make a trip to Dugway, taking turns getting everyone's groceries, miscellaneous household supplies, and mail. Those days were looked forward to; contact with the outside world. Other than the employees who came from Callao, thirty miles west, and the occasional helicopter pilot looking for coffee, we saw very few people. Without telephones or neighbors, questionable at best television reception, and few trips to town, the mail became a very important part of our lives.

Pat's middle sister did brave a visit to see us, the first from either of our families. Not being a real outdoors person, she was somewhat taken aback by the rustic isolation of the place in which her sister lived. Also, not being an outdoors or wildlife person, she was not familiar with the idea of National Wildlife Refuge, or waterfowl marshes. In conversation one day, trying to remember the name of where she was visiting, she called it Duck Water. A far cry from Fish Springs, but in spite of that the name stuck, at least within our immediate family.

A lone person we did see moving around the marsh, was actually a resident from long before it became a National Wildlife Refuge. His name was Jim Harrison, and he was a muskrat trapper from the old school. He lived in the marsh, ate from the marsh, and had little use for the outside world. He also smelled like he lived in the marsh; bathing was not an activity he frequently enjoyed. Because of that, and the fact that once he started visiting with another two-footed creature we couldn't get him to leave, we always chated with him out of doors.

One conversation Pat had with him though, was memorable. Once Jim found out that Pat was pregnant, he became almost solicitous of her well being. He reminded her of how far it was to town, how bad the road was, and how delicate her condition could be. Then he proceeded to tell her about a former female resident of the immediate area, who was pregnant, and started to hemorrhage. "She bled to death right here." This did not comfort Pat a great deal. We continued our visits to Dugway for prenatal checkups.

Sometimes "outside" people did find their way into the refuge, and we wondered how they got that far. One car full wanted to know where the nearest restaurant was, and where could they buy gasoline? For that kind of situation, which happened a number of times, both of us residents kept a 5-gallon jerry can of gasoline in our garage. We couldn't do much about a restaurant.

Pat and I occasionally took the opportunity for an evening drive out on the dikes, just looking at the

waterfowl, or checking on water levels in the pools. We always saw lots of wildlife, from swans to pelicans to muskrats. One evening as we drove along the dike, a killdeer, a small shore bird with a single black "necklace" across its chest, jumped up an started running in front of the truck. It was limping, and dragging one wing in the most pitiful show of attempted escape anyone could imagine. Pat said "stop, he's hurt!" She jumped out of the truck and started chasing the wounded bird, which stayed just ahead of her, and just out of reach. After about 15 yards, with the danger sufficiently moved away from its nest, the bird suddenly recuperated and flew off. Pat stopped, stood up and turned around with a very sheepish "I've been had, haven't I" look on her face. My thoroughly enjoying her being suckered into the bird's perfectly executed "distract and escape" ruse, did not help hide her red face.

By this time we had been authorized, because we were federal government employees, to use the base commissary and hospital. This was very fortunate, and allowed Pat to establish medical attention during her pregnancy. In early June, her doctor advised her to plan on coming into "town" earlier than the expected delivery date, in case the road became impassable and we couldn't get there on time. During her checkups, Pat had established a relationship with a single nurse, who promptly invited her to come on base and live with her for the last week before the projected delivery. So, in late June, Pat moved to Dugway. Each evening I would trudge up to the office, get on the radio, and call the security office to find out if I was a father yet.

Each evening the answer was the same, negative. Then, finally on the eleventh of July, two full weeks after Pat went into Dugway, I was out in one of the impoundments when our refuge clerk drove out onto the dike and started frantically waving to me. "You better get into Dugway, you're a daddy."

By the time I changed clothes and drove into Dugway, of course the baby was delivered and Pat was in her room with our new son. On my way off the base that day, I was stopped by the MP's for some now forgotten indiscretion. I wasn't too upset, considering I was now the father of a beautiful baby boy, and I gave the M.P. a cigar that said "It's a Boy!" Catching him off guard, he only said "Congratulations, and be careful."

Even though hospital procedure in those days prohibited the husband from being in the delivery room, unclean person that he might have been, I have always regretted that I was not there. Other fellows who have been present for the birth of their children, thought they had witnessed an almost spiritual event. I wish I could have shared that with both of our boys.

Sometimes humor comes from unexpected places. When we received the Chris' birth certificate, in the space for place of birth, it said "Fish Springs National Wildlife Resort. Obviously, the medical staff had no conception of where we lived.

So, without lessons of any kind, we launched into parenthood. The manager and his wife had no children, so we couldn't get advice from them, even though sometimes we needed it. Within a very few days of bringing the baby home, we began to notice some discoloration in his diaper, obviously from his urine. This was discomforting, since we had no idea what it might mean. So I got on the

radio to security, who brought our doctor into the radio room, and discussed this situation over the air. Anyone in central and northern Utah, who had a radio on that frequency, heard the discussion and the diagnosis: the discoloration was coming from the liquid vitamins. Ok, to the certain relief of everyone in Utah, that crises was solved.

The birth of a baby, a grandson, a redheaded grandson, brought Grandpa to visit. Actually, it brought both grandparents, Pat's dad and my mother. They knew the place was called Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, but had no conception of what it was like to actually be there. I arranged clearance for them to come into the proving grounds, go to the hospital to pick up Pat and the baby, and exit to the refuge by way of the Callao gate (the paved road). They were thrilled with the baby, and singularly unimpressed with the rest of what they were seeing.

Grandpa enjoyed seeing the refuge, and learning about what we were doing out there, but could not imagine staying for more than a few days. My mother was glad to see us and the baby, but mostly just tolerated her stay. When they were preparing to leave, and be escorted back through the proving grounds, Pat's dad summed up what he thought of the refuge by calling it "The asshole of the universe." He has never said what he thought of me for taking his daughter to live in such a place.

For all the good things I can say about Fish Springs, it was not the best place to have children, or a family that wanted more stimulation, and opportunity to be part of the real world (that thought would later come back to haunt me). I began to apply for other jobs on other refuges all over the country. I even applied for one in North Carolina. I was not desperate to leave Fish Springs, but the opportunity to move up a little, and to see other parts of the country was appealing to both of us. When I was finally notified, by way of a radio transmission from Dugway, that I was selected for the job in North Carolina, it took me a few minutes to remember that I had applied. Sometimes the government does not move with lightening speed.

The radio message came while the new manager and I were out on the refuge. Pat and I were going to their home that evening for dinner, and I told him not to say anything about the move until I did. I wanted to surprise Pat. And surprised she was. Out of the blue, I simply said "how would you like to move to North Carolina"? After a few seconds for it to sink in, Pat's open-mouthed response was "are we really going to?"

Neither of us could sleep that night from the excitement. Pat started packing boxes, which we had saved from our move in here, the next day. St that time the government still did not pay enough for moving costs to allow the moving company to do the packing. North Carolina sounds like a long ways away. The refuge is Mackay Island NWR, located in North Carolina, but with headquarters in Virginia Beach, Virginia. It was a satellite refuge, meaning I will be away from the headquarters and mostly on my own. Just exactly what I had hoped for.

III. COOKED GOOSE

Our trip across country was fun, exciting, and tiring. With an eight month old baby having trouble

digesting milk, and a socially maladjusted dog, some days seemed very long. We kept going, excited to see what North Carolina was going to look like, and what our house would be. After the nice brick home at Fish Springs, it would be surprising to have anything as pleasant.

We arrived in Virginia Beach, Va. on March 30, 1969, after five long days on the road. I was not interested in sight seeing along the way, I just wanted to get there. I don't know what the hurry was, except that I was excited to get started. We drove into Virginia Beach, and stopped at a restaurant for lunch. While eating, we asked the waitress how to get downtown. She looked at us for a second, and said "there is no downtown, just what you see along this street." At that time, Virginia Beach was a rather tacky ocean side tourist area, with everything located between the highway, which paralleled the ocean, and the water. If you wanted to go shopping, you drove to a nearby strip mall or into Norfolk. I suspect that not a lot has changed since that time.

We then drove along that street, looking for a motel priced within our per diem rate, that would take the dog. We found the Sandpiper, which filled both of those requirements, and had a ground floor room for ease in walking the dog. Taco was a small cocker spaniel, with an attitude. He thought he could whip any other dog, regardless of size or breed. He only picked fights when he was on the leash, knowing we would pull him from the jaws of danger the moment anything started. That day, he challenged a very large opponent, which had him by the scruff of the neck, shaking him like a rag doll before we could react. Taco didn't learn anything.

That evening, after the baby was asleep, we walked out to the beach, in the rain, for our first real look at the Atlantic ocean. For two New Mexican desert rats, it was an awesome, almost overpowering feeling. We reacted like kids, getting our feet wet in the surf, and talking about this being as far east as we could go from New Mexico. The sound of the waves breaking was exhilarating, and we called our parents from a pay phone on the beach so they could hear it too.

The next day we drove to where we thought the refuge was, wanting to see our house and the area. Not knowing the roads, we actually ended up at Sandbridge, a small community on the sand dune peninsula running south along the edge of the ocean. Technically, this is a part of the outer banks. Although we soon realized we were not in the right place, it was very interesting. Most of the Ocean side homes were built on substantial stilts, which kept them above the sea water during times of hurricane caused flood tides. I was later to witness one of those beach homes burn. Being situated well above the ground, with plenty of air space under it, the fire became a roaring, upward vortex, destroying the structure in a matter of minutes. Cancel any thoughts of an ocean-side beach home. A question to one of the local people got us on the right road, and on our way.

We proceeded south toward the refuge through thick green trees and occasional agricultural fields. Coming from the salt flats in Utah, we weren't used to all of the green, but it was a pleasant change. Finally we came out into a large marsh, containing sloughs and small islands, and waterfowl. Being February, there were still large numbers of snow geese in the marsh, which showed up like snowflakes against the darker colored vegetation and water. The deep blue sky, with puffy white clouds scattered across it was beautiful.

We drove across the marsh on a man made causeway, not constructed until 1955, but which now connected "the island" with the mainland. Historically this was called Knotts Island, except for the far south end which was called Mackay (Mackee) Island after the man who owned it as a hunting area. The refuge, most of which was purchased from his estate, was named after him. At one time the hunting area was highly developed, containing a large home, barn and even a swimming pool. Now, the home was gone, the barn was in disrepair, and unless a person liked swimming with water moccasins, one did not venture into the pool.

I had been told our house was "an old farmhouse" toward the north end of the island. With a little searching, and a question or two, we found it. The house was a typical North Carolina farmhouse, a white two story, pitched tin roof, with a huge screened in porch on the front. It looked like it had lots of room, and would make a nice home for the three of us. Still unbeknownst to us, in only a few months we would welcome another youngster into our family.

