

## Bill and Dave's Excellent Adventure:

### The Extreme NCW Tour, 2005



---

October 9, 2005, 08:29 am  
Chicago, IL

[Back to most recent posts](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Maybe it will turn out that the hardest part of the Extreme Tour is starting this blog. It's Sunday, October 9, and I'm on a plane for [Chicago](#). This week I have a couple of local section visits in Milwaukee and Appleton, Wisconsin before starting the Tour itself. But this gives me a chance to ramp into it and tell you a bit about it before we get rolling.

The Tour idea started simply: How many local sections could you visit during [National Chemistry Week](#) (NCW) if you really put your mind to it? I thought 20 might be possible. And if you did make this tour, could you use the outrageous nature of it to generate more media interest in NCW? I think you can, and with the help of a bunch of dedicated volunteers and the ACS Staff, we're going for it.

From the beginning, members told me they were concerned about how the public perceives chemistry. They believed that a lack of knowledge on one hand, combined with inevitable negative press on the other leads to a poor image. Now, research shows that while that might be true, it is also true that the public knows that science, and chemistry, play an important role in modern life. The opportunity to educate is there. The question is: how to get your message across.

We've talked a lot this year about "[getting the microphone](#)" to deliver a message. Doing a service project that attracts local media gives you a chance to talk about how chemistry is central to almost good work you can name—simple, decent housing; preserved blood; cures we race for—chemistry impacts them all, and more importantly THE MEDIA DOESN'T REALIZE IT. This gives us a great opportunity to make news.

Another way of getting the microphone—and this is the central organizing principle behind the [Extreme Tour](#) (XT)—is to do something a little outrageous. Safe, mind you, just out of the ordinary. I'm hoping 13,000 miles in ten days, and fifteen stops along the way counts as outrageous in these days, and also helps to bring out members.

We're also promoting new stuff—the Chemistry Club High School pilot project—and trying to enable more economically disadvantaged students to have a lab experience through [Project SEED](#). I'm hoping someone takes me up on the \$25,000 offer to shave my head—if someone does, we send a dozen more kids to an experience they couldn't have had otherwise.

More later on why this first stop in Chicago—Crown Point, Indiana, actually—is a sentimental journey.

---

October 10, 2005, 09:23 am  
Crown Point, IN

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

The reason this trip to [Indiana](#) is a bit poignant is that my sister and I are liquidating the remainder of my parents estate, including the house we grew up in. It was also the house my mother grew up in. Lots of ghosts in there.

The sale of their effects went well and we're now in the cleanup phase. Even though I couldn't bring myself to be there for the sale, I showed up the next day to help a little with cleanup. All I can tell you is that in the midst of these emotional things there are still funny moments.

My parents lived in a farmhouse, complete with barn and a nearly 100 year-old iron windmill. It is badly rusted and doesn't work, but that doesn't make it worthless. Someone bought it, as is, where is. By the way, it is by now also tightly surrounded by 100 year-old trees.

So, today the crew shows up to harvest the windmill. Some of you will remember the old [Bob Newhart](#) show, set in Vermont, where there were three brothers who took on odd jobs. The line that always introduced them is “My name's Larry. This is my brother Darryl and this is my other brother Darryl.” [Larry, Darryl and Darryl](#) were not mentally up to any job they were given, no matter how trivial. Today they were trying to take the top off our windmill.

They had a [cherry picker](#) out there and one of them was up in the bucket with the other operating it. “Larry” was explaining that the windmill was pretty heavy and they might need to use a grinding wheel to cut it off. At that point the bucket lurched a bit, and I heard a voice from the bucket yell “[D'Oh!](#)” Looking up, I saw “Darryl” rubbing his

head. Object lesson: While harvesting a windmill in a forest on a cherry picker, a hard hat is recommended.

They never got it down—too rusted, bulky and heavy. I imagined a [Darwin Awards](#) moment wherein Darryl actually got the windmill off by using the cherry picker, whereupon it would pitch the whole thing forward and come crashing to the ground. I thought about the call to the insurance agent in [Crown Point](#):

“Bob? Bill Carroll. Say, I’ve got a question for you. What if, totally hypothetically now, someone was trying to lift the top off a windmill with a cherry picker and somehow in the process the cherry picker fell over and the guy was decapitated. Would homeowners cover that?”

My sister and I were in the house working when we heard what sounded like a load of sheet metal hitting the ground. It appeared to be an isolated event and we went on with our work. Later in the afternoon the venue switched to working in the barn, but the lights wouldn’t work. Didn’t appear to be a fuse. Did appear to be related to the wires laying on the ground coming from the barn.

The other “Darryl,” in attempting to get the cherry picker out through the trees, apparently hooked the electrical supply that ran from the house to the barn, ripping the electrical wires and the steel support cable. The sheet metal sound was a support ripping from the aluminum siding.

The wires were sheared through, and the live ends appear to be high enough in a tree and separated such that they aren’t going to short to one another. Just to be sure I suggested my sister touch the two wires laying on the ground to her tongue to test them, recalling an old incident with a 9-volt battery that is too long a story to tell here.

I hope we don’t desperately need lights in the barn on Monday. We haven’t heard from Larry, Darryl and Darryl about the incident yet, but Larry was interested in a couple of rusted [old farm implements](#), so there may be more story to come.

October 10, 2005, 05:07 pm  
Crown Point, IN

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Finishing up my end of the work at the farm today. We’ve burned all the old files and most of the loose ends are cleaned up. There’s a dumpster full of trash and still a few old artifacts that could probably be sold. There’s a freezer in the basement that ain’t coming out until they finally demolish the house.

That freezer was central to a great moment between me and my late father. Dad had been [hunting in Canada](#) in the mid 60’s and he and his buddies shot a moose. When it was

dressed out, it was enough meat for everybody, and we got ours. We ate moose for months. Now, my mother, both an excellent physician and marvelous cook was faced with using up moose burger, moose steaks, moose tips—once, I think, she made sweet-and-sour-moose. At the age of twelve you don't know this, but looking back and remembering the taste and texture I think it was an old moose they shot.

My parents were children of the Depression and never threw anything away. When the house was full, they just brought in a ramrod and shoved stuff in tighter to make more room. This means you lose track of stuff. One year, one of my mother's patients gave her a subscription to the "Fruit of the Month" Club. Kiwi fruit was the fare one month, and being a relatively unusual fruit in Indiana in those days nobody really knew what to do with them. A year later when I visited, while searching the back of the refrigerator for one last beer I found one, perfectly dessicated, kiwi fruit. My sister says even now, with it empty, stuff is still oozing out from the pores of the house.

