

How I Missed the Draft

In the summer of 1961, after graduating from high school, I took a job with the Boeing company in Seattle. Because I had done well in their employment tests, I got a job as a template maker in the "Blue Streak" shop. This shop made parts from photo template blueprints to replace parts of damaged airplanes, to get them back in the air in three days.

My first day there, I met Eddie Vos, a master craftsman who could do amazing things with a hammer and a piece of metal. On that day, he was given a watch for thirty-five years of service to the Boeing company. I knew immediately that I wasn't going to stick around for a watch.

Unlike other areas in the "Blue Streak" shop, we had a badge that would allow us to go anywhere in the plant. With a blueprint under my arm and a piece of metal, I could go anywhere in the plant and I learned a lot by seeing everything that went on.

After a couple of months, I changed to the graveyard shift, which was six and one half hours, but paid for eight.

I lived in a dank house with an oil heater and I got pneumonia. I didn't miss any work but was cured by an antibiotic prescribed by a doctor, who I had only seen the one time to get a prescription,

About that time, I received a letter from my draft board in Everett, Washington, enquiring whether I was in school or working and it asked if I was presently under a doctor's care. I returned the letter with the name of the doctor I had seen for pneumonia.

After working for a year and a half for Boeing, I entered a Mechanical Engineering program at Washington State University. It took me six years to get an undergraduate degree because I would go to school for a semester and then work for a semester and so on.

About two years later, I was working at North American Aviation in Los Angeles, when I received another letter from the draft board, demanding that I report for a pre-induction physical. I got them to change the physical from Everett to Spokane and I got back into university at Pullman, Washington.

I rode the bus to Spokane in April and reported for the pre-induction physical. First, I took an intelligence test. After taking the test, I asked the woman who had graded it, how well I had done. She said, "You got a hundred. You are the first person this year to get a hundred!!" (Not a wise move for getting out of the draft.)

Next, I saw the examining doctor and after giving me a physical, he said that he had in my file, a letter from Everett. The pneumonia doctor said in the letter that I had incurable bronchitis and I was not fit for military duty. The Spokane doctor gave me a 1Y classification - no need for re-examination. This was my Get Out of Jail Free draft tale and the pneumonia doctor....I would kiss him on the lips if he wanted!

Years later, while in grad school in Canada, I got a notice of a reunion from my high school grad committee. Half of the 450 grads were men, but many of their names in the letter had a line through them. My Canadian wife asked me why the lines and I told her they were killed in Vietnam. In 1961, many had joined the army, having nothing else to do.