One thing we didn't know about the house until a hot, muggy night that summer, was that part of it had burned one time. We learned that after asking a neighbor why we woke up last night smelling smoke, but could find none. Other than that, and the fact that the mosquitoes had free access to anyone in the house until we put up storm windows, the house was adequate. When we went into town to shop for groceries, people thought our oldest boy had chicken pox. The storm windows also helped keep the winter wind from blowing through, and forcing Pat to wear gloves while cooking in the kitchen.

The house was located near the north end of the island, about a quarter mile from the Virginia line. The North Carolina-Virginia border cut across the island due to a trick of nature when the line was first surveyed. The official survey was to commence at an agreed upon natural cut in the outer banks, and run westward. Between the time of that agreement, and the actual survey, nature conducted a hurricane, and the agreed upon cut moved due to the force of the storm. When the survey was actually done, the line ended up crossing Knotts Island, severing it along the new state boundary.

The refuge teemed with wildlife. In the marsh were countless water birds, including wading birds and snow geese, which the refuge was primarily focused on, and ducks of several species. In the open bays around the island were Canada geese and whistling swans. Songbirds flourished, and deer, raccoon, snapping turtles and osprey could be seen every day. It was truly a "wildlife refuge."

Mackay Island was a satellite of the Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, located on the outer banks south of Sandbridge. Back Bay was an old refuge, as could be evidenced by the design of the buildings, including the residences. Their design was of the typical outer banks architecture, hurricane resistant and sturdy. The outbuildings were the same, and together they presented an attractive picture, reminding one of a coast guard station on the northeastern coast. All it lacked was a lighthouse.

South of the refuge were several small communities, with interesting names such as Corolla, Sanderling and Duck. These were communities which had been there for generations, and had

changed little in that time. Talking to the residents was an experience, because they still retained an Elizabethan accent so heavy that they were difficult to understand. Further south were more familiar community names like Nags Head and Kill Devil Hills. These were people with roots going clear back to the earliest English settlers in this country. They were good people, staid in their ways, and understandably not fond of the federal government. Included in that attitude was a propensity to ignore federal law relating to hunting of waterfowl, and hunting on National Wildlife Refuge lands. That provided some interesting challenges at Mackay Island.

On Knotts Island I represented the only federal wildlife law enforcement. Being the only person with law enforcement authority, automatically made me suspect in many people's minds. While most everyone on the island was polite, only one other couple really accepted us as friends. We were outsiders, meaning we were not born on the island, and so were they. I joined the volunteer fire department, and became qualified to drive the ambulance. Most of the other men on the island worked in Norfolk. As almost the only available man on the island during the day, the locals were as friendly as they could be. The same was not true for Pat.

There was no mail delivery on the island; we went to the tiny local post office to pick it up. There were also no individual boxes, so we asked the Post Mistress to hand it to us. The small post office was often a gathering place for the ladies on the island, so anyone picking up their mail had to go in and say hello to all of them too. When Pat would go for our mail, as she approached the door there would frequently be animated conversation going on inside. As soon as she took hold of the door knob, the conversation died. She would go in, get our mail, and return to the car. The minute the door closed, the conversation picked up again. Nothing personal you understand, you're just an outsider.

Wildlife law enforcement was part of my job, and it was a challenge. I quickly learned two things: there was poaching going on, both of deer and waterfowl, and the violators knew more than I did, like where I was most of the time. I spent a lot of evenings prowling in my truck, which had a switch enabling me to keep the brake lights from announcing exactly where I was, but I also know the time could have been better spent at home with my family. Based on the number of cases I wrote, the violators came out ahead.

The Dooney Bonney case stands out, however, even if it was made by accident. Dooney was a known violator, of the most flagrant order. The federal game agents with whom I occasionally coordinated, had been trying to catch Dooney in the act for years, unsuccessfully. On this afternoon my maintenance man and I took our boat out into a bay east of Knotts Island, and holed up in an empty boat house to just watch what happened as the afternoon went by. After a couple of hours, the birds weren't moving and no shots had even been fired. We decided to call it quits and head for home.

Within an hour of arriving home, I heard a horn honking in my front yard and looked out to see two game agents wearing very broad smiles. I walked out to their truck and boat, which contained a large number of dead ducks. "We nailed Dooney" they exclaimed at the same time. "We were also pulled

into an empty blind, but no one knew we were there. As soon as you guys left, Dooney came roaring out of his blind, and went straight for a raft of ducks. When they started flying, he started blasting. That's when he found out we were there!" They had "written" him for several things, including over limit and hazing, both highly illegal. It was hard for me to sleep that night I was so excited, even if I had been an accidental contributor to the bust. Old Dooney subsequently lost his hunting privileges for several years, his shot gun and his boat. I was not sorry.

We did enjoy some real hands-on wildlife management work at Mackay Island. One of the fun things we did was to canon net canada geese, sex and leg band them, and then release them back to the wild. The canon net was simply a long net, laid out in a folded position, along an area which has been baited with corn. Behind the net was a row of "canons," which were simply large pipes loaded with explosive. When this is set off, by touching two wires to a car battery, the net is pulled behind a projectile and falls over the geese which have been attracted onto the baited area. The geese are then taken out of the net, sexed, banded and released. That was always the plan, and that usually happened. On one occasion however, the plan didn't quite come together.

On this particular November day, by the time we had the net laid out, the corn distributed and the canons loaded, a slow, steady rain was falling. Geese aren't too concerned about getting wet, or getting their feet muddy, and before long about sixty of them were on the site gobbling grain. My supervisor and I were in a small wooden blind built into some low trees, waiting and watching. He said "now" and I touched the wires to the battery. The canons went off, geese tried to fly but under the net only rolled in the mud, and we headed toward the net to get them corralled. That was our first mistake.

We loaded the whole gaggle into boxes, and transported them to the building where we were going to finish the job. Mackay Island was a poor refuge, and consequently had poor facilities. The only building we had to do this work in was a large, converted chicken house. In this case converted meant the building had been gutted, removing all of the roosts, and large sliding doors installed on either end. No heat, and a dirt floor. This was also our vehicle maintenance building. By now it was pitch dark. We discussed whether we should just leave the geese over night, and finish banding them in the morning, or "tough it out", and finish that night. We decided to finish that night. That was our second mistake.

We handled geese until late that night, releasing them to the outside as we finished with each one. That was our third and crowning mistake.

Early the next morning, I received a call at home from someone who had found a very wet, bedraggled, too heavy to fly goose walking through their yard. As the morning wore embarrassingly on, I received several of those calls. I dutifully went to each home, picked up the goose, and took it back to the chicken house to dry, and once again be released. I don't know how many we lost to predators, or how many ended up on the Thanksgiving tables that year. I do know a chagrined refuge manager who felt like his goose had been cooked.

On October 8, 1969, our son Mark arrived with a flourish, six weeks early. Getting Pat off the island, and to the hospital in Virginia Beach was an adventure. I was at the main office in Princess Anne, when I received a call from Pat saying "you had better come home, I think I am getting ready to have this baby." I jumped into my vehicle and headed south toward Knotts Island at a reasonably sane, but not necessarily legal, rate of speed. When I reached the small community of Pungo, everything came to a halt. The highway department was installing a large pipe under the highway, and the trench was cut completely across the road. No way to go around it, just sit and wait and sweat. I explained to the work crew why I really needed to get by and, as they say in southern Virginia "carry my wife to the doctor." Finally they filled the trench enough to allow me to pass, get Pat, and return past the same point on the way back to Virginia Beach. Again, I was not allowed in the delivery room, so I passed the time talking news, weather and sports with the other anxious men in the waiting room. That gave both of our boys the distinction of being born on national wildlife refuges.

I mentioned that we became friends with one other couple on the island, and she in particular took a shine to Mark. She would come over to visit Pat, who as likely as not was at the end of her rope caring for two babies. Pat would pick up one baby, she would take the other, and they would sit and visit, and rock babies. At that time Laugh In was a popular weekly show on television. One sketch every week featured the Farkle Family, and one of their children was named Mark. Our friend picked up on that, and from then on she called our youngest, Mark Farkle. That name still comes out of us on occasion.

We often give wild creatures credit for being intelligent, or having natural senses which we humans don't share. These same wild creatures can at times become confused though.. While we were at Mackay Island, we observed a full solar eclipse. Being curious about how the wildlife might react, I waited on the shore of one small bay where a several species of waterfowl and other birds could always be found.

At the very beginning of the eclipse, all was normal. The redwing black birds were trilling, the geese and swans were scattered over the bay; it was a very normal, serene setting. As the moon began to cover the sun, however, that began to change. By the time the sun was completely blocked, and we were in apparent twilight, the black birds were in trees roosting, and the waterfowl had gathered into their usual nighttime rafts. They were going to bed! Then, of course the sun began to "rise" again, and the birds resumed their daily routine. I found that, while not surprising, at least fascinating to watch.

While living at Knotts Island we bought our first camp trailer. The one couple who had befriended us were regular outdoor campers, and hardly quit talking about how much fun it was. We decided to join them and bought a little tiny Scotty which we could easily pull and had enough room for the four of us - barely. It was so small Pat had to keep her head down while cooking to keep from bumping it on the ceiling. And with two boys in diapers, it occasionally got a little "close" in there. In spite of that, we became hooked on camping, and have done it ever since.

One other memorable trip, again with two very small children, was to Washington, D.C. We did the

whole routine, White House, as much of the Smithsonian as we could squeeze in, Capitol hill, and the memorials. We took that trip because we knew we would not have another chance to see Washington, and we wanted to do that. So that took care of that, we had seen it. Then...

In late August of 1970, the Assistant Regional Refuge Supervisor in Atlanta, called to say he had an opening in northern Virginia at the new Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, that he would like for me to fill. "Take your family up there to look at the refuge and the area, and see what you think. Then let me know." This was intimidating, for a number of reasons. First, we would have to buy a house after years of living in government provided quarters. Second, we would be living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, after several years of living in out of the way, secluded places. We weren't sure about this at all.

We took the trip to Mason Neck, which was beautiful, and while there looked at the area we learned we could most likely afford. It scared us terribly. We stopped in one real estate office to talk in general terms. We told the agent we didn't know what we could buy, but would like to keep our payments at no higher than one hundred dollars per month. He was kind enough not to laugh out loud, but the message was clear: "you must be kidding." Undaunted, we asked to look at something we could afford. The one house we saw was ramshackle, and in a terrible neighborhood. There were only curtains on the cupboards, and we could easily see under the back door. Enough, we are going home.

We returned to Mackay Island. The next day I called the Assistant Supervisor in Atlanta and told him we had looked at the area, and decided it was more than we could handle. But thank you for the opportunity. I then called my supervisor in Princess Anne, and told him the same thing. After a long, boss to subordinate pep-talk, I called Atlanta back and reversed my previous decision. On October 15, the moving truck arrived, and we were off to a new adventure As is so often the case, this turned out to be a fortunate turn of events.