Mom died first, and to help Dad make what amounted to a usable apartment in the old museum, I helped him clean out and trash a bunch of stuff—canned food ten years past its freshness date, five of the six identical bottles of hardwood floor wax (Dad was not the floor waxing kind), stuff like that.

I don't know why, but I decided to clean out the freezer. It was like excavating Troy, civilization by civilization. The first layer was new; the second layer had five-year-old bags of nuts from the Tri-Kappa sorority annual fundraising; the third layer had foods popular in the eighties; eventually I got to the bottom, where there were forty-year-old bricks wrapped in brown paper. I called the old man down for a look.

He said, "What did you find, Billy?" I pointed. "My God," he choked, "Is that the moose?" It was. While fondly remembering mom, we also had a huge laugh.



So there are a few loose ends left. A refrigerator in the barn that needs to go, some left over farm chemicals from the era when if you wanted to poison something, you didn't screw around, you used lead arsenate. Toxic anion, toxic cation—does it get any better? I have a surprise for the Lake County Household Hazardous Waste brigade.

And as I pull out of the driveway for the last time headed for Milwaukee and the Local Section meeting tonight, I'm reminded of a Jimmy Webb lyric:

If these old walls  
If these old walls could speak  
Of the things they remember well  
People laughing and raising hell  
Couple in love living week-to-week

[Rooms full of laughter](#)  
[If these old walls could speak](#)

[If these old halls](#)  
[If hallowed halls could talk,](#)  
[These would have a tale to tell](#)  
[Of sun goin' down and dinner bell,](#)  
[And children playing at hide and seek](#)  
[From floor to rafter,](#)  
[If these halls could speak....](#)

A major piece of my history fades in the rear view mirror. [Objects may still be closer than they appear.](#)

---

October 11, 2005, 05:19 PM  
Milwaukee, WI

[Back to most recent posts](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

It was a beautiful fall day yesterday, and a great day for a drive. It was also Columbus Day, which is a big enough deal in Chicago that the traffic was way down and I was able to go straight through the city on I-94 to get to Milwaukee instead of having to go around the outside on the Tri-State Expressway.

There is more good news for the Extreme Tour. McDonald's has started its Monopoly game again. This means that the meals eaten at the Dashboard Diner take on a new and potentially financial significance if we get Boardwalk and Park Place. I've already got two of the yellow properties. Now, that's what I'M talking about. Hope Dave likes McDonald's. He's going to see a lot of it.

In Milwaukee there was a good and enthusiastic crowd to discuss Enterprise 2015. Tom Holme of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was there and gave a great lead in for the Tour. Scott Rice of Marquette arranged most of the meeting.

What's in the CD player: The nice weather reminded me of Fall, 1989 when I started OxyChem's recycling business. Those were great days. I was pumped about the project, and had absolutely no idea yet how hard it would be to buy garbage and turn it into anything—never mind gold. What I listened to that fall was an album by a Brazilian vocalist named Ivan Lins. His album "Love Dance" is mostly in English and is kind of Brazilian smooth jazz-pop. There is also a duet with Brenda Russell. Went great with a 60 degree clear day.

This morning Tom Holme and I met with Suzanne, a reporter from the [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#) and talked about National Chemistry Week and the Chemistry Enterprise project. Northern states are understandably very concerned about energy and

especially natural gas. It was a bit of a new twist to talk about how the ethane component of natural gas is a desperately important raw material for industrial chemistry in the US. Pricing here in the US is about \$14/MM BTU (up from \$2 five years ago) but in producing countries like Saudi Arabia can be \$0.50-\$1 because it is typically flared. The world market for gas doesn't equilibrate in price the way oil does--and what's more it won't--until liquefied natural gas is shipped and traded the way oil is.

Afterwards we visited the first, second and third year chemistry classes at [Rufus King HS](#) in Milwaukee. There were about 90 students at this International Baccalaureate school. The venue was kind of tough—it was the first day the heat was on and we were in the auditorium. The clanking in the radiator could be heard as far away as Fond du Lac. Their teacher, [Keith Zeise](#) is an enthusiastic guy and was a little embarrassed about the noise, but there were some bright and interested students there. I have another high school class to visit this afternoon.

After that we saw a bit of the sights of Milwaukee and two stood out for me. First was an old roadside restaurant whose largest identifying sign only said "EAT." Looked rough, greasy and good from the road. Another more sophisticated place testifies to the pervasiveness of multidisciplinarity these days, and not just in science. This store combined muffler service with "Bar-B-Q." The cooking device for the ribs was not immediately obvious from our fly-by, but I'm thinking this needs a visit from either the [Food Channel](#) or [American Chopper](#).

I thanked Tom for a great visit, put him on the bus back to [UW-M](#), and headed north on US 41 for Appleton. Couple of things of interest along the way. First of all, the trees are just on the verge of changing in the Chicago area, but by Oshkosh are pretty far along. Next week in New York and New England may be [prime leaf-peeping](#). Second, a sign caught my eye: "Watch for Gusty Winds." I wasn't exactly sure how to follow those instructions.

What's in the player: [Sara Evans](#), "[Born to Fly](#)." Sara Evans has a straight, clear voice on country pop and writes interesting lyrics. This disc is about three or four years old--I like "I Keep Looking for Something More" but there are lots of good cuts, including a remake of Bruce Hornsby's "Every Little Kiss."

---

October 11, 2005, 10:30 PM  
Appleton, WI

[Back to most recent posts](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)



I got to town about 2 and went directly to [Appleton West High School](#). I found Steve Franklin, teacher of the AP chemistry class, sitting in front. He introduced himself and said, "Have a seat. We're about to have a fire drill." Before I could even say "Really?" the horn blew.

While the classes filed by, Steve explained to me that the school was a [WPA project](#) that opened in 1938. The lettering “Appleton High School” over the door was clearly of the period and so was the design. There were very nice sculpted features in the concrete and marble on the inside. The building is beautiful, and reminded me of my own high school, built in [1939](#) and recently demolished.



Steve’s class was mostly seniors. We had a great discussion about a number of topics, and wound up talking quite a bit about issues that really turned on policy more than science.

I usually ask the students at these sessions to tell me about big issues they think will impact them as adults. The discussion always eventually gets to energy, especially now with high gas prices. So we talk about alternative forms of energy and some of the tradeoffs and the technical issues. In the end, we talk about how far we have to go if the 80% of the world that doesn’t live like us is to achieve our standard of living.

