

Chapter Twenty-One: The Trail of Full-Circles

Dr. Lamoureux And Fall 1985

I have long believed that driving across the U.S.A. must be one of the most wonderful adventures on the planet. I am not a world traveler; I have visited Canada four or five times and Mexico City once. We lived in Hawaii, when I was very young, before it was a state. Those constitute my experiences outside of the continental United States. Further, I have little interest in travel as I allow my various maladies and peculiarities to get in the way. However, I love to drive across this country in virtually any direction.

Crossing the country in a car, one quickly discovers what a large, diverse and breathtaking geography this place has. However, due to its enormity, the full unveiling happens slowly. After more than 60 years of cross-country travel by car I've had only one bad experience with a person: the one male hitchhiker who I would not have allowed "the girls" to pick up had I not been napping in the back seat, during my post-high-school trip to the Midwest. I've certainly been to places that I liked more than others and visited or driven through a few places that I never want to be again. But for the most part my travels have been mostly positive experiences. Our trip from Eugene to Peoria in late July 1985, driving a *U-Haul* van with our *Buick* in tow, was no exception. Three events stand out in particular relief.

First, we approached Kearney, Nebraska just before dark on a Sunday evening, not realizing that most of the services there close at or before 9 p.m. on Sundays. We were hot, tired, hungry, and the truck was low on gas when we pulled into a very old-fashioned-looking service station with the exterior lights still on. Although the interior lights were dimmed, the proprietor, a man who appeared to be a young senior citizen, came out and began pumping gas into the truck.

As we chatted we told him of our situation and when he'd completed filling the tank he motioned for us to come in to pay the bill. We entered the small service station and noticed, in addition to the usual stands selling maps, trinkets, candy and such, there was one table with four chairs serving as a small "diner" area. He took our money and then suggested that we "hang on just a second while I get my wife." Cheryl went to the restroom; I sat down to wait.

Mrs. Kearney-Service-Station soon appeared from the back and when Cheryl rejoined us the woman told us that although they ran a small diner inside the service station, they had closed the kitchen for the evening. However, since her husband told her about our plight, she offered to cook dinner and asked us whether we would like steak or chicken? We both went for the steak and within twenty minutes we were sitting in front of a delicious home-cooked Kansas-City-cut steak dinner, after closing time, in an old service station in Kearney Nebraska. Delicious. Go figure.

Second, early the next morning, about 20 minutes after we crossed the eastern Iowa border and ten seconds or so after Cheryl's eyes returned to their normal size, I won the nickel bet as the summer corn tassels easily stood higher than the cab of our truck, in fields on both sides of the road. In fact, even though the roadway was built up a bit higher than usual, it was still higher than the top of the cab. Although I would have to keep my promise to Cheryl, "Stick with me and I'll take you places," I had an extra nickel in the bank for those trips!

Third, the next night we stopped in Newton, Iowa. Newton is barely a four-hour-drive from Peoria but since we had planned to move directly into the house that we were renting from my cousin, Tim Davidson, upon arriving in town, we didn't want to show up after dark. Instead we pulled into Newton, a mile off east-bound I-80, and got a hotel room.

After we checked into the hotel we called Tim: “we’ll arrive in Peoria mid-morning tomorrow if that’s ok with you.” After the call, we asked the desk clerk to point us to the best meal in town. She immediately pointed just up the street, across two, large and adjoining asphalt parking lots: “Right next door; you just can’t beat it.” While that is the kind of advice travelers should seldom accept in light of possible kick-backs and local prejudices, we were tired and very hungry so (and after all, we had asked), we quickly unloaded our baggage, and walked out into the oppressively humid and miserable summer heat toward the establishment next door, across the steaming-hot-asphalt-empty-parking-lots.

The exterior was neither inviting nor promising. We were headed for a restaurant located in what had formerly been an *A&W Root Beer* outlet. The parking lot featured many filled-in holes where the poles that held the transmitters and speakers for “ordering from the outside” squawk boxes had been before their removal. The restaurant building seemed larger than the standard *A&W*; clearly, this *A&W* had been a full-service restaurant rather than just a takeout stand. The place now had signage and decorations indicating a Chinese restaurant. We paused at the door, looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders, and went in. Chinese food at a former *A&W* in Newton, Iowa; what could go wrong?