IV. MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

Before the actual move, we made a house hunting trip to Woodbridge, in Prince William County, Virginia. Across the Occoquan River, where the refuge was located, was Fairfax County, with real estate prices we simply could not touch. We bought a house in something of a hurry, because the market was such that if you even thought you might be interested, you better make an offer; it won't be available tomorrow. The Realtor we were working with had been waking people up to present offers at 11:00 p.m., so that someone else didn't get there earlier the next morning. By cashing in our bonds, and making a couple of phone calls to "Mom", we managed to scrape together enough money for the down payment. Now we were first time home owners.

Because Mason Neck was a new refuge, there were no facilities, and no office. That meant my office would be in our home, at least until I could get one established. Due to the design of the house, a split foyer, the most convenient place for my "office" was in the den, on the lower level. I placed my desk, which was left over from a condemned married housing project at college, in one corner of the

den. In the other corner was the television set, in front of which our one and two year old boys spent part of each morning. I watched Mr. Rogers come in, take off his sweater and hang it up, and change his shoes a lot of times. Can you say ad nauseam, boys and girls? Our boys never did learn to hang up their clothes, in spite of Fred Rogers.

The Mason Neck refuge was named after the boot shaped "neck", or peninsula on which it was located. This land mass was originally named after George Mason, one of the nation's founding fathers and author of he Virginia Bill of Rights. Above the heel of the boot, Mason had built a beautiful, typical Virginia architecture home called Gunston Hall. This area adjoined the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority's Pohic Bay Park, which was a publicly owned, protected area slated for eventual high density public use development Then, at the toe of the boot was a Virginia state park, also protected, but planned for low intensity public use. The last chapter in the protection of Mason Neck, and the establishment of the refuge, was written by a large number of determined, dedicated conservationists, rallying around one special creature.

How very appropriate, fronting on the Potomac River, and actually within sight of Mount Vernon (remember that last chance forever to see Washington trip?), that special creature was our nation's symbol, the bald eagle. Nestled into the arch of the boot, was a beautiful fresh water marsh, surrounded by northern Virginia nature. Dogwoods and holly trees, ladyslipper orchids, and Indian pipestems made the woods an adventure to walk through. The neck had been logged a long time before, but only ancient, rotting stumps remained like sentinels to witness the past. Pileated woodpeckers drummed their message in the silence, leaving room for the occasional sound of retreating white tail deer rushing off from two legged intruders. But the creature which historically graced the skies, and decorated the tall trees with their regal white heads and tails, was missing.

Rachel Carson wrote her book Silent Spring in 1962, addressing the very reason why the eagles had disappeared from Mason Neck, and much of the habitat they occupied nationwide. That reason was the pesticide DDT, which was being sprayed on the landscape in hundreds of thousands of gallons annually. What she concluded, and history has shown her to be correct, was that the DDT was finding its way into the environment, mostly through runoff from rainfall. It was then being moved up the food chain to birds, like the bald eagle, which ate fish, which swam and ate in the rivers, which received this runoff. The birds then built nests as they have done for eons, and laid eggs as they have done for as long, and sat on these eggs to incubate them. The catch came in the fact that because of the DDT, the egg shells were very thin, and the incubating adult actually broke their own eggs. After a few years, the numbers of eagles, and many other bird species, began to show demonstrable decreases, and the eagles disappeared from much of the landscape, including Mason Neck.

In the early 1960s, residents on Mason Neck became aware of the development potential on the neck, and of what they had in this undeveloped wild area. At the same time, awareness of the bald eagle's plight was growing, and alarms were going off in the environmental community. Out of this awareness came the idea that something could be done for the bald eagle, and what better place than in an area where he used to nest? Like a mushroom popping up overnight, the idea was born to establish a national wildlife refuge on Mason Neck.

I must also recognize that more was going on than simple altruism, and concern for the wild creatures. The residents of Mason neck were living in their own Shangri-la-on-the-Potomac. They did not want the Washington, D.C. metro area/bedroom community to ooze its way downriver and swallow up the serenity they enjoyed. They very effectively began putting together plans, and lobbying their elected representatives. They were eventually successful, and land acquisition funds were included in the national budget to begin establishing the refuge. When I arrived at Mason Neck, it was all of 609 acres in size, small enough that I got to know each tree by name.

Although the majority of citizens on Mason Neck were strongly in favor of the refuge, there is always that small minority who object, for whatever reason. In this case, objection came in the form of actions ranging from simple acts of covert rebellion, to outright vandalism. The covert rebellion was in the form of an old eastern tradition, which is shared nationwide any more, called dump your trash in the woods, or on the desert, or in the stream, or where ever you get it out of your own sight. When I moved to Mason Neck, there was trash all over the refuge, especially along any road or trail a pickup truck could maneuver. There was even a stripped car body along one road, which the county was good enough to remove for me.

I did surprise one of these dumpers in his own driveway once. Finding a new trash pile just off the main road through the refuge, I stopped to go through it. There was a number of prescription bottles from one local drug store, and some mail. I took the prescription bottles to the drug store, flashed my refuge manager badge, which meant nothing special to the clerk, but she gave me the address of the person who bought the medicine. Unethical perhaps, but it worked.

I found the culprit sanding next to his truck in front of his home. He was very surprised when I told him what I had found, and that I had traced it to him. He started to plead innocent, but quickly realized it would not be worth the effort. What he then wanted to know was how I traced it to him. Rather than say what I really wanted to, about his obvious mental shortcomings in leaving prescription bottles and mail in what he dumped, I simply told him some of it had his name on it. I never traced any more to him, so "maybe" he stopped doing it.

The more covert objections were not as easily traced, and may have even been plain old vandalism. On one evening I received a phone call from the manager at the Pohick Bay Regional Park, who I had come to know because we managed adjacent areas. After a friendly greeting, he matter of factly said "hey, your refuge is on fire." I jumped into my work clothes, and headed for the refuge, a fifteen minute drive away. Within minutes after I arrived, the local volunteer fire department also arrived. As volunteers are want to do, they charged up close to the fire line, which meant they drove their fire truck into the woods, over small trees and over who could tell what legally protected plants. I was at a loss for words, but it was probably good that I was. They were there to put out a fire on the refuge, they had been called away from their families too, and the damage was already done to the environment. We never found who started that fire, but no doubt it was arson.

There were special places we sometimes had access to, where very few people were allowed. One of these was tiny Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge, smack in the mouth of Chesapeake Bay,

and on the path of the twenty mile long Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Fisherman Island was but 250 acres in size, and the only round barrier island. Shore birds, dolphins and ghost crabs were just a very few of the wild creatures one could observe on the island.

During the second world war, the military established a base on the island with the objective of protecting the Chesapeake Bay and the industry along its shores from aircraft attack. When we visited the island, only collapsing walls of a few buildings remained. The wildlife abounded however. The thrill of seeing acres of nesting wading and shorebirds, where you had to watch your step so as not to crush one of those nests, was something we will never forget.

Our dog Taco, not a Rhodes Scholar by any stretch, also enjoyed running through the surf and matching wits with the ghost crabs in a futile attempt to catch one. The crabs had a natural advantage in this chase. Being the same color as the sand, Taco could only see them when they moved in their erratic way. You could see the puzzlement on his face when, just as he got to where the quarry was, it disappeared from sight, only to start running again in a different direction. The chiggers however, were not a laughing matter, at least for the two-footed visitors.

Starting up a new facility, whether it be a wildlife refuge or anything else, requires doing things you never thought you might someday do. The main refuge road, an old, long established trail, was called the Lady Lewis road. This was in reference to gentry who reportedly once lived there. At one point the road crossed a gully, which became a creek whenever a heavy rain fell. In order to safely cross that gully, whether full of water or not, we needed a bridge. I contacted a man in our Washington, D.C. office, who was also an officer in a national guard engineer unit. He said they could build a bridge that would last for years, and do it in short order. All he wanted from me was material. We concurred on a date, I got the material, and on the agreed upon day we built a bridge.

I remember a couple of things in particular about his engineer unit. One, no one was going to die of over exertion while building that bridge. Two, they were playing their 8-track tapes as they worked. I had never heard such lyrics in any music, anywhere before. The words did rhyme, and there was a definite rhythm, but the lyrics were words and ideas my parents would never have approved of me listening to.

They built a good bridge though. It was built to weather almost anything. That is <u>almost</u> anything. Not long after the bridge was built, hurricane Camille hit the gulf shore. Then the storm moved inland, and intensified. Southern Virginia received a rain storm that washed out major roads, threatened the Occoquan dam outside of Woodbridge, and flooded low areas clear into Pennsylvania. The gully my new bridge spanned suffered considerable erosion, and the bridge plunged into the chasm. The bridge was built to survive intact, and it did. However, it <u>was</u> somewhat unimpressive lying on its side at the bottom of that gully.

Wildlife law enforcement was also a part of the job at Mason Neck. We did not have a hunting program on the refuge. It would have had to be hunting deer, and the local residents would not have put up with that. Years later the deer did overpopulate the area however, and the refuge manager

had a real battle getting a hunting program instituted. Why would some people rather see the forest grazed down to mineral soil, the tree limbs and leaves denuded as high as the deer can reach, and deer starve to death, than to allow the herd to be thinned down in a more humane manner? No, I have never been a hunter, and I don't like the NRA, but starving wildlife is against my principles.

At any rate, I had developed a close working relationship with the local State Game Warden, and we worked other deer hunts as well as waterfowl hunting on the Potomac River around the refuge. On one winter morning we met on a high spot on the refuge, and "set up" on an island just off shore where there was a hunting blind. On this day two hunters were in the blind at sunrise, the legal time to begin hunting. It quickly became clear that they were having a good day, based on the number of shots they were firing. It was so good a day in fact, that we both became suspicious of how they were getting all of those ducks to come into their shooting area. So we piled into my boat, and ran out to the island.

When we got to the island, we visited for a few minutes, and checked their licenses and guns to see if they had the proper plugs in them to limit the number of shells the gun would hold. We checked their "bag" for numbers and species of ducks taken. So far everything was as it should have been. Then the warden and I went to work. We had a small hand held dredge to check the river bottom in front of the blind for corn. Baiting, or using grain to coax the birds in, is illegal. The bottom in front of the blind looked like they were planting corn. No wonder these guys were having a good day. While he began writing the citations, I walked to the other end of the small island where their boat was moored. In the bottom of the boat was a duffle bag, the kind hunters use to carry their decoys. On impulse, I took that bag and turned it upside down. Lots of dead ducks came tumbling out, way more than these two men were entitled to. So, while I gathered up all of the birds, and samples of the corn, the warden just kept writing. Pretty good morning's work.

One other law enforcement duty, which was actually more fun than work, was at Susquehanna NWR, a tiny island at the very northern end of Chesapeake Bay. This island was actually man made, providing enough room to build a light house to warn ships of shallow water. Ships venturing that far up the bay were actually headed for the Susquehanna River, and the commerce up stream. The Fish and Wildlife Service came into the picture because of a 1939 Proclamation Boundary signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which prohibited waterfowl hunting in a several thousand acre area around the lighthouse. Every so often, one of us was detailed up there to spend a couple of days checking hunters, and watching what was going on in terms of waterfowl numbers and species composition.