For those who are interested in science, these are the problems they will solve because they must. For those who are not interested in science, it’s good for them to be in class because they will be voting on and paying for the solutions. It’s usually a good conversation.

Perhaps the most unusual answer to the “future issue” question came when a student said he was worried about kids. I eventually figured out he meant he was concerned about being a good parent.

I tried to reassure him. “Put your mind at rest. None of us knows how to raise a kid. In fact, we pretty much learn by trial and error on the oldest one.” I don’t know what came over me, but then I added, “Although this is a place where the government could help. I think they should just issue every set of parents a kid to practice on. Then, if they accidentally mess up, they can just give that one back to the government and then have their own.” My attempt at humor went over most of their heads.

Not today, though. This was a very sharp bunch with a great set of questions and three of them stayed after class just to talk. One, a student from [Bulgaria](#), came to the Section meeting.

[Appleton](#) is a clean, pleasant town. [Lawrence University](#) fronts, understandably, on College Street and is easy to find. Also, if you need beer or coffee, College Street is a pretty good place to look. The [Northeast Wisconsin Section](#) meeting was very well attended, with Lawrence students from a number of departments and some guests from as far away as [Fond du Lac](#) showing up. After, I had a great Thai dinner with the faculty and stayed in a university guest house.

Wednesday I drive north to Green Bay, then back to Dallas to prepare for the Extreme Tour in earnest.

October 12, 2005, 01:00 PM  
Green Bay, WI

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

It was foggy, drizzly and dark starting out [in Appleton this morning](#), and that explains why the pictures of the high school are also a little foggy and dark. I headed off for Green Bay and eventually Dallas to make the final preparations for the road trip.

You can tell when you're starting to get closer to Green Bay. There was a house with two life-size plywood cutouts decorating each side of the mailbox: one of Uncle Sam and one of [Brett Favre](#), the [Packers](#) quarterback. It has always amazed me how a boy from [Gulfport, MS](#) who wouldn't have known snow if he woke up in a pile of it (which, of course never happened in Gulfport) found such a following in the home of the [Ice Bowl](#).

In Green Bay proper, I stopped for breakfast at [Mickey D's](#) (we now have two out of three in three colors in their [Monopoly](#) game—we WILL beat it) and found that not only was it a shrine to Green Bay football (with the obligatory shadow-boxed jerseys of Favre and the sainted [Bart Starr](#)), the sign outside was also green and gold instead of red and gold. I thought I had suddenly gone [color blind](#).

Souvenirs were available at the airport, and I almost couldn't turn them down. When was the last time a boy from Texas saw fresh cheese curds? And multiple flavors! There were Packer jerseys, clocks and [bobble-head figurines](#).

Since I've been in the president's job, I have been bringing home t-shirts from various universities to my 10 year old son Quin. I snagged one from Lawrence, so the trip was a success. But he's a sports fan, somewhat fond of the Packers, and I had the chance in the airport to buy him a [cheesehead hat](#). In the end, I simply couldn't bring myself to spend \$15 for a bright orange slab of polyurethane foam and then eventually walk through O'Hare airport with it. Besides there were different sizes and I didn't know which he would take. Yeah, I know it's a lame excuse, but it's the only one I've got. I'll have a lot of explaining to do when he finds out.

So anyway, back in Dallas. Thursday is a big day.

---

October 13, 2005, 01:00 PM  
Dallas, TX

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Getting my messages ready for the radio media tour. Nine stations in four hours. The average interview was about 10 minutes, and the goal is to get people psyched about [NCW](#).

There are some big cities involved. I remember reporter [Don Lancer](#) at [KYW](#) from when I lived there years ago. We had a great opportunity to promote the local events in Pittsburgh and especially Cleveland—[WABQ](#) gave us lots of time.

High points—a nearly half-hour spot with [Accent Radio](#) on wide ranging topics; two good opportunities to promote the [Indianapolis](#) and [St. Louis](#) sections and the events at their [Science Museums](#). Good stuff.

A bit odd—the Dallas station had a theory about the numbers central to the plot on the TV show “[Lost](#).” The interviewer repeated the numbers and hypothesized that they might have something to do with the periodic table. I noted that all those numbers were on there, but I couldn’t shed any light on the plot. Now I’m sorry I watch [CNN](#).

---

October 13, 2005, 09:30 PM  
Dallas, TX

[Back to most recent posts](#)

Send your comments to  
[ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Preparing for a trip always gives me a chance to buy some things I don’t really need because, I tell myself, you might need them on the trip. This one is no exception.

I decided I needed a CD copy of [Abbey Road](#) by the [Beatles](#). Never mind that I have three vinyl copies. Abbey Road is about the only Beatles CD that my brother didn’t leave me when he passed on and I decided to buy a used copy and bring it on the Tour. I was out driving, and not wanting to make a special trip, I went to [Bill’s](#).

Bill’s is a fixture in Dallas. It is also an above-ground landfill. The aroma is that of a slightly mildewed closet full of cardboard. Half the store is rolled-up posters of every description. There is a PILE of stuff—records, books, posters, who knows—in back of the counter, apparently waiting to be filed if that’s an accurate term. The aisles are clogged with stuff. All important, all valuable, but if you were more than fifteen feet from the door when a fire larger than a cigarette broke out, you’d be toast—literally as well as figuratively.

Bill (no relation) is of indeterminate age, but is a wonderful example of [Robin Williams](#)’ observation that if you can remember the sixties, you weren’t there. He looks as though his last name should be “[the Cat](#).” But his store has everything. He has a two-disc recording of John and Yoko arguing about who takes out the trash. He has the play-by-play of all six games of the [1959 World Series](#). He has your third grade piano recital—on CD and vinyl. My own records want to go to Bill’s when I die.

Looking for a copy of Abbey Road in Bill's is like looking for a print of [Dogs Playing Poker](#) at [Sotheby's](#). I had forgotten this. So I slinked out without buying one of the five copies of Beautiful South's album "Blue is the Color." Or that disastrous piano recital. Abbey Road? Bought it at CD Warehouse from a kid my son's age. His look confirmed I'm way too old. "Don't you have this already, Mister?"

Friday is tomorrow. [Lewis \(Jerry\)](#) and [Clark \(Dick\)](#) finally hit the trail.

We're getting some buzz and I'm using my time at the microphone to talk about the [benefits of chemistry](#).

---

October 14, 2005, 09:30 AM  
The Friendly Skies

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Somehow it seems a shame that there's no one here to shoot a starter's pistol (problematic in the airport, of course) sing the national anthem, or throw out the first mole but here we are. I'm waiting at the gate for Dave Harwell, my adult supervision, and then it's off to [San Juan](#).