It turned out that we each enjoyed the finest Chinese meal that either had ever eaten, except perhaps in restaurants in the Chinese restaurant in Vancouver, B.C. The food was spectacular. The people were nice and the price was right; all-in-all, the experience was off the charts. We asked our waitress about the circumstances and she told a story that we would hear from others in a variety of forms over the course of our time in the Midwest. The proprietors had emigrated from mainland China, Singapore, or Hong Kong (I do not recall which) to join family

in Chicago. There, they went into the Chinese restaurant business. Eventually, they came to dislike the situation in Chicago; I don't recall if the problem was the city or the arrangement with the relatives/business partners or both. They moved south and when they got to Newton, the *A&W* property/building was available at the right price, so they set up shop. As a result, we enjoyed the most authentic Chinese food south of Chicago for as far as the eye could see. Go figure. Had I bet, I would have lost back the nickel.

The next day we pulled the truck into the driveway at 3207 N. Biltmore Ave. in Peoria. I visited Uncle Dave and Aunt Corinne Davidson in this very house on my post-high school trip, summer of 1971. After Uncle Dave passed away, Aunt Corinne moved to Long Beach and lived with Aunt Lucille upstairs in the duplex on Termino that had been Roger, Evangeline, and my first home in Long Beach. While Corinne was in California, eldest off-spring Tim Davidson (with wife Theresa and a family of six growing kids) managed the Biltmore house as a rental. The Biltmore residence was between renters, had been empty a couple months, so Tim was happy to rent to us and we were thrilled to have a move-in-ready home in a great neighborhood with wonderful neighbors.

The house is less than three blocks from St. Philomena Catholic Church; neighbors Jim and Marilyn Bielenberg lived to the south and Mr. and Mrs. Bob Comisky to the north. Jim Bielenberg was an insurance adjuster and uncle Dave's golfing buddy. Whenever uncle Dave played a round without Jim, perhaps when Dave was out of town on a sales trip or on a day when Jim couldn't get away from work in Peoria, Jim came home from work to find Dave's scorecard pinned to the clothesline just outside Jim and Marilyn's back door. We spent many hours talking with Jim and Marilyn in their screened-in back patio. Jim watched the Cubs on a small TV on

that patio; I alternately teased him about the team's poor play and plied him with questions about everyday life in Peoria. For nearly six years, Jim Bielenberg served as my surrogate father in Peoria. That was an unexpected blessing soon more deeply appreciated than we first realized.

We arrived in late July so that I could get up to speed for the big job that lay ahead; Bradley University faculty contracts were not supposed to begin until mid-August, a week before school started. I was pleased to learn that the Basic Speech program at BU had been in place so long that it was a well-oiled machine that didn't need very much administration.

The department dropped its Master's program a few years before my arrival; that meant no graduate students, only full-time faculty taught in the program (a mix of tenured and tenure track faculty as well as a hand-full of full-time temporaries), all with experience in the course and at Bradley, so no teacher training was required. The course was delivered via instruction in self-contained classes with sixteen students; there was no mass lecture to prepare or deliver. At the start, my job consisted of fielding student complaints and teaching two sections of the course.

Since the interim basic course director from the previous year was still on my teaching staff, I quickly learned what she had done to prepare for the year and what I needed to do going forward as Director. Eventually, I was responsible for scheduling classes and teachers to match, preparing examinations, and seeing to other aspects for smooth course function. First term, I was also assigned a section of Argumentation and Debate; thank goodness for the UO class at the start of the just-finished-summer. As fall break approached, I was in firm control of my teaching position and learning to fit into life as a full-time, tenure-track faculty member. Unfortunately, I was about to lose control over one of the most important aspects of my life.

Late in the afternoon, Friday October 4, Mom called from Long Beach. Roger was in the hospital, under intensive care, after having a heart attack while playing golf. Although he didn't feel particularly well that day, he played (walking and pulling his clubs with a two-wheeled cart) seventeen holes on the *Destroyer* layout of the *Navy Golf Course* in Los Alamitos (one of the places Tiger Woods honed his golf skills) on that hot fall day. He teed off on eighteen, got to his ball, and called to his playing partner, who was riding in an electric cart, for a ride to the clubhouse and Roger's car in the parking lot. That's the first and only time I am aware of that that my father "quit" a round of golf before finishing all eighteen holes. He used to get madder than hell with me when I'd want to go in after 9 holes, usually due to playing poorly and thereby



not enjoying myself. He held no truck with "quitters," especially when one had paid to play an eighteen-hole round. Rog would probably have broken 100 that day, heart attack or not.