This refuge was actually administered by the Blackwater NWR in Cambridge, Maryland. There was one employee who mostly served as the eyes and ears for the refuge. If he got any compensation, it must have been minimal. He was a crusty individual who frequented flea markets, and had a penchant for old clocks. The inside of his home in Havre de Grace, looked like he frequented flea markets too. While putting these notes together, I learned that the proclamation boundary was rescinded in 1978, and the refuge reduced to one-half acre around the lighthouse. It has now fallen into disrepair, and may be turned over to a lighthouse preservation society. The few nights I spent

in this lighthouse were very enjoyable, kind of like camping out in the middle of a huge lake.

That fellow did teach me one law enforcement trick that I have used several times. That was, as we were moving across the bay and saw a floating log, stop and roll it over to see if any of the hunters had weighted some over-limit ducks and attached them to this floating anchor. If it appears that I am mistrustful of waterfowl hunters, it should. This opinion is based on a number of years working waterfowl hunts, and watching people's behavior. That is a sad commentary, but based on my experience, it is accurate.

I was notified to expect a visit from one of the Regional Office people in Atlanta. He wanted to see the refuge, and talk about what was planned for the future. No problem, I was always proud to show off what was going on and what had been accomplished. While we visited he mentioned that nominations were open for the Departmental Manager Development Program, a one-year management training effort in the Central Office. That meant the Washington Office, and a chance to see close up how the agency operated, and perhaps for an eventual promotion. I had heard of this program in the past, and I knew I wanted to experience it. I told him so, and he said he would see what he could do. In June of 1972, I was notified that I had been selected. I was ecstatic. The good news was that since I already lived in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, I would not have to relocate for this assignment. I could begin my commuting experience, which I am still doing today. Pat and I were both pleased about not having to move.

V. MR. JOE

My story of Mason Neck would not be complete without including a very special person, a person who played a significant role in establishment of the refuge, and in fact in the very early history of what we now call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. His name is Joe Flakne, or as my boys called him, Mr. Joe.

Joe's roots go back to northern Minnesota, on a homestead at what was called Mud Lake. Today maps still show Mud Lake, but it is surrounded by the Agassiz (Ag-a-see) National Wildlife Refuge. The Thief River flows into the lake, and the Middle River drains to the north. This appeared to be a good arrangement until the spring thaw began, and ice melted in the south but more slowly in the north. The water wouldn't flow and drain the lake, it just backed up and flooded the homestead. So, each winter the cattle were moved to the tops of the buildings, which were made of sod, to wait for the thaw further north.

Joe had various jobs as a younger man, including working in a filling station in Minneapolis, but eventually found his way even further north, to Alaska. There he signed on with the Bureau of Biological Survey, where he had responsibilities that took him to many of the mountain ranges and valleys across that snow and ice covered territory. This sounds exciting even today, but Joe did it on a dog sled, following his lead dog Monkey and his team. Not surprisingly, realizing the bond and dependence for survival developed between the "musher" and his team, Joe still gets a soft spot in his voice when he speaks of his dogs. Over time the Bureau was renamed a couple of times,

eventually becoming the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At 96, Joe still remembers and speaks of those days in Alaska with excitement.

Joe eventually went on to the Interior Department as Director of Trust Territories, Islands of the Pacific, retiring long before I got to Mason Neck. In the interim, he became deeply involved in establishment of the refuge, which led up to me going there and the two of us becoming life long friends. Also after going to Washington, he and his wife purchased a small log cabin on the banks of the Potomac, just down stream from, and within sight of, Mount Vernon. I spent many hours in that cabin, sometimes using it as a base for contacting people, meeting local politicos, and at one time writing my annual report. Eventually Joe donated the cabin and the land to Fairfax County to be used as a park for older citizens, where they could sit and relax, and watch the river flow by.

Joe had a wonderful impact on me professionally, and my family. We shared a number of holiday dinners at our home, always enjoying the stories and the friendship. On one occasion we experienced a typical Virginia thunderstorm, with lots of lightening and thunder. Both of our boys were frightened by the noise, but Joe talked to them, measuring the time between the flash and the thunder clap, and explaining what nature was doing. After that they were no longer frightened by these storms, and still remember Joe's being there that day.

Although Joe has now relocated to his native Minnesota, but not to Mud Lake, we still maintain contact, and still remember the good times and "what we did for the refuge". Mr. Joe holds a special place in my career, and is a unique memory for my family.

VI. OVER THE BACK FENCE

Being selected for the Departmental Manager Development Program was a thrill and a highlight in my career. Few employees, even today, have the opportunity for this experience. It allowed me tremendous latitude to get into a number of different offices, and interview a variety of people, with the simple opening statement "I am a Departmental Trainee this year...."

Our first meeting, of all of the Fish and Wildlife Service trainees, was exciting, because we had all come from different parts of the country, and different functions within the Service. I knew several of the Service trainees, and would come to know the rest very well. Over the next nine months we would spend a lot of time together, some of it fun and some of it stressful. We did a lot of self evaluation, goal setting and planning for our future. We all thought that since we had been selected for this program, we had no where to go but up the ladder. For some of us that was true, but not for all of us. Over the past twenty four years, some of the group has just faded away.

Shortly before the program began, a neighbor told me they were moving, and would be gone for a year. Their departure time was about the same as when the program would start, and the year's absence would also be very close to the length of the program. Knowing that some of the folks coming from out of town would need a place for their family, I talked to the course coordinator in Washington, and the house was rented within an hour. The family who rented the house were friends

we had not yet met, and were also a Fish and Wildlife Service folks. Our families struck up a lasting friendship right away.

Since he and I were going to be in the program together, we would also have the same work schedule. We rode the bus back and forth to Washington, a Greyhound commuter leaving from Woodbridge early each morning. The bus station was close by, just across Highway One, which was only a short walk through some townhouses from my back yard. A short walk that is, after we crossed the wire fence at the back of my property. And to get there, he had to crawl over a chain link fence between our two yards. The two of us must have been a sight crawling over those fences in our three piece suits, especially on days when he wore his red suit. Polyester was the fabric of choice then; thank goodness those days are gone.

Even though we were each assigned an advisor, we were pretty free to set our own schedules as long as we made all of the meetings, and attended the required classes. One of those classes was Economics of Natural Resources, taught by a graduate student from George Washington University. Fortunately, he knew a great deal about economics. Unfortunately, he knew next to nothing about natural resources. The class left a lot to be desired because of that, but we all passed somehow anyway. Economics was not my strong suit in college, and my attitude toward the subject had not changed appreciably since.

One of the first assignments I was given was to write a recovery plan for the red cockaded woodpecker, an endangered species. I attacked the task with enthusiasm and the conviction that this would be a cake-walk. We knew what kind of habitat the woodpecker liked, and what was happening to cause its numbers to decline. One of the things this bird likes, is to drill nest holes in old age pine trees that have heart rot disease. This is a condition that naturally occurs in old stands of pines, and is a primary reason the Forest Service likes to go in and clear cut old stands. They don't see old trees out there, they see lumber.

So, in my enthusiasm, I went downstairs to visit with a National Park Service management person. I suggested that in order to assist in saving the red cockaded woodpecker, we find old stands of pine on their land, and infect them with heart rot disease. My suggestion was met with a great deal less than enthusiasm. It was one of those "don't call me, I'll call you" responses. Oh well, it was worth a shot.

Another opportunity we had was to spend time with a senator or congressman, or a committee over on "The Hill". We were somewhat constrained in what committee or what congressman we could choose, because the Department didn't want any of us to have connection with budget committees which might have an affect on our annual appropriations. I was able to line up an assignment with a senator from New Mexico, Pete Domenici. That was exciting for me because he was my home senator. In retrospect though, it was not a real good decision, because he was a first term freshman, had no juicy committee assignments, and was also feeling his way along. Since that time his lot has changed, of course, and he is now a mover and shaker in the senate. But it was fun to wander the halls and tunnels under capitol hill, just to see the senators and congressmen.

As trainees, we also had wide ranging access to offices within the Interior Department. Again the magic words "I am a Departmental Trainee this year..." were enough to get us into most offices. I shadowed the Director of the Bureau of Land Management, and attended Directorate meetings for the Fish and Wildlife Service. One of the most exciting tasks I was assigned was to accompany the Director to a Senate Hearing on establishment of a new refuge. I sat at the front table, just below the dias behind which all of the senators were sitting. They asked one question, relating to providing resting space for waterfowl, and the Director turned to me and asked that I answer the question. I thought I did a pretty good job, and they must have thought so too, since they didn't ask any more questions on that subject.

This training program was supposed to give us the background, and the credentials to move quickly through the ranks in the organization, and become "someone." Of course, attached to that was the unspoken but crystal clear understanding that you couldn't do that and stay in the same job. An upward mover had to have a broad breadth of experience. I took this to heart, and upon finding that there was an opening for a fish and wildlife biologist in the Ecological Services office in Olympia, Washington, I went for it. To the exhilaration of both Pat and me, the decision was approved by the Director, and in late May, 1973, we were on our way to the northwest.

I had learned my way around "The Hill" well enough that I knew how to find congressional offices, and knew they all had maps of their respective states. By this time the Training Program was winding down, and we had all the time we wanted to find our own things to do. So I walked over to the Senate Office Building, and visited the office of each state through which we would pass on our trip to Washington. My next effort was to use a yellow hi-liter to mark each highway and projected overnight stop, all the way to Puget Sound. This was still long before I learned that control was not the key to harmony and getting things done. Had I known that then, we would have had a more leisurely trip. In spite of that, with two small children, the same psychotic dog, Taco, and a camp trailer loaded with house plants, we made our way to the southern tip of Puget Sound. We discovered a whole new physical environment; we found...rain.

VII. THE SLUGS DRANK BEER

I don't remember that it was raining the day we arrived in Olympia, but I do remember that it rained for the next nine months. It wasn't a downpour like we get during the late summer in New Mexico, it was just a slow, steady drizzle, and it went on and on. It didn't take long for us to come to the conclusion that no matter what we were going to do, mow the yard or have a picnic or go camping, we would do it in the rain. Once we accepted that, we were alright. Early on, we heard a story about that.

It seems that a fellow had tried for some time to get his girl to marry him, and move to western Washington. Finally, when he told her that she would love it because it is always green, she relented and married him. They moved to Washington, and she quickly found out why it is always green. It is always raining. We did adjust though, and actually came to like the area very much. We have agreed several times since leaving, that if there was any place we would go back to, if we <u>had</u> to leave

Albuquerque, it would be Olympia.