I want to summarize why we're doing this beyond providing me with entertainment for 10 days. We have three purposes:

1. To attract media attention and talk about the benefits of chemists and chemistry;
2. To promote our new Chemistry Clubs pilot program, and last but not least,
3. To raise stipend funds for [Project SEED](#) so economically disadvantaged students can have a summer laboratory experience.

One more word about #3. I realize we all have a budget for charity, and we've had plenty of places to donate money this year, but please don't forget chemistry. Small donations add up—they really matter. Of course, if you have some extra chips sitting around, and you'd like to [test my commitment](#), a \$25,000 donation merits me shaving my head. There are other lesser but nonetheless personal premiums at lower levels.

Tomorrow we have a huge event with Scouts doing merit badge type work and hands-on chemistry organized by Ingrid Montes, ACS activist extraordinaire. I have remarks prepared for me, which I will read in Spanish. There's a little story there.

When I took Spanish as a boy, I was taught by a friend's mother who was from [Argentina](#). I could tell even without really knowing the language that she had a profound accent, and of course, we all wound up with it as well. So when I'm really rolling, I have an Argentine accent. Of course, me reading Spanish still has the overall effect of [ABBA](#) singing in [phonetic English](#), or the voice mail tree for someone's help line, but people are usually pretty [polite](#) about it.

First off, let's thank some people who've made this possible: NCW coordinators in the cities we're visiting, and really, all over the country; the Committee on Community Activities, and about 50 members of staff for getting this off the ground. Now we execute.

And special thanks go to Michelle Franci of [Bryn Mawr University](#). Michelle is on the all-pro blogging team and has given me some pointers (write well and don't be a sap). She's also linked her blog: [cultureofchemistry.blogspot.com](http://cultureofchemistry.blogspot.com) to ours and I urge you to visit. You go, Doc.

---

October 15, 2005, 06:00 PM  
The Friendly Skies

[Back to most recent posts](#)

Send your comments to  
[ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

If you happen to be in [Puerto Rico](#) when there's a Festival de Quimica, be sure to go. It will be the work of the collected Student Affiliates of the universities and colleges in the [Puerto Rico section](#), and it will be [first class](#).



You might be invited out to dinner the night before and treated to local dishes like [coconut shrimp](#), [paella](#) and [tres leches cake](#) (more on that in a minute). Go easy on the local rum and white wine, though, because it makes you sleepy,

especially if you were tired to start with and had a long plane ride. Most of all, relax and enjoy the company of the university and industry chemists. They are masters of genial hospitality.

The hardest part of being ACS President is not the work, it's the play. Many people know of the tendency of college students to gain weight during their first year—some times called the “[Freshman 15](#)” (pounds). There is a similar syndrome associated with this job, where you're constantly eating on the road—and for that matter, constantly eating—called the Presidential 15. I've added about eight so I'm pretty much on



schedule. Fighting the Presidential 15 is made significantly harder by things like tres leches.

The cake, with a sauce made as the name suggests with three milks is very sweet and very good. Our hosts told us the three milks were cow, goat and (searching for a noun)...chicken. Well! No wonder this stuff is so special. I only had one bite, and pleaded for less out of fear that I would outgrow my slacks before the trip home.



In the morning, the action on the University of Puerto Rico campus at Rio Piedras started with a Boy Scouts' Merit Badge University. During the day, Scouts could do the work leading to a number of merit badges, including chemistry. Ingrid Montes chose some simple experiments from "Inquiry Matters" designed to teach logic and the scientific method. The scouts worked their way through them under the guidance of chemistry majors and graduate students from many of the campuses on the island.

We talked to the scouts and students and both asked and answered questions. Some of the discussions are captured here as podcasts.

Then the Festival started. Virtually every university and college in Puerto Rico was represented by students who manned hands-on chemistry stations. Each Student Affiliate had its own uniform—distinctive shirts—and there were about 200 volunteers in total. All the standard experiments were there, and the scouts and community kids loved them.

With all those volunteers, and more still at home, it seems like there are a lot of chemistry majors for a small island, but chemistry figures prominently in the economy here. About a third of Puerto Rico's GDP is derived from the pharmaceutical industry.

I did read my welcoming speech in Spanish. I couldn't see any shaking heads or people tugging at their ears, so it must have been intelligible. The flying discs made out of recycled plastics and printed with the tour logo were a big hit. I stood on stage and whizzed them to the kids, which gave me Woodstock flashbacks. These were greatly prized giveaways—and inverted they did a nice job of carrying home slime for later use on unsuspecting siblings. One time I did accidentally zing one low enough to almost whack someone. What's Spanish for "lawsuit?" No wonder we make people wear goggles at these events.



At 2 PM the scouts went in for the afternoon sessions and it was time for us to get the planes which will eventually take us to Memphis. I guess it's hard to call the Puerto Rico Student Affiliates the best kept secret in ACS, since four of them earn Outstanding evaluations (in the top 3%) but they and their advisors set a high standard for volunteerism and enthusiasm. They rock.

October 16, 2005, 1:00 PM  
Memphis, Tennessee

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

We arrived in Memphis rented a car and made our way downtown. The car we got was a Kia Amante, and the Hertz lot was full of them. Kia is a Korean car that is trying to expand its product line in America. That's Amante, not Armani, but a reasonably comfortable car.

Memphis has a trolley reminiscent of the toy trolley on Mr. Rogers old kids show. Many of you will remember the trolley and the puppet characters of the Neighborhood of Make Believe. Aalok Mehta of C&E News, who is traveling with us for a couple of days, said it looked familiar but couldn't be Mr. Rogers trolley because he didn't see King Friday anywhere. Dave observed that the puppets on that show pretty much creeped him out when he was a kid. Being older than the two of them put together, almost, I felt I deserved full credit for recognizing it was a trolley.

Then we tried to navigate the Memphis streets. Union Street, in front of the main door of the Peabody hotel reminds me of Main Street in the movie "American Graffiti." Guys in hot cars with loud engines cruised slowly up and down the street, slowing traffic, seeing and being seen. This is not an unknown problem. Turns out that there are signs around posted by the police that say, "No Cruising in this Area." They ain't working. I won't describe exactly why it took us half an hour to get the car parked, but it did.

On Sunday morning, we were finishing up the Advanced Leadership Training for Local Section officers. There we met Kara Jackson, who works at St. Jude, and we cemented plans for this afternoon. Kara also had plans for the morning.