Our next-door-neighbors, Bill and Marge Hoppe, owned *Long Beach Hospital*, a small independent hospital (now the *South Campus, College Medical Center*), on Pacific Ave. at 17th Street. Mom took him there. This may well have been a strategic mistake. Bill assured her that Dad would get nothing but the best care: the owner, neighbor, golf buddy, fellow Angel fan, and close personal friend would see to that. Additionally, Roger's regular cardiologist kept his office

directly across the street from the hospital. On the down side, the place was much smaller than the major hospitals in Long Beach.

Luckily, 1985 was one of the very few years that *United Airlines* flew directly from the *Peoria International Airport* to the *Long Beach Regional Airport*. I was able to book a flight for the next morning and I arrived in Long Beach before lunch. The following week, Bradley released students, Monday and Tuesday, for fall break so I wasn't overly concerned about missing a lot of time at school.

The Driscoll Ave. house was only four miles, across east Long Beach, from the airport, so Mom's trip to pick me up was a breeze compared to the 30 to 45-minute battle through freeway traffic had I flown to *LAX*. Evangeline and I stopped at fast food restaurant for a quick burger as my flight did not serve lunch. We then headed to the hospital. Dad was in good spirits and without pain. He was hooked to heart monitoring devices and had a small TV at his bedside. We talked for an hour or so; I sat close to him next to the bed and gently stroked the hair on his arm as I told him about my new job and our time, so far, in Peoria.

Toward the end of the afternoon, Mom and I went home for dinner and the night; visiting hours were passed and the staff wanted Roger to get lots of rest. On my way out, I cautioned the nurses that he would want to watch the Angel game and that he tended to get very worked up over their play. The nurses assured me that Roger would be well cared for; the nurses told us that the first 48 hours after an attack were key so they'd be keeping a very close eye on him. When I looked back over my shoulder just before exiting, I saw that, despite my warning, Dad was watching the game on the little black and white television at his bedside.

Mom and I headed home, stopping on the way for a few groceries and a lottery ticket. We ate dinner and then turned in early as crossing time zones found me extra tired from the travel; Mom was played out from the recent stress, including that of the day. Saturday morning, we shared breakfast in the kitchen, then headed back to the hospital for a morning visit. Roger had a restful night: The Angels won the night before, the hospital wasn't busy, and the staff only woke him up a few times for monitoring. We chatted about the game and other trivialities; he was in good spirits and wasn't uncomfortable. We talked about bringing him home Monday or Tuesday. Bill and Marge Hoppe dropped by to see that their good friend was being properly taken care of. He was.

Eventually, I retrieved a take-out lunch from one of my favorite places not far from the hospital. The *Omega* fast food outlet down the street made the meanest beef (and cheese) burrito north of the border (or at least, in my experience). Their burritos were very large, so I split one with Mom and added fries for good measure. After lunch, we both stretched out on readily available hospital beds for a quick afternoon nap as Roger closed his eyes and rested as well.

Toward late afternoon, Marie Hauck dropped by for a visit. Marie was Richard's (aunt Lucille's youngest son) wife and one of Roger's favorite nieces. Marie was an emergency room nurse. On her way out, she pulled Mom and I off-to-the-side and repeated a caution she had shared with Mom, earlier, by phone, the same notion the hospital nurses had offered the day before: "the first 48 hours after a heart attack are the most dangerous." Marie also noted that the first day often went better than did the second. Visiting hours ended not long after Marie left, so we headed home for dinner and the night, fully expecting to bring Dad home sometime the next day, Monday. Once again, as I left, I cautioned the staff about the Angel game and stress, but

nevertheless saw Roger turn on the game just as the nurses rolled his dinner tray next to the side of the bed. Dad disliked missing meals and/or Angel games.

I cooked a light dinner at home; chicken breasts sautéed in butter and a little lemon juice with a touch of lemon pepper. Mom and I shared a small salad and a couple slices of the best sourdough bread south of San Francisco; we'd stopped by the *Leona Rose Bakery* on the trip home from the hospital. Just after we finished dinner, right before, 8 pm, we received a call to rush back to the hospital. We didn't make it in time. Apparently, when he went into cardiac arrest, the staff was fortunate to get the cardiologist from across the street even on a Saturday evening. But there was nothing that could be done to save him. He was gone long before we could make the twenty-five-minute drive across town. The doctor reported that he'd suffered a massive attack originating from the back-side of his heart, a place that did not show on any chest X-rays that had been done. It's impossible to know if the outcome would have been different had Roger checked into one of the major surgical centers in town. No matter. Two months short of his 70th birthday, Roger Maxime Lamoureux broke a lot of hearts by leaving this world, to my knowledge, without an enemy.