As a further example of the rainfall, and how people miss the sunshine, I think back to the Olympia office. We were located in a World War II barracks, at the foot of a blackberry covered hill sloping down to the water front. Projecting out into the bay was a substantial pier, the one time support for the navy mothball fleet. On days when the sun would finally peek through the clouds, the staff reacted as if someone had pulled the fire alarm, and many of us assembled on the pier to enjoy the feel of sunshine.

After selling a home in the Washington, D.C. commuting area, we found housing prices to be very attractive. We bought a nice home in an area which was just developing. The area was called Woodland Creek, and in fact there was a beautiful creek running through it. Behind our house was a tract of undeveloped land, grown up with brush and trees, essentially a western Washington forest. Pat's grandmother visited us there once, and didn't want us to let the boys play outside because of the wild animals which might be in those woods.

We didn't see many wild animals out there, other than the squirrels, chipmunks and occasional snakes that were supposed to be in residence. There was one "wild animal" that we saw frequently however. That was the slug, a slow moving, rather ugly, black, slime machine. We would frequently see a slime trail leading up and down our sliding glass patio doors; from a slug. There was one option for getting rid of at least some of them, before they trailed across the patio door, or the door knob. That was to bury a nearly empty beer bottle, slanting up from the soil, near the patio edge in the evening. The next morning you would have a wonderful collection of slugs in that bottle, which you could throw away. What else do you do with a beer bottle full of slugs? Of course, you knew this only made you feel like you were doing something. The woods were full of a never ending supply of slugs, helping the rotting process and just waiting to attack your patio door.

The rain also continued into winter, and on very rare occasion it turned to snow. Our second winter there we had a blizzard, and several inches of very wet snow fell, breaking power lines, and occasional trees. Most of the trees in that area were evergreens, and very pliable, just bending with the weight of the snow. There are also white barked alder trees, which are brittle and will break if too much wet snow gathers on them. That is what happened one winter evening, just when I went out to see how much snow had fallen, and how badly the trees were bending. I heard a sudden, loud crack, followed by a crash and a horrible buzzing sound. At that moment, our house and part of our neighborhood became dark.

The crack of course was a large alder tree, which crashed onto a corner of our house, breaking through to the attic, bouncing off and taking down the power line which serviced our home. The buzzing was the electric fuse box blowing up immediately next to where I was standing. That sent an electrical surge through our neighborhood, knocking out power to several other homes, and our community well. Rube Goldberg could not have planned a better sequence of events to turn the water off. We learned that it takes a lot of snow, melting on the stove in the camper, to gather enough water to flush the toilet. For a couple of days, little boys writing their name in the snow in

the back yard, was OK.

One of the responsibilities of my job was to inspect sites of proposed personal docks on the thousands of miles of shoreline in and around Puget Sound. Inspecting these sites often took me as far north as Anacortes and Port Townsend, opposite each other at the mouth of the Sound. The reason for the inspection was federal responsibility to assure that the structure did not have a negative effect on the environment, specifically the fish and shellfish so abundant in those biologically rich waters. This could happen through shading or interruption of the natural water currents along the shore. Sometimes our recommendations, which were made to the Corps of Engineers, made us quite unpopular with the landowner who had paid a lot of money for waterfront, only to have the Fish and Wildlife Service object to their building a dock. Usually we could come to some agreement with the applicant to modify his plan in a small way, so that our concerns were alleviated.

Like my concerns with the prairie dog work years ago, I again had the feeling that we were sometimes overstepping, if not the letter of the law, at least the element of reason. At times I think we did. And then I would find the shoreline owner who was running his bulldozer into the water, well below the low tide line, and reeking havoc on shellfish beds. Then my concern over our actions would lessen.

There was one person, however, who was all in favor of our protecting the shellfish beds. Pat and I attended a picnic with the antique bottle club I belonged to. We met on a small bay along the Sound, and had a clam bake, the first we had been to. Pat dug into the steam pot, learned how to open the clam shells, and just flat enjoyed herself. She amazed both of us, eating freshly harvested clams, and loving it.

We made one trip "out of the country" while we were in Washington. Leaving the boys with friends for a long weekend, we caught the ferry in Seattle, cruised north through the San Juan Islands and landed at Victoria on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. I will never forget sailing through the islands, and seeing several bald eagles in the trees along the water. At that time the eagle was in trouble, and to see more than one at a time was a treat. We had tea at the appointed time on the hotel veranda, rode a double decker bus to Busch Gardens, and saw the most beautiful flowers, all over Victoria, one can imagine.

I didn't travel much in this job, mostly day trips to inspect the various dock and pier applications. My office did get a request from the Washington Division of Game for one of our biologists to do the annual white wing dove census. I was able to get authorization to take Pat and the boys along on this trip, and was glad I did. The surveys I did were in the south eastern corner of Washington, in very rural country. The census route ran through one small town, and those people probably wondered who that was out there at sun up with his family and binoculars. We found a lot of white wings, and had a nice family vacation while we were at it. Taking my family along on such a trip, is something I have done only once in my career. I am not real sure, because of the family being there, that the census numbers were really reliable. The boys got a taste of what doing a wildlife census was, but were hard pressed to stay quiet so as not to scare the birds off.

In April, 1975, I received a telephone call that thoroughly surprised, and wildly excited both Pat and me. That call was from an old friend of Fisherman Island days, who was by then the Chief Scientist for the National Park Service in their Boston Regional Office. He called to ask if I would be interested in a four month detail to he National Park Service, in New York City, at the new Gateway National Recreation Area. The job would be to write the management plan for a wildlife refuge to be established on the new recreation area. Park Service would pay all expenses for me and my family, and would work out the details with my superiors in Washington. Would I be interested?

VIII. THE BIG APPLE

Writing this now, twenty one years later, I hear echos of Frank Sinatra bouncing around in my head. Why New York is called "The Big Apple," I have no idea, but it is definitely accepted, and widely used. When Pat and I arrived at Gateway, and were shown into the Director's office, he greeted us with "Welcome to the Big Apple." Another adventure for our family was beginning.

Gateway was an anachronism, once a Coast Guard station, hangars and runways still intact, sand dunes and excess buildings. This was all tucked away southeast of the five boroughs of New York City, surrounded by chain link fence, and for all practical purposes abandoned excess federal property. The time was right for urban parks which could provide recreational and educational opportunities for masses of people. Certainly this was a perfect opportunity for New York City.

In the following years, there would be incalculable improvements made, developments designed and created, and millions of dollars spent. At that time the mood in the Congress was right, and no obstacle seemed too great. Pat and I arrived very early in the game, and were on the fringes of what Gateway was to become. We were assigned a mobile home to serve as our quarters. I use the term quarters loosely.

The several mobile homes assigned to employees were excess property left over from hurricane Camille, a few years earlier. They were mobile homes moved into the part of Pennsylvania devastated by the hurricane. They served as temporary housing for people whose homes were damaged or destroyed. As could be expected, they were not in the best of shape. The one we lived in had some furniture, a couch without legs, three beds, a stove and refrigerator, and kitchen table. It also had a washer and dryer, large enough to do one set of sheets at a time, and the washer overflowed regularly, running water onto the floor. Not to worry, there were enough holes around pipes and under walls to let the water flow out onto the sand. That was the good news.

Those holes and openings which allowed the water to flow out, also provided access to the inside. Since Gateway was being established on the site of an old coast guard facility, there was salt water, a wharf, and the various trappings of a dockside facility. Along with that were the expected critters, specifically *Rattus norvegicus*, the Norway rat, also called wharf rats. We could hear them squeaking at night, roaming the inside of our trailer, and terrifying Pete, our fearless and mentally challenged pek-a-poo. We knew immediately when one of those critters was inside; Pete landed square in the middle of our bed.

One story we didn't learn until many years later, was how Chris, and a friend of his took the friend's dad's Park Service firearm, and were out shooting rats for fun. Had something happened, and the kids been found out, at best his dad would have been severely reprimanded. At worst, what could have happened is unthinkable.

Before we left Olympia, Pat and I checked with Chris' first grade teacher to see if she would object to his going to New York, and seeing all that it had to offer. Chris was a good student, and she didn't even hesitate before giving us a sound "yes, by all means." We took some of his grade level books, and shortly after we moved into the trailer at Gateway, Pat began tutoring him. He didn't take real well to his Mom being his teacher, and developed a nervous habit of twirling a lock of hair, on the crown of his head, between his fingers. Before long, he was developing a bare spot there, and since it was near the end of school anyway, the lessons were curtailed.

Pat and I brought our bikes along from Olympia, so we quickly went to a nearby shop and bought small ones for the boys. With all of the runway and landing pad space available, we could all ride a long time, and not worry about traffic, with one exception. The New York police department used all of that wide open concrete space for training their rookies to drive fast, turn sharp, and stop quick. We always knew when that was going on however, simply by the noise of screeching tires. Mark learned the hard way that all puddles were not meant to be gleefully ridden through. The one he chose on the Gateway landing area, disguised a hole into which he and his bike almost disappeared. Was he surprised? The boys put a lot of miles on those little bikes, which we sold back when we returned to Olympia.

Living in Brooklyn, somewhat misleading because of where we <u>really</u> lived, opened up a whole new world to us. We quickly learned how to catch a bus from Gateway, disappear into the subway like prairie dogs running for cover, and get to almost any place in the City. Some places, like the recently burned out part of Watts, we did avoid. We didn't go out at night. But we saw places and things we desert rats had never thought about seeing before.

One thing you do when moving into a new community (New York City?), is to open a checking account. We went out to Flatbush Avenue, caught a bus, and went into Brooklyn to accomplish that. The bank nearest the bus stop happened to be Chase Manhattan, located in a gleaming office tower, furnished with beautiful furniture and plush grey carpeting. As we were talking to the very nicely dressed account representative, both of us glanced behind his office chair. There sat Mark, gaily dumping two shoes full of Gateway beach sand onto that same plush grey carpet. I don't remember if we said anything to the man or not. Thankfully, we would never see him again anyway.

The New York subway was an adventure all its own. The Transit Authority does provide a subway map, a very colorful map. This diagram reminds one of the proverbial can of worms, only these are multicolored worms, and they are in a seemingly incomprehensible tangle. We had to learn several things about navigating our way through the myriad of tunnels, and levels of tunnels. We learned how to transfer from the red line to the blue line, how to read the signs underground, and how to disembark at the correct station. We did find the underground natives using the subway to be anxious

to help, and generally of good nature. Of course, we were easily spotted as tourists, gazing at the subway map in total confusion, and arguing about whether it would be quicker to use the yellow line or the green line. Eventually we would reach our destination, and emerge from underground, blinking in the daylight, and staring almost straight up in open-mouthed awe at the skyscrapers.

Most of the time we felt safe in the subway tunnels, but always tried to be aware of what was going on around us. One story in the newspaper was about a subway security guard who would hide in the trash cans, peeking out under the swinging door, watching for anything which might happen on the platform. He would then jump out, and arrest the scofflaw. The story did not say how often he had a soft drink or a dead lunch dumped on him.