The Peabody is celebrating its 80th anniversary in business this year. It is distinguished by a tradition of having live ducks in the fountain in the main lobby, a tradition established years ago after two hunters decided to play a practical joke on the hotel. Every morning at 11 AM the ducks are marched from a roost on the roof, down the elevator across the lobby and into the pond, er, fountain.

Today was my chance to lead the march of the ducks from the elevator to the fountain. Kara had arranged this and broke the news to me by saying, "How are you about surprises?" I thought it was cool.

Arthur, the official assistant duckmaster told me that they change out the ducks every 90 days or so, sending them back to the wild and it doesn't take long to get them trained to walk to the elevator, stand still in the corner and then walk to the fountain. In fact, this was my first elevator ride with a bunch of ducks. I tried to chat them up a bit, but you know ducks—they pretty much keep to themselves.

There was one other duckmaster today. A second-grader had also signed up for the duty, so we did it together. You can see me carrying the ceremonial walking stick, which I waved like a drum major's shako. What you can't see is people taking pictures only of the ducks and the kid. Wonder why that was.

After cleaning up the feathers, we were off to lunch, and I enlisted the crowd in buying stuff at McDonalds so we could have the Monopoly game pieces. We are now "All but Dissertation" e.g., one piece away from most of the winning situations on the scorecard. We will beat this thing yet.

October 16, 2005, 11:00 PM  
Nashville, Tennessee

[Back to most recent posts](#)  
Send your comments to  
[ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

The next stop was the [Target House at St. Jude Medical Center](#). The Target Company has sponsored two houses that provide apartment-style living for long-term patients and their families at St. Jude, and there is no fee. We were not allowed to take pictures of the kids, but by no means did we walk away with no images.

I was deeply impressed by the sense of optimism of all the kids and parents. I spent a lot of time with Brandon, who at age twelve observed well and absorbed the experiments. For the families, there was a resolute sense of acknowledging the difficulties, and never losing faith in a child's recovery ability. These are brave people and there is no whining at St Jude. I do not understand how you could walk out of that place and not have been touched by the courage within.





After another successful round of superballs, bubbles and super shrinkers, at 4 PM we said goodbye to Kara and the students from the [University of Memphis](#) who helped us out and hit the road for [Nashville](#), about a 3 1/2 hour drive. None of the kids really got into Mood Mud, which is a yogurt-cup-sized wad of thermochromic gel that was just a little too wet and disgusting. The five-year-olds declared in unison, “It feels like a big [BOOGER](#).”

We fired up the CD player in the Amanti, which frankly did not sound very good for us in the front seat, but Aalok said it was fine in back. Dave and I are trying to figure out how to drive from the back seat so we can enjoy the music better. Aalok has a phone that's also an MP3 player and through its tiny speaker even it sounded better than the car CD.

We've all had a hard time with the controls of this car. Every time Dave goes to put it in gear, he grabs the wipers stick and washes the windows. He will get used to the gearshift on the floor about the time we turn the car in and go rent one that has the transmission on the tree, and we'll never find the wipers. After two hours bathed in sweat from my knees down, I noticed that the air conditioner has dual controls: Dave's was at 65 and mine was at 78. I thought 78 was the outside temperature, except that it hadn't changed in three hours. Well, no wonder I was hot and uncomfortable. That explained the thunderstorm over the console as the cold front moved through the passengers' side.

What's in the CD player? Had to be country on the way into Nashville. [Brad Paisley's](#) new album “[Time Well Wasted](#)” has a number of interesting lyrics with a little humor. Consider: “You Need a Man Around Here”

You've got more candles than a Midnight Mass  
That pretty mirror adds a touch of class  
But don't you think that a mounted bass  
Would look good on that wall?

We eventually got to the hotel, and the bellman asked if we were with [IEEE](#) conference, the epicenter of which is apparently here. Obviously we said no, and that we were there to celebrate [National Chemistry Week](#). He said, “So there are going to be a lot of [nerds](#) in town.” I used that opportunity and tip leverage to teach the lesson that impolitic words can lead to economic consequences. Of course, I suppose he could have meant the engineers.

We had a wonderful dinner with Robert Wingfield of [Fisk University](#), Dorothy Phillips of [Waters](#) who happened to be in town, Carrie Brennan of [Austin Peay](#) and of course the ringleader of the [Nashville](#) leg, Ruth Ann Woodall. We're ready for the toy store Monday morning.

---

October 17, 2005, 1:00 PM  
Nashville, Tennessee

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Morning in Nashville is in the books, and we are now headed east toward Knoxville and Oak Ridge, TN. It was a super morning at Phillips' Toy Store in Nashville, which is a wonderful cross of the [Discovery Channel](#) stores, your favorite craft store, and the old time toy store you remember if you grew up before 1980. I know we were supposed to have an NCW event outside, but the three of us—Aalok, Dave and me—almost couldn't leave the store itself. But more on that in a minute.



What Ruth had cooked up was an [NCW](#) kickoff that featured Dr. Carrie Jackson and the [Austin Peay State University](#) Student Affiliates doing many of the standard demos and hands-ons and really doing them well. The superballs bounced, the shrinkers shrunk, the soap-and-glycerine bubbles could be caught and handled and the slime was so real it nearly made you sick to your stomach.

A little girl named Carli spent the most time with us doing all the demos, and developing great dexterity, even being able to put her fingers into some of the bubbles. Near as I can tell, we didn't scare off any business for the store.

Ah, the store. I hadn't even imagined some of the science toys we found there. First was "Grow a Bug." Usually in chemistry we try to keep that from happening, but this bug grows. Put it in a 2-liter soda bottle full of water, put the cap on and it almost pops it from the inside. Take a look at that critter and tell me why no lawyer made them put a warning on it that says, "For heaven's sake don't swallow this whole."

On the other hand, here are bugs I could never grow. I had three ant farms myself and with my kids and in each one all the ants died. On the other hand, when I had apartments in grad school I couldn't kill them with a B-B gun.

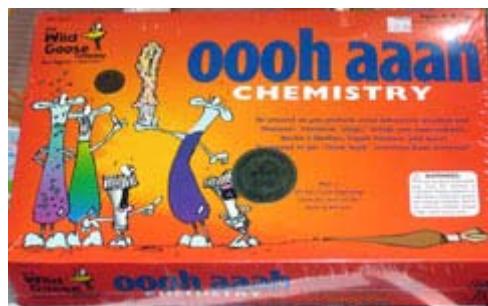


Next is DNA Wizard. It's molecular models that are like K'Nex for biochemists. Look at the species-indeterminate thing swimming next to the DNA and ask if there are directions for that synthesis. Stem cells not included.

