

To Wichita

In the summer of 1964, I returned from W.S.U. to Seattle. Not finding a job in Seattle, I took up the offer of an old guy who was driving to Los Angeles and wanted a passenger to help with the driving.

I returned to North American Aviation, to get my old job back. Lacking an entrance badge, I waited at the gate, to be met by the one supervisor who had never liked me and had made a special effort to meet me at the gate to inform me that I couldn't get my job back.

So, after searching the want ads, I connected with a company, Genge Engineering, who were supplying optical tooling jig builders to Lear Jet in Wichita, Kansas.

Armed with my small bag of clothing and tool box, I set off hitchhiking across the U.S. for the new job.

I don't remember how I got out of Los Angeles, but I do remember being picked up by a couple in a new Ford convertible with the top down, outside of San Bernardino. They were drinking beer and throwing the cans out and told me they were going to Las Vegas. He said he would give me a long ride and a fast one too. We raced up the four-lane, me in the back seat, in the sun and them in the front, laughing and giggling at more than 100 mph!

We saw a California highway patrol car going the opposite way on the four-lane and soon in pursuit of us with its red light flashing. When it came into view, my drinking driver stopped the car and the police officer asked me how fast we were going. I said that depended on whether I would get to chat with the driver after he left. He said he would drop me off at Barstow and I said I couldn't see the needle on the speedometer because it was buried past 110mph. The cop said he knew it was fast because he was going 135mph to catch up with us. He gave the guy a speeding ticket and radioed ahead, saying, "I think he'll go again!"

When I arrived in Needles after a ride from Barstow, I was let out in 117 degree Fahrenheit heat and picked up about half an hour later. I travelled east to Kingman, Arizona. I was picked up by an odd family on their way home to Flagstaff.....a gay guy and his brother and sister, who offered to let me sleep on the couch at their house.....after they drank a few beers.

Next morning, I got a ride all the way to Amarillo, Texas, from a religious couple who told me all about the good Lord Jesus, all the way to Amarillo!

I decided to take the train from Amarillo to Wichita. When the train crossed the narrow strip of Oklahoma, the bar car (which had been "booze free" in Texas) broke out special beers that were labelled, "Oklahoma" and were consumed.

On arriving in Wichita, I took a room in the Carey Hotel in the downtown area. The bar on the main floor was the first bar chopped by Carey Nation's hatchet in 1900. She was a famous prohibitionist, who went on to fame for using her hatchet on bars all over the U.S.

I went to work at Lear Jet and took up my new job as an unqualified optical tool maker.

After six weeks, I was let go, mostly to inform the engineering company that they could not send unqualified people to work there.

I got various rides from Cheyenne to Little America and south east Wyoming. My last ride and I stopped at Little America for a meal, then we went about five miles west, where the road forks. He was going south to Salt Lake City and I was going north to Pocatello, Idaho. There was nothing at the fork but the directional sign when I got out at about eleven o'clock in the evening.

It was chilly and dark, like the inside of a cow, as I trudged up the road carrying my suitcase and toolbox. I kept out of sight at about one in the morning when I heard mooing steers and the sounds of rustlers at their nighttime work. They didn't see me as I wisely hung back and waited for them to finish their deed. I continued walking in the night, arriving at Granger, where the Union Pacific Transcontinental Railway went west to Pocatello. I waited in the train station, exhausted after walking five miles in the middle of the night.

I later found out that Granger had been an important pony express station in the 1860's and currently there are signs on the track to Pocatello, warning about rustlers! (2026).

I slept for three hours on the train and outside of Pocatello, got a ride with a returning airman to the base at Payne Field, Washington, near my Mom's home, where I finished my round trip saga of going to Wichita and back.