We visited all kinds of museums, some memorable and some not. Art museums were high on Pat's agenda, although the three "guys" didn't get too excited about most of them. We did see some wonderful art museums, and a number of historically important paintings. There was one museum though, that was memorable for probably the wrong reasons. That was the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art. One room we went into appeared to be undergoing remodeling, based on the pile of canvas tarps in the center of the room. Then we stepped into another room which contained no art work at all, just some scattered, square steel plates lying on the floor. Imagine our amazement when we later discovered that those tarps and steel plates were the "art work."

It wasn't until many years later, after we had returned to Albuquerque, that the boys said they really liked living there. "There aren't any museums."

In early July, 1975, I received word that I had been selected as manager of the Desert National Wildlife Range in Las Vegas, Nevada. Even though it meant leaving Olympia, I was delighted. It would be the first refuge where I was "the manager," and at 1.5 million acres, it was the largest refuge in the United States outside Alaska. It also meant another move for the family, but being a real promotion for me, Pat, as usual, was in favor. In my excitement, I didn't realize that this would be the fourth major move we had made, and every time Pat was in there pitching as hard as she could.

The other thing that didn't occur to me until much later, was that every time we moved, Pat had to start over. That meant giving up the credits she had earned in school, her friends (which were limited because we moved so often), and any stability that she had managed to create. She never complained, or indicated just how hard it had to have been on her. She always jumped right in and said "let's go." Our mutual thought was "someday we will get back to Albuquerque." Maybe that is what kept her going, and keeping such a positive attitude.

In mid July, my mother became ill in New Mexico, and we all flew back there for a few days. I returned to Gateway, leaving the family in New Mexico, to finish the management plan for the new wildlife refuge. I accomplished that, and we made plans for our return to Olympia. Pat was going to fly through Denver, leave the boys with her sister (remember Duck Water?), and join me in New York for a leisurely drive back across country. She arrived on Thursday the seventh. On Saturday we took in a Broadway play, and on Sunday we headed west. The Big Apple experience was

wonderful for all of us, and one that the boys still remember.

So, we returned to Olympia, sold our Woodland Creek home, said goodbye to a lot of friends, and on October 6, 1975, started south to Las Vegas. We had no visions of making our fortune at the tables. Pat and I have always been more careful and conservative than that. I have even been accused of being "tight" by some people. I prefer to call it fiscally conservative.

IX. SHE SURE MUST HAVE A LOT OF BABIES

October in Las Vegas is getting into nice weather. The searing heat of July and August is behind, and people can begin to enjoy being outside again. We knew we were moving into government quarters, and knew it was on the very busy corner of Decatur and Vegas Drive. When we would tell people where we lived, they would say "I didn't know anyone lived there". It was a very large area, the house bordered by oleanders and huge trees, and the whole lot surrounded by a chain link fence and gate which we locked each evening. We felt safe enough in our compound that Pat and I slept outside on the lawn occasionally. From there we could see the top of the Union Plaza Hotel at the end of Fremont Street, where on the fourth of July fireworks were launched to light up the sky.

Desert was an interesting refuge. Established originally to protect the desert bighorn sheep, it was an exception to the "rule of thumb" that the federal government has responsibility for migratory animals such as waterfowl, and the state exercises control over resident game like qual, and deer. Add to that the fact that approximately two-thirds of the refuge is overlain by the Nellis Air Force Base bombing and gunnery range, which precludes us getting "into the field" except two weeks in December, and you have a challenge to get much accomplished for the critters.

In spite of the closure, we were able to do some work for the wildlife. Scattered over the refuge, particularly in the bone-dry mountains, were improvements called guzzlers. These are constructed of one or two slanted sheet metal surfaces which shed rain water into a gutter, and then into an underground holding tank. From there water is metered out, through a float valve, into a drinking basin. This provides water for most of the year, even in dry times. These guzzlers had to be checked and maintained to assure their continued operation.

Naturally these "watering holes" were gathering points for all kinds of wildlife. They gave us a good way to census sheep numbers, and see what other species might come in to water. This could be done by either "sitting" on the guzzler and watching it, while hiding in a blind, or with time lapse photography. The latter had proved to be the most time efficient and least expensive. We were able to do such things during those magic two weeks in December.

I always wanted to get the boys out on the refuge to see what it looked like, and to experience more than just my stories about what was going on. Not being able to do that related to why the refuge was closed so much of the time, and why even we employees didn't get out and hike around. Because of the bombing and gunnery range, which fired live ordnance, a lot of used brass was lying

on the ground. While it might be fun to pick it up, some of it could still have been "live ordnance," and potentially deadly if it should go off. Those few hunters who "drew out" for the annual trophy sheep hunt, and had paid hundreds of dollars to the State of Nevada for a permit, were cautioned repeatedly not to pick up anything.

There was a way for the boys to see sheep though, and we did took advantage of that. At the field headquarters, a place called Corn Creek, there was a substantial pen, holding a few desert bighorns. There were a couple of ewes, and two rams. The older ram, Spots, was well known in the local area because of the tremendous set of horns he sported. A ram with a three-quarter curl was something any sheep hunter would covet for his trophy room. The younger ram, Frisky, earned his name honestly. The two ewes were just there. I don't know if they even had names, but they were sheep the public could see up close, and they annually produced lambs (Frisky lived up to his name).

A couple of years after we left Desert, the Service adopted a "no zoo" policy, and any captive groups of animals such as our sheep had to be disposed of. In our case, it was fairly easy. Frisky and the two ewes went to the Los Angeles zoo. Spots had by this time died of natural causes, and is now on display in the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau.

When the sheep pens were taken down, there were some puzzled people asking why there was all of that shrapnel lying on the ground. The story of that shrapnel is related to the blinking red light at the top of a tower over Corn Creek. The bombing and gunnery range to the west of Corn Creek was used for practice bombing runs by the Air Force at Nellis Air Force Base. After dark one night the folks at Corn Creek heard jets overhead, followed by loud explosions and breaking windows. Immediately the resident Manager was on the phone to the Refuge Manager in town, saying "Call Nellis, and tell them they are bombing us!" Not long, and the bombing runs ceased.

The next day, there was not only shrapnel at Corn Creek, but also a lot of uniformed, red-faced brass. The pilots had somehow mistaken the house lights at Corn Creek for the correct lights on the bombing and gunnery range. Rest, America, our Air Force is flying. That is when the blinking red beacon was erected at Corn Creek. The military even comes out to change the bulb.

Desert had two satellite refuges which I was in charge of administering too. One of these, Paranagat, was north of Las Vegas about one hundred twenty miles. It was a waterfowl migration area, and annually served as a home base for thousands of ducks, and lesser numbers of snow geese. It also supported large number of mourning doves, and consequently we had an annual, very successful, dove hunt. That was, fortunately, the only time I was ever shot. I noticed a dove hunter sighting on a small flock, and following them with his aim. When he swung around toward me, I shouted "get down" at the fellow next to me (Mr. Joe, remember him?), and we were peppered with shot. No harm done, just a memory now.

The other satellite was the same distance away, in the other direction. That one was the Desert Pupfish Refugium. It amounted to little more than a highly mechanized fish tank, way out in the desert. The water was from a natural spring, and levels were controlled by sophisticated electric

pumps. There was a baffle of wooden slats over it for shade, and a fence around it. Not too much to do as far as management; just go out occasionally and see if it was still operating properly.

Pat and the boys saw both of these places, but the one they found really interesting was the Devils Hole Pupfish refuge. This was actually administered by the U.S. Geological Survey, rather than the Fish and Wildlife Service. It was a large, deep hole in the rocks with a spring at the very bottom, approximately thirty to forty feet down. Below the water level was a labyrinth of tunnels filled with water. As the story went, a couple of scuba divers went down into the tunnels, apparently became disoriented, and never came back up. Fact or fancy, I don't know for sure.

As I have told a number of people when describing our Las Vegas experience, it is not all slot machines and poker tables. There is a real town there too, with schools, churches, cub scouts (this is where we got started in scouting), and really nice, caring people. Pat and I experienced the latter in a very special way, that we still remember with warm, fuzzy feelings. A couple we did not know, but who seemed to know us, called and asked if they could stop by and talk to us about our marriage, and how to make it even better. Normally, we would have run like a frightened jackrabbit from an approach such as this. Something, perhaps their sincerity, lead us to say yes.

When they came by, they told us about an experience that couples can share, relating to communication. They said this experience was oriented toward opening up communication within the marriage, and the way to maintain that open communication. It must have struck a chord with us, because within a few days we had decided to take advantage of this experience, and agreed to go to Reno for it. A few weeks later, with someone to take care of the boys, we were on our way to an abandoned air force base near Reno. We were going to a Marriage Encounter weekend. Just by coincidence, it happened to fall on our eleventh anniversary, and it turned out to be a very meaningful, close, loving experience. It must have been. Today, having passed our thirty-first anniversary, twenty years later, we are still involved in a Marriage Encounter group. We no longer follow the Marriage Encounter tenets to the letter, as we did when it was all new to us. But I believe that weekend did have a very positive affect on our relationship, and certainly put us in touch with a large number of wonderful people who are also interested in making their marriage work better.

Las Vegas was also entertainment, about any kind you could want. One thing Pat and the boys and I did on occasion, was to go to the MGM Grand and watch the old movies. We saw Tugboat Annie and Singing in the Rain for very little cost. The story here though, took place outside the hotel's front entrance. At that time there was a very large fountain just outside the front doors to the casino. Around the edge of the fountain were perched several mermaids in typical mermaid dress, that is except for their tails, nude. Each mermaid was, Las Vegas remember, very well endowed. The fountain water was circulated through a pump in the bottom, and then returned to the pool by streams shooting from each mermaid's breasts. Chris studied this scene for a minute, and then observed in typical eight year old volume, "She sure must have a lot of babies". There were a number of laughs and chuckles around the fountain.

While we were in Las Vegas, the enormous building boom was just beginning. So, for entertainment

we occasionally toured new homes just to see what they looked like. This led to another fountain incident, this time for Mark, and this time not so funny. One new home we visited had a very pretty courtyard entrance, with a fountain that had several levels. The falling water sounded pretty, and looked lovely. As we entered the front door we heard Mark choking and coughing, trying to spit something out. The first place I looked was the fountain, smelling and tasting the "water." I found that in order to keep the algae from growing in the fountain, they were using straight clorox. Mark said he had not swallowed any, but to be certain he was alright, we took him straight to an urgent care center. The doctor said he appeared to be fine, and probably learned a valuable lesson on drinking things he didn't know about. I went back to the builder, who paid me the cost of the doctor's exam. Seemed fair to me.