Who could resist "I Can Become A Chemistry Wiz." This is the BS refresher course I've been looking for.



And for the MS, we have oooh-aaah chemistry. More unidentified species on the cover, but one may be the famous Oooh-Aaah bird: a three inch wide bird that lays a six inch wide egg, known for its distinctive call.



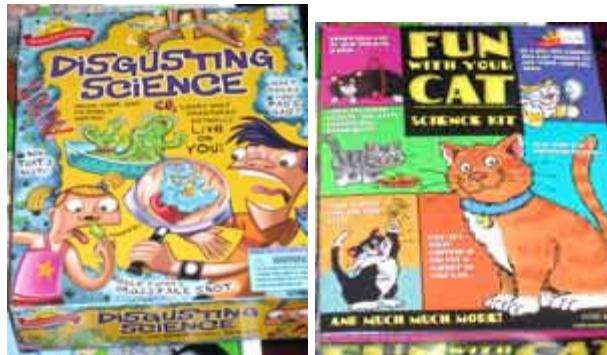
Our PhD program is Fizzy Foamy Science, wherein we "learn to experiment like a real scientist." That's certainly the way my major professor explained it to me. Perhaps best in

this kit is “Feed a living creature and watch it make foam.” I figure the creature is either your little brother or the rare Australian Shaving-Cream Beetle. Either way, I’m shure that the Committee on Chemical Safety did not approve this toy. The chemicals listed are safe, but there is a choking hazard. Beer is not mentioned.



Now, the postdoctoral work. Who could resist “Disgusting Science” wherein we “learn what creatures actually live on you” and “what makes you pass gas.” We won’t discuss the super gross fake snot, but see the comments on “Mood Mud” from yesterday.

And here is my very favorite: Fun with your Cat. Best experiment: “Find out what happens when you put a magnet on your cat.” And you doubted animal magnetism.



There’s really not time to tell you about the wind-up plastic sushi that runs across the table or the rubber chicken that, when squeezed, extrudes a liquid and yolk-filled egg. Release the pressure, and it goes back in. This was desperately serious fun.

But all good things come to an end, and we said goodbye to Ruth, Carrie and the students, and headed for Oak Ridge. We put about an hour behind us before stopping for lunch. Of course it was McDonalds. I was driving, and we were deeply rewarded for our investment. We hit our first winner in the Monopoly game: an instant winner of (wait for it...) a Breakfast Sandwich. This is just the start. I can feel the rock starting to move.

What’s in the player: Pure Heart 2. Nobody has this album and nobody will except Dave. Pure Heart was a group famous in Hawai'i when he was teaching there and one of the members was in his gen chem class. In exchange for rescheduling an exam Dave was

given this autographed copy. The music is very easy listening, with lots of [ukulele](#) played in the style of a mandolin. Contains covers of the [Commodores](#) and [Buddy Holly](#).

---

October 17, 2005, 9:00 PM  
Oak Ridge, Tennessee

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Spirits buoyed by victory, and frankly missing the sweet sounds of Aalok's cell phone since he went back to DC, we headed toward Oak Ridge and [Roane State Community College](#). Adolph King is our host, and Adolph gave us very specific instructions on how to get there. Just to make sure we understood, we called about 2, thinking our appointment was at 4. Some of the audience was already there when we called. Yikes!

Well, nothing we could do at that point. I've had a ticket already this year on an ACS driving trip and I'm not inclined to drive 90 to save 10 minutes when we're two hours



late already. I just settled in. Dave was working and I found myself daydreaming a little, thinking about what it would be like if someone really did give us \$25,000 for [Project SEED](#). I'm a little worried—not about shaving my head, per se, but I don't really know how to take care of that kind of haircut. I can't imagine going at it with a blade razor, because I bleed like an [Irish boxer](#). Don't bother with a little chunk of toilet paper on the cut, get a Bounty and a tourniquet

We followed the directions carefully right to the penultimate turn, and the final instruction was "right turn into the parking lot after 0.2 mi." I carefully watched the odometer, knowing Adolph's dedication to precision. Since I had gone only 0.1 miles+, I did not turn into a parking lot, only to have the digital display flip over to 0.2 ten feet past it. So we went down a block and turned around.

Poor Adolph had been standing out in front of the building waiting for us for about two hours, and we looking back through the rear view mirror could see the worried look on his face from a quarter mile away. All's well that ends well, because we had a good meeting with lots of students and [National Laboratory](#) alumni, before getting very precise directions to the [Knoxville](#) area airport for the trip to [Cincinnati](#) and a late arrival in [Buffalo](#).

What's in the player: Aqualung is basically Matt Hales, a classically trained young pianist whose work sounds like [Coldplay](#) meets [George Martin](#) production, circa "[Magical Mystery Tour](#)." Pleasant, filmy haunting. Then [Johnny Lang](#), teenage bluesman. Hot guitar and a nice edge.

---

October 18, 2005, 9:00 PM  
Buffalo, New York

[View Comments](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

We got to the Hilton Garden Inn in Buffalo about 1 this morning. What a great place. Apparently it was a complete reconstruction of a gutted Ramada Inn. VOIP phones, internet, good beds—this was the first hotel I'd ever been in that had a new car smell.

The way we got to the hotel was in our new ride—an eight passenger [Ford Expedition](#). Boy, this is a big car.

Paint it yellow and we could take kids to school in the morning. Dave threatened to drive over a couple of 18 wheelers when they got in his way, and they moved over when they found out he meant it.



In the morning I did a WebEx presentation for the [Canadian Society of Chemistry](#). We had hoped to be there in person, but their time constraints and ours wouldn't allow it, so we were virtually in Toronto. Then we met Dave Nalewajek and his [Honeywell](#) colleague Dave from the [Western New York section](#) and went off to the Drew Science Magnet School,

which is located at the [Buffalo zoo](#). One of the three Daves in the car pointed out that the hairy brown animals we saw were bison, and noted that they should not be called "buffalo." I'll take Animal Planet for \$800, Alex....



At Drew we met Pam Bachwitz, a chemical engineer and second-career teacher, who has been at it two years. When her company closed a local operation, she made a decision, got a Master of Arts in Teaching and started teaching junior high. She had arranged for four classes to see demonstrations and hands-on chemistry conducted by Ruth Mistretta and Carrie Buckley, grad students from the [University at Buffalo](#) and Matt McKay of [Buffalo State](#). They did a great job with a tough audience of eighth graders. As usual, nothing succeeds like liquid nitrogen.