Cheryl caught a flight to Long Beach Tuesday; services and burial took place Wednesday. I called Bradley and cancelled classes on Thursday and Friday so that I'd be able to spend a few days with Mom and the family before returning to Peoria. Speech teacher that I was, I chose to speak at the funeral service at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. Delivering the piece was a necessity for my peace of mind but was not easy. I did my best.

Our lives are oriented toward death. We fear its inevitability. We live our lives searching for escape from our anxiety over death and from death's very hold over us. We try to live

our lives behind the back of death knowing all the while that in doing so we are merely backing toward death's door.

Our terror is eased along the way by many graces. Our faith in the incarnation of God as man sustains our belief in ultimate victory over death. Our contact with noble spirits lightens our hearts enabling us to face whatever uncertainties life and its ultimate end portends.

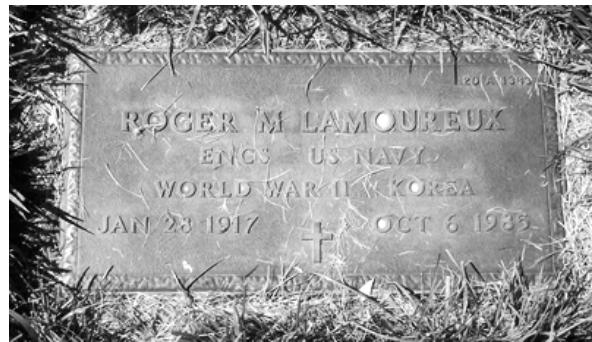
No man has walked this earth with a greater faith in the resurrective power of Jesus Christ than did my father. And no man has touched more lives with a noble spirit of good cheer than did this joyful soul.

Frenchy, the Iron Duke, Uncle Rog, the Chief, Dad: We all knew him as our most cherished possession. Yet he was never really ours to have. He belonged first to his country, he belonged to his four careers, he belonged to his beloved Angels, and he belonged to the bogies and pars, the birdies and double bogeys that gave him so much pleasure.

But most of all, he belonged to his God and through the strength of his intimate relationship with Jesus Christ he derived the ability to touch each of us in a special and personal way such that no one would ever find him wanting.

He filled my life with more love and care than one proud man could ever give. He offered an unfailing devotion to his dearest wife and accepted her love with a joy and humility unmatched. He made each and every one of you laugh, and smile, and now cry. When the earth shook, or the skies emptied, or the snowdrifts piled high, or the depth charges exploded around his submerged vessel; when brave men and frightened mothers worried over anticipated pain or calamity, Roger would say "relax, enjoy this, it's God's special work, and it is beautiful."

My father died peacefully with the sounds of your love for him ringing in his consciousness. He is here with us now through that same grace of Jesus Christ that he transferred to us when touching our lives these many years. And he says to you now, in joy, in love, in a wonderful peace that he earned with a life filled with good actions: **Relax, enjoy this, it is God's special work, and it is beautiful!**



Riverside National Cemetery,

Section 20 A

Site 1383

22495 Van Buren Blvd

Riverside, CA 92518

Roger was buried with military honors at the *Riverside National Cemetery* in Riverside California, not far from the home of Mom's youngest brother Donald (and wife Chris/Babe and family) in Corona.

Roger Maxime Lamoureux, a retired postal clerk, died Sunday at Long Beach Hospital. He was 68.

He was born in Salix, Iowa, and served in the Navy from 1936 until 1960. Fifteen years of his Navy duty, including World War II, was in the submarine service. After his discharge he made his home in Long Beach.

Lamoureux was with the postal service in Long Beach for 14 years.

He is survived by his wife, Evangeline; son, Edward; brothers, Paul, Reno and Leo, and sisters, Bertha Ceilley, Corinne Davidson, Rachel Redmond and Georgette Murray.

Funeral Mass will be at 10 a.m. today at St. Joseph Catholic Church, 6220 E. Willow St., Long Beach. Interment will be in Riverside National Cemetery.

Arrangements are under direction of the Stricklin/Snively Mortuary, Long Beach.



[To Table of Contents](#)