Speaking of entertainment, Desert is also the only refuge I know of which has a "house of ill repute" within its borders. Actually, our east boundary conveniently skirts around what was then called Sheri's Ranch (Master Card & private runway), and we actually had very little contact. I did stop in once however. I was going to Washington, and thought a few matchbook covers might be items of interest. One day, on my way to Paranagat NWR, I pulled in and asked the proprietor for some matchbooks. He offered other amenities too, which I politely declined, and being nervous enough that my official vehicle was parked outside, left quickly. The matchbooks were a hit in Washington. I still have one in my desk.

There was one other adventure the boys had at Desert, which their grandfather would probably just as soon forget. He is not an outdoors man. Wild animals that crawl on the desert are not his "thing." We had grandpa out at Corn Creek one day, and the boys found a desert tortoise, not an uncommon creature there. As they were bringing the tortoise in the back door of the car, grandpa was doing his best to take himself out the other side. Guess he didn't see himself as tortoise food.

In spite of the glitz and glitter of Las Vegas, which Pat and I avoided unless we had company, and the million and a half acres of refuge, I simply was going stir crazy. Other than the national guard commander, who wanted authority for the military to play war games on the refuge, not very much was going on. So, after only a year and a half, I was watching for a possible new assignment. Strange how things work out. A position in the Division of Refuges, in Washington, came open at the same time as I made a trip back there to some meeting. While there, I talked to the Assistant Division Chief, a man I had known since the Mackay Island days, and my application went through like I was the only candidate. So, we were off on another odyssey, another move, and another adventure. We had enjoyed the Washington area last time, so we knew what we were getting into. Actually, it sounded kind of exciting.

That meant another house hunting trip, always a very stressful activity. The story here though began before we got to the plane in Las Vegas. As I was getting the tickets, Pat was standing behind me. She heard the man behind her talking, apparently to himself. She turned around, and they began visiting. The man was in a terrible emotional turmoil, and who wouldn't have been?

His wife didn't know he was in Las Vegas; he was only supposed to change planes there. He started

to gamble for just the time between planes, and ended up gambling all night. "I've lost everything, my savings, my house, everything." He was on his way home to tell his wife what had happened. I wonder how many times that story has been repeated in Las Vegas. The old saw is right, Las Vegas wasn't built on winners.

Our house hunting trip was another rich, emotional experience. At the time we were looking for a home, the housing market was at its peak, and houses were selling as fast as they were listed. We looked all over Prince William County, knowing we still could not afford Fairfax County, and after several days found a house in Manassas. When our agent made the appointment to present our offer, she found that she would be second in line. That was actually to our favor, since she would be present when the first offer was made, and would know their proposal. So, in her folder she had a less than full price offer, and one for full price. That way she could present which ever one she judged the seller would be most likely to accept. We got the house, on the full price offer. We were glad for that. Our search was over, we had a nice home, and we could go back to Las Vegas and pack.

X. BULL RUN, PAPER DRIVES AND OLD FRIENDS

Leaving Las Vegas (we shoulda made a movie) was not hard for us. We were losing some friends, but not close friends. We had made some happy memories, and had some great experiences. We did not seem bonded to anything in particular there. So on February 28, 1977, we hooked up the trailer and started east, back to Virginia, and rekindling of a long time friendship with the Fosters.

On March 7, we arrived in Manassas, and took up residence in a motel not far from our house. I had already established that several of my co-workers lived near our house, and there was an opening in the car pool. I began commuting into the District, and the Main Interior Building within a very few days. I could tell right away that I would enjoy this group. No one seemed to be dominant, in spite of the varied positions we all held, from Assistant Division Chief down to staff support. I did learn quickly that there were rules for the car pool, and they were adhered to religiously.

Everyone was to drive the same number of times over any given period. If you were on travel and it was your turn to drive, you made it up before or after you traveled. We had a record book that showed who drove when, and how many days they had driven. You were expected to be ready on time in the morning, there was no waiting. The car pool waited fifteen minutes after quitting time, and left town with or without you. We did leave one fellow in town several times, because he had a hard time passing the pub [illegible] His wife then had to drive 45 miles back into town to get him that evening. The first time I drove into the District, I made a wrong turn, and we had a grand tour of capitol hill and the executive office buildings. I only did that once.

I transferred into Washington in the Division of Refuges, Branch of Planning. In that position I was involved in refuge affairs nationwide, but it was routine, and not too challenging. One man I worked with was also in my car pool, and when times were slow, which happened occasionally, we made up

things to have fun with. One of those things was to write a note, and put it in a document which we knew was going out to a refuge "somewhere". One of these notes might say "Help, I'm being held prisoner in the Washington Office. Please call me.", and we would sign it. We never got even one call. Another was to start a rumor, and see how long it took to get back to us from the field. After nine months, I got a chance to move over to the Migratory Bird Office, and work in the land acquisition approval effort.

I liked this more than working in the division, because I was dealing with a more dynamic issue, and land acquisition is something I enjoy anyway. The migratory bird office is where the responsibility for all of the records for bird banding are kept, and some of the people in there were old hands at this business. This job only lasted a few months, when I was transferred back to Main Interior to be in the Program Development office for the Wildlife Program. That was a budget office, dealing with all of the wildlife programs in the Service. I was working for the same man as when I was at Mackay Island, and the job was the best I had during this tour in Washington.

I had gone back to Washington a second time because the policy then was if you really wanted to move up in the organization, you had to have Washington experience in a substantive position. I wasn't sure being in the Departmental Training Program would carry enough weight, so I'll do it right and proper. That policy has long since gone out the window. Now the Service practically has to beg people to go back there on permanent assignment. Oh well, we had a good time while we were there.

Sometimes getting home after work was easier said than done. In February of 1979, we were almost ready to start for Manassas, when snow started falling. The sky had looked ominous all day, but nothing was happening. When it started happening, it happened with a vengeance. We got out the George Washington Parkway alright, and then connected to the beltway. Enough snow had already fallen, the temperature was dropping, and the roads were getting slick. Then we turned west on Interstate 66, and traffic came to a near stop. The slightest incline would start tires spinning, and cars sliding off the road onto the median grass. With the heavy cloud cover, darkness came quickly.

This went on for several hours, inching forward and sitting. Essentially all of the cars in that seemingly endless line were car pools out of Washington, headed west. No one had any food, unless it was a dead lunch. Several of the cars must have had at least beer, and maybe something stouter. As time went on some voices got louder, and more people could be seen in the foggy glow of headlights through the snow, standing on the roadside facing a road sign, or trying to hide in the trees and look inconspicuous. Having left the office at 3:30, riding in a Chevy Chevette, the four of us were glad to finally get home a little after 11:00. Two days later, the roads were clear, and we were all ready when the car pool arrived to take us back to Main Interior.

Our car pool became a close group. All of the wives knew each other, and were at least visiting acquaintances. On several occasions we held car pool picnics or met for a car pool dinner at a restaurant. These were always fun, and reflected what a close group we had in that commuting comradeship. By the time we left Washington, according to "the book," I had driven the car pool 107 times, totaling 8,774 miles. Since each of us in the group did the same thing, we had spent a lot of

time together. And we were still friends! While writing this "autobiography," I have checked on each of the men who were in the car pool. I am the only one who is not already retired.

One of the things that made our living in the Washington, D.C. area even more fun, was the nearness of our close friends, Bob and Beverly. The four of us had been companions since starting college at New Mexico State in 1962. We double dated, went on weekend hikes, shared our romantic spats, and in many respects grew up together at school. Bob and I were suite mates in the dorm, and Pat and Bev became fast friends living in adjacent rooms. Eventually we stood up for each other at our respective weddings. Later, we shared mutual joy at the birth of our children. We had all gone through some changes, and had different experiences by the time we moved back to Washington, but we were still close friends. They now lived only a short drive from our house, and we visited frequently.

Bob was working for the Bureau of Land Management, as an Environmental Specialist. I think that at this time he felt very frustrated. He had no opportunity to get out of the office, and the work he was doing was pretty routine. Fortunately, for his sanity he had his airplane. I would occasionally walk around the corridors in Interior, to where Bob's office was. He never really seemed like he was having fun. He did have one office mate though, an attractive blonde, but she kept leaving what Bob called "dead lunches" in her desk.

Pat and I had hoped that our four kids would become close friends, like their parents. That just never materialized, even though we all saw a lot of each other. Then came the day Chris shot Kim, their oldest, in the eye with a rubber band, knocking her off the bar stool and onto the floor. Well, she dared him to do it. At that moment we weren't sure the Dunkeson and Foster adults were still going to be friends, the heck with the kids.

Then, Bob's environmental unit was disbanded, and the Fosters had a job in Reno. They were excited about going back west, and we were glad for them. There was a downside though. That meant they would be leaving, and we were going to lose having Bob and Bev and the girls nearby. We both felt very sad about that, but knew this was the nature of working for the government. We had certainly moved a few times, and left people behind. We just didn't want to lose the close contact with them. As life has turned out, we didn't, and have even been able to vacation together occasionally.

Eventually the day came, and they stopped by our house on their way west. As fate would have it, the day was cold and foggy, and spitting snow. The weather was a perfect match for the mood we were in as we watched their truck and car disappear into the fog. To help ourselves feel better, we went into town and bought a microwave. What else does one do when old friends leave?

Life on the banks of Bull Run didn't come to a halt at that point though. In fact, during the summer we sometimes took the boys down to the creek, and they swam in history. Bull Run is not a large stream, but it is very picturesque. It is hard, on a summer day with the water gurgling between the shade trees, to imagine the terrible civil war battle fought here that caused the water to run red. The Manassas Battlefield National Monument was just upstream from our house.

The idea of conservation, on a personal level, was just coming to Virginia at this time. Our scout troop conducted a periodic paper drive, which really grabbed the interest of the people in our housing development. On the appointed day, people put their saved up newspapers on their curb, and those with pickup trucks or large car trunks, drove around and gathered the paper. We had arranged for a tractor trailer to be parked at the school, and the papers were piled in there. Each time, we actually filled the trailer with newspapers. We had tremendous support for our scout troop there.

It was at this school, that Chris was elected Captain of the Safety Patrol. He wore the orange sash across his chest, and was very responsible in his duties of protecting the younger students as they made their way to school. This earned him the opportunity to go to a week long safety patrol camp in Culpeper, a small town west of Manassas. The camp was great fun. But when we picked him up at the end of the week, the greatest adventure was when some of the older male camp leaders raided the female leaders cabins, and ran items of their underwear up the flag pole. What a coup!

Desert rats from New Mexico will go to almost any length for Mexican food. Green chili is addictive, but there isn't much of it in Virginia. There was one little restaurant in Manassas that served tacos, although that is stretching the word quite a bit. I think it was called El Taco, but I don't remember for sure. In any case, it was not an impressive establishment, looking in fact like kind of a dive. I started to call it El Roacho, just to give it a little southwestern flavor. The boy's favorite baby sitter, whose dad was in my car pool, worked there as a cashier.

We were there one day for just a quick lunch, and Mark saw his baby sitter. He ran up to the counter, to say hello I thought, but instead he said in a seemingly very loud voice "My dad calls this place El Roacho." Why is it kids always hear those kinds of things, but never hear you say "pick up your room", or "remember your curfew"?