We needed to leave by two, which meant there was just time for a fast lunch at...well, yes, it was McDonalds, but it was next door to the hotel, OK? I previously snuck out that

morning to cash our winnings and try again for the big score. Between that and lunch, however, we took four more runs at the Monopoly goal line today and were stopped totally. Dave also discovered by experimentation that the Apple-Walnut Salad does not under all circumstances keep perfectly for the full ten days it is expected to and occasionally becomes a biology experiment. In limited testing, fresher appears to be better.

Dave fired up the [Peterbilt](#) and we were off for [Oswego](#). After four days together, we've pretty much exhausted our own histories and told every story we know, so we resorted to an automobile game we played as children, [Counting the Cows](#). As most of you know, the game is played by counting the cows on your side of the road, most cows at the destination wins. If you pass a cemetery on your side, however, you lose all your cows. Since we were headed east, then north I had the cows on the south then east sides. We decided to make it interesting by playing for a dime a cow.



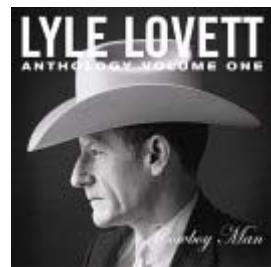
Apparently there is a state [law in New York](#) that requires that all cemeteries be built on either the south or east sides of major highways, leaving me with no cows and a sour attitude. Dave suggested the license plate game for tomorrow. I'm still thinking about it.

There were other things on the road today. A lock of the [Erie Canal](#); Halloween yard decorations including huge balloons of [Scooby Doo](#) and [Garfield](#). Incidentally, along state road 34—a 55 MPH highway—there is no parking allowed between 2 and 6 in the morning. Also, there is a heated race for [highway superintendent](#) in this county, with both candidates advertising extensively. How good a job can it be?

Tonight we had a really unique event at the [Syracuse Local Section](#) meeting in Oswego. After a wonderful dinner we went to an old barracks associated with [Fort Ontario](#) that is now an arts space. Three SUNY Oswego chemistry professors who are also photographers--Joe LeFevre, Casey Raymond and Jeff Schneider--exhibited their pictures and we heard a discussion about photographic preservation and restoration.

Since we'll be leaving very early in the morning there will not be time to swap extreme stories with the proprietors of "Xtreme Underground," the leader in body piercing here in Oswego. Dave noted that we didn't yet have the \$25,000 donation and thought maybe we should consult with them on ways to refresh our marketing to include some other, uh, premiums. I told him I'd rather play the license plate game.

What's in the player: "[Lyle Lovett, Cowboy Man](#)." An anthology of material from the classy country singer: smooth music, clever lyrics touching the past few years of his career. I bought this album on the recommendation of my friend Pat Costner from [Greenpeace](#), who said she thought I resembled the profile of Lyle in a cowboy hat on the cover. Well, maybe a little.



Early call tomorrow for the run to [Troy, NY](#).

---

October 19, 2005, 11:00 PM  
Boston, Mass.

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

We hit the trail at 7 for [Troy](#). Today's my day to drive the Queen Mary and I practiced with a run down the street to the least common denominator for [Monopoly](#) game pieces. Another dry hole. This is starting to remind me of the year I was eight when I collected baseball cards seriously. I actually did get one Mickey Mantle, which I now cannot find. On the other hand, I had 375 copies each of [Bob Cerv](#) and [Harry Chiti](#), all of which are in mint condition. In 2005, Bob and Harry are St. James and St. Charles Place, respectively.

So off we went on our last driving day. I understand Ford makes an attachment for a gasoline tanker truck so it can pull up next to you while you're moving and simply [refuel you in flight](#) like a fighter jet. Might save



us some time today.

Dave's GPS got us to the [New York Thruway](#) and we pointed ourselves east. We were a bit behind time, but it is truly a beautiful drive with the leaves about 50 percent turned. My spirits were really high and I tried to pass this exhilaration along to others. When I stopped to get our toll ticket, I grinned right at the attendant and said, "Happy National Chemistry Week." He was

flummoxed. What had the older gentleman in the battleship said? Cognitive dissonance overcame him. He would clearly need rebooting.

This scene was repeated at every toll booth today and we got the same result until Dave pointed a camera at one of the toll takers. Then when I said “Happy National Chemistry Week,” she said a cheery “Thank you!” Much to her dismay, [Candid Camera](#) never called.

We arrived in Troy, NY and went to the new [Children's Museum](#) —a wonderfully functional space with a planetarium dome. Rensselaer Polytech and the museum, with help from NSF have created a truly unique film for the domed theatre called “[The Molecularium](#).” The Molecularium is a ship, piloted by an oxygen atom named “Oxy” that homes in on matter at different sizes. Assisted by two hydrogen atoms (Hydra and Hydro—twins, but I couldn’t tell if they were fraternal or identical) they explore all kinds of materials. They pick up a couple of random carbon atoms who make weird chains of polymers and ask to be dropped off by a protein.



Look, it’s a little hard to describe and do justice to it, OK? But it’s a great film for the targeted ages of K-3 and has good spillover to older children as well. And, I had a great time lying on the floor with my head on a big [beanbag](#), admiring it with the twenty 5-year-olds that were there.

Later, we made magic putty in the traditional way, and these kids really enjoyed stirring the material until it congealed. Then they enjoyed pounding it with their fists. All twenty of them. At once. We made the thunder stop by bribing them with [plastic flying discs](#). When we gave them out one kid wanted to know what kind of animal was in front of Milli in the plane. He was allowed to leave early.

We had a great lunch and said goodbye and thanks to Dick Siegel of RPI, Sally Knutson of the museum, Todd Stark, Section chair, and the Mary Carroll (of [Union College](#)) seen at ACS meetings who is not my wife. They have some class activists at RPI and the Eastern New York Section. We really had to move to make [Connections to Chemistry](#), a teachers’ event in [Burlington, MA](#).

On the way, Dave told me that there were two local sections really trying to come up with enough Project SEED money for a



head-shaving session, and he was worried he might be the second head. Then he said, “But what if we get THREE?” I said not to worry because the Presidential succession typically works as a coordinated team on many projects. “Ann? Bill. I have some good news and some bad news...”

Fortunately, you can drive 70 in a 65 zone on the [Mass Pike](#) with impunity; at least you could today if you sincerely wish the officer a Happy National Chemistry Week, and we made it in good time. I gave some opening remarks, and then did two sessions on how to separate plastics for recycling with a hands-on density demo, and an after-dinner seminar on [Enterprise 2015](#). Then I announced the numbers for the raffle. Voice-wise it’s a good thing I didn’t sing in the truck on the way over or they’d be calling me Froggy.