Ever since I began my career with the Fish and Wildlife Service, we have had a weekly listing of available jobs come out, always on green paper. Of course it was known as the "green sheet." Always that is, until about 1993, when job vacancies started to be made available on the computer network, and the green paper disappeared. Habits are hard to break. Still today, us old dogs refer to the green sheet, and all of the other old dogs know what we are talking about.

By this time we had been in Washington for over two years, and were still happy with being there. The cultural opportunities were wonderful, we had done a lot with our house, and had a nice circle of friends. It was a long ways from New Mexico and family though. So when the day arrived that the green sheet included an opening for a biologist in the Albuquerque Regional Office, we did not spend a great deal of time debating whether or not to apply. I knew some of the people who would be making the selection, and did not hesitate to remind them that I had now been in Washington for a while, I would like to return to Albuquerque.

It just happened that the fellow in the job, who was moving on to another position in Oklahoma, was in the Departmental Training Program with me way back in 1973. I talked with him at length about the job, and became even more excited. The down side was that the job was one grade lower than

the one I currently had. He told me that the process had already been initiated to upgrade the position one grade, so if I were to get the job, it wouldn't be long before I was back at my original grade. Sounded good to me, so I applied for it. With my Washington Office experience, I felt very comfortable that I would be a highly qualified applicant. I was right, and was eventually notified that we would soon be OFF FOR ALBUQUERQUE!

I am not sure the boys were as excited as Pat and I were, they knew they would be leaving friends too. We did a lot of talking about how much we liked New Mexico, and how excited we were about going back and having family so much closer. It may have been contagious, because I don't remember any resistance or moping on their part. That is with one exception. Mark was showing some hesitation about moving to New Mexico and going to school. After a while, we found that he was worried that he would be the only one in his class who couldn't speak Spanish, and wouldn't be wearing a sombrero. Once we addressed that concern, the fear went away.

We contacted a realtor, and a moving company, and thought we would be on our way in short order. That did not prove to be the case however. While we had a number of people look at the house, no one made an offer. Time was going by, and my reporting date was looming larger and larger. Pat and I had decided that while neither of us was too excited about the idea, in order to take care of the house while it was on the market, and surely it would sell soon, she would stay in Manassas, and I would go on to Albuquerque. We both remembered the three months we had been separated when I first went to work in Albuquerque, twelve years before Not too long before our scheduled moving day, we looked at each other and almost in unison said "I don't want to do it that way. I want us to go together." Relief and excitement for both of us.

The house did not sell soon. Just before we left, we made arrangements with our realtor for his office to act as our agent, and rent the house. We had purchased our house at the top of the sales curve, but in the two and a half years since, things had changed and we were now in a pronounced housing sales slump. No telling how long our house might be on the market. We were comfortable with the arrangement, and with the agent, so on October 10, 1979, during a slow, Virginia drizzle, the movers packed us up. After a final cleaning frenzy, which included buffing floors by flashlight, we spent the night in the same motel we stayed in when we arrived in Manassas. The next day, after a last lunch at El Roacho, we headed west for Albuquerque.

During the time before the actual move, in the excitement of going back to New Mexico, a melody had come into my head to which I fitted some words. The melody was an Al Jolsen tune, called California Here I Come. My changed version, using the same melody, went: Albuquerque Here We Come, Right Back Where We Started From (to this we added the words), Take This Dirty, Rotten Job, Give It Back To Mr. Bob, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh (shades of Froggie Went A Courtin). We are a very musically gifted family, you see. The truth is, the job was not a dirty, rotten job, but the words fit nicely, and we liked singing it.

Mr. Bob was the same man I worked for in North Carolina, and the same man I was presently working for in Washington. I sweated a long time, fearing that Mr. Bob would come over to our

house, and one of the boys would launch into a loud, lusty version of Albuquerque Here We Come. Fortunately, that did not happen. We did enjoy the song all the way to New Mexico though.

XI. WELCOME BACK TO WATERMELON MOUNTAIN

This trip probably only seemed longer, because of our excitement over getting back to Albuquerque. We were heading west, and therefore into a headwind. The trailer we had then was a design in which the front of the trailer protruded out over the trunk of the car, making it seem like we were pulling an open parachute. We didn't even want to check the gas mileage. I do remember that we had to stop for gas coming up the last hill before we topped the mountain, and descended into the Rio Grande Valley and Albuquerque. That had to be the slowest gas pump ever made.

Once we arrived in town, the first order of business was to find a place to stay pending the arrival of our furniture. That always seems like it takes forever, and we always wonder if it has been lost. We tried several places, finally settling on a nice motel near the two largest shopping centers in Albuquerque. This one fit our per diem rate, which went down every week. So, we would stay as long as we could, and then move to a less expensive motel. In fact, that is what happened, leaving us in a place which filled our needs, but marginally. I was able to catch the bus from there, and ride downtown to the office, leaving the car available for Pat and the boys. Only a few years later that motel became a regular news item because of drugs, and occasional shootings.

The first evening we were in the original motel, we all climbed into the car to go somewhere for dinner. As I drove out of the large shopping center parking lot, I glanced at the crest of the Sandia Mountains, and immediately stopped the car to just gape and drink in the beauty. It was right at sunset, and the Sandias were a perfect pink hue, the color of watermelon. It was a wonderful time to point out to the boys why this mountain was named Sandia, the Spanish word for watermelon. I actually got teary eyed looking at that mountain, and remembering how it used to look the same when I was a boy, and how I had missed that mountain for as long as I had been gone. We have been back seventeen years now, and I still occasionally experience the same reaction when I take time to look at watermelon mountain.

We had made a house hunting trip to Albuquerque, when we still thought our house would sell before we had to leave Virginia. After it became evident that was not going to happen, we talked to our realtor (who just happened to be married to one of Pat's cousins), and agreed to rent a house he knew of in the same school district we had been looking to buy. It even had an above ground pool. When the furniture did arrive, at least we had a place to put it. The house was nice, just down the street from my boss, and near a bus stop, although for a while we did car pool. And, there was a boy next door just Chris' age, so he felt a little more at home.

After a few months, it was apparent that our house in Manassas may not sell for an extended period of time, as the market was still stagnant and showing no signs of improvement. Pat's two sisters and their husbands offered to loan us enough money to get back into the housing market, and out of the

rental routine. With that infusion, we bought a new home only three blocks away, and again in the same school district. We were delighted to get into a home of our own, and a very nice home to boot. It actually took two years for our house in Virginia to sell, and by that time we had paid the money back to the two sisters. A very good feeling indeed.

The boys were active in scouts, soccer and basket ball, both of which I coached in spite of knowing very little about either game. Scouts was more my bag, and I became active in the troop, volunteering to be the awards chairman. I went on a lot of camp outs, ate a lot of questionable food, and slept on a lot of hard ground. Pat and I had made the commitment that we were going to be active in our kid's lives, and we intended to keep it. Back in Las Vegas, she was a cub scout den mother. Then the boys got older, and Pat said "OK, its your turn, Dad." I am very proud of what each of our boys did in scouts, and gratified that I was a part of it.

My job in Albuquerque was terrific for the first fourteen years. I traveled frequently, saw areas all over our four state region, learned a tremendous amount about the realty division, and how the government buys land. My boss and I got along famously; he trusted me explicitly and provided me with wonderful opportunities for training and learning. Through the retirement of a longtime realty employee, I became the Assistant Regional Realty Supervisor, in charge of the in-house administration of the division. He worked on the outside, lining up land deals and money, and left me to do the work at the office. We were a team, and the other people in the Regional Office respected that. I was very satisfied with how things were going. People respected me, recognized that I was doing a good job, and knew they could depend on me. It was a good feeling.

In May of 1984, after several weeks of eye trouble, tingling and numbness, and frequent tiredness, I woke one morning with double vision and more numbness. I was terrified, and had no idea of what was going on. Of course my imagination went to the worst case scenario, and I called my doctor immediately. I saw a neurologist within a few days, with the diagnosis being multiple sclerosis. I didn't even know what it was, but it scared hell out of me. Within a few weeks the double vision cleared up, and the numbness subsided. Over the twelve years since, some symptoms have worsened, and some new ones have appeared. Over all, I am handling it pretty well and living with the inconvenience. I do resent the disease, and occasionally get down in spirit; but I always come back up and go on with life. The alternative is not inviting.

One person who does not get down in spirit, is Pat. As I pointed out in the "Big Apple" chapter, she looks at the best case scenario and goes on. She does not let herself get discouraged about my disease, and is always watching for ideas which might make things easier for me. This includes going on and doing what she wants to do, even at times when I am not feeling energetic enough to do them with her. I applaud that, and I admire her spunk. While it may sound trite, I'm not sure how well I would do without her.

There have been lows and highs for our family in Albuquerque. The lowest point was in early 1986, when it seemed our family was coming apart. Pat and I had no idea why, or what to do. We stood together, put our heads down and went forward with the best advice and intuition we could gather.

That spring and summer were gut wrenching, and terrifying in terms of our family. All four of us pulled together, made some individual sacrifices and decisions, and put it back together. Like a broken bone which has healed and is stronger than before, today all of that is an unpleasant, but valuable memory. We are stronger for it.

There were lots of high points in Albuquerque, but two of special note were when Chris and Mark found "that special girl," and were married. Chris and Eva were married in September of 1993, and Mark and Julie in May of 1994. Pat and I are very fond of their wives. I told both boys that they couldn't have done better if they had asked my opinion, which of course, they didn't.

My job went on very well through mid 1994, when a change of administration in the Regional Office and in the Realty Division, occurred. The bottom line is that my boss of fifteen years was forced to retire, and a new Realty Chief came in. In accordance with a reorganization plan, I was moved out of the Realty Division, to another office across the street. I was put in charge of a small staff, given no operating funds, and essentially forgotten. Sometimes the high point of the day was my sack lunch. There was a silver lining on that cloud however. It was that for several months I had almost nothing to do. Silver lining? Yes! That is when I hit on the idea of starting a project I had conceived when I was working for the Game and Fish Department at Navajo Lake, sleeping on a box spring, thirty-one years ago. I could start writing my "memoirs." I knew, even back at Navajo Lake, that I would someday write about this, and call the product Three Months on a Box Spring.

So, that is where I have been for the past thirty-one years. As of now I have thirty years in my career. The extra year came from the time between the job at Navajo Lake, where I slept on the box spring, and the time when I went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. As I said in the first paragraph, it has been a mostly wonderful career. I have worked with top notch people, who are deeply committed to making our environment safe, and perpetuating the wild creatures living in that environment. In spite of the fact that most of my career has been spent in an office, behind a desk, I am proud to be one of those people. Quoting a line from the Valedictorian's comments at our (Pat and I graduated together) high school graduation, "I am only one of them, but I am one of them."