We had dinner in the high school cafeteria. It was pretty good, but different than I remember from [Crown Point High](#), as the pork slices at [Burlington High](#) consisted of meat. On the other hand, as cafeterias usually do, there were unusual local recipes. At CPHS the signature dish was “[Pizza Lasagna Casserola](#).” Here’s the recipe “Take 50 lbs of white stuff. Add 50 lbs of red stuff. Allow to warm near the radiator. Serve.” At Burlington High School the signature dish was green beans in spaghetti sauce. “This is the French Chef, [Julia Child](#) ...Bon Appetit!”

But it was a great evening. We had some substantive discussions and predictions about 2015 by the teachers. Great concern about how to draw new teachers to the field; student decorum; even a suggestion that second-career teachers may become the norm. Mort Hoffman of BU, Ruth Tanner of UMass-Lowell and Amy Tapper, Section Chair threw a great symposium.

By the way—Amy mentioned that the proceeds of the second annual [Northeastern Section Golf Tournament](#) would go to Project SEED. We have a number of individual donations, and a couple of corporate donations in the works. I am extremely grateful to all who see the benefit of giving economically disadvantaged high school students a chance to experience research first hand and have a chemist as a mentor.

Tomorrow is the tough day. Up at 2:45 AM, in the lobby at 3:30 for a 5:00 flight to [Charlotte](#). Apparently I’m supposed to be scintillating by 7:30 for a business audience. They better have emergency trucks full of coffee meet the plane on the runway when we get there.

---

October 20, 2005, 10:00 PM  
Charlotte, North Carolina & Ft.  
Lauderdale, Florida

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to  
[ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Two alarms were sufficiently annoying to get me out of the rack at 2:45 for the 5 AM flight to [Charlotte](#). That was so early I really didn’t need to shave yet, but I did so anyway in the name of preventive maintenance.

I felt we needed to allow no less than an hour at the airport in the morning and more was preferable, so I insisted that we rally in the lobby at 3:30 AM. I had carefully back-calculated the 3:30 time having had a bad experience with a security line at Boston Logan some years ago. Everything ran like clockwork and at 3:40 we were standing in front of the dark, locked security area, nearly the only ones in the airport, Dave's "I could have used that extra half-hour sleep, Mr. Obsessive-Compulsive" look said it all without a single word. Well, OK, so we're a little early. Fine. So sue me, I'm careful. Dunkin Donuts was open, offering the remainder of yesterday's least favorite selections—who's ever heard of a vegetable beef muffin?—but the coffee was good, and we made it through security at about 4:10.



We were met in Charlotte by Jim Martin, a chemist, former professor at Davidson and former governor of North Carolina, then off to the Discovery Place (TDP). TDP is well-equipped and pleasant, and we met with local chemists and activists, discussing Enterprise 2015. It was also good to see Marilyn Sikes, with whom I've had many discussions about science museums and chemistry outreach. Marilyn is now an eighth-grade teacher, and my hat is off to her for having made the "second-career" transition.



This was a fast visit: in, eat a sausage biscuit, talk, see the sights of Charlotte in the car on the way back to the airport, check in and go. With the exception of a little drool on my shirt from sleeping with my head on my chest we arrived in Fort Lauderdale on schedule and in good shape. Then Dave committed the ultimate travel error. He provoked the gods by

saying, "Why, we're here in plenty of time."

At that point the  
the directions to  
suddenly  
2



PM WebEx conference at 2:30 by cell  
from the car at a strip mall in front of a

rental car van started moving at -5 mph;  
the FIU Biscayne Bay campus became  
ambiguous, and we wound up doing our



phone  
bikini

store. There is a lesson here.

We finally got to Milly Delgado's office at [FIU](#) where the last CARE package of fresh clothing had arrived. We changed out dirty for clean and boxed it up for FedEx. When I called home yesterday I discovered that the first load of laundry had already made it there. Mary said, "You know, you got a lot of FedEx packages here." I said, "Curiously enough, sweetheart, they're for you." She was not amused.

Our evening at FIU was wonderful. We met students and teachers from four high schools including [Wellington High School](#). Two students from Wellington wrote to me this summer asking why we didn't have ACS national affiliates in high schools. Curiously, the Education Division had developed a new Chemistry Club pilot program, and we agreed that we could kick it off with Wellington during the Extreme Tour. As a result, I presented the first credentials for an ACS Chemistry Club to Phil, Kristin and their faculty advisor, Barbara Cloran. They will make us very proud.

---

October 21, 2005, 8:00 AM  
The Friendly Skies

[View Comments](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Dinner with the [South Florida Section](#) was Cuban and tasty, including a [Mojito](#), a drink consisting of rum, lime and mint, that goes down like Kool-Aid if you'd let it. One was sufficient, given the early (4:45 AM) call we set for this morning.

At the airport this morning, I spotted a rather large woman in white short shorts with hair the color of purple Easter grass. I think I said it was stunning, but I may have used another term—it was pretty early in the morning. Dave said, "Keep it up, laughing boy. With a \$10,000 donation to [Project SEED](#), that could be you, minus the white short shorts of course."



I'm writing this from the plane from [Ft. Lauderdale](#) to [Houston](#). If the type looks a little cramped it's because the guy in front of me leaned his seat in my lap and I'm holding the computer with my chin as I type on my chest. The good news is that I have no trouble seeing the screen. I can count his vertebrae with my knees, and he appears to have them all. One is a bit out of alignment, and I'd suggest a chiropractor. Especially after my knees are done with him.

We've had good weather most of the week, and will have in L.A. today as well, but it looks like a bit of rain and wind is coming to Florida this weekend. If [Hurricane Wilma](#) is on the horizon, how far behind could hurricanes Fred, Pebbles and Dino be? It's probably a good time to be in the air.

What's in the player: How could you visit Florida without some [Jimmy Buffett](#), whose latest album "License to Chill" was also the only #1 of his 30+ year career. In addition to a collaboration with a number of country stars on [Hank Williams'](#) "Hey, Good Lookin'" it contains a nice duet with [Alan Jackson](#) on a [Guy Clark](#) song about the next phase of one's life called "Boats to Build":

I'm gonna build me a boat with these two hands; she'll be a  
Fair curve from a noble plan.  
Let the chips fall where they will; 'cause I--  
Got boats to build

Three more days. We're determined to finish strong, and I'm looking forward to LA.

---

October 21, 2005, 10:00 PM  
Los Angeles, California

[View Comments](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

A 4:45 AM call this morning. We left [Fort Lauderdale](#) on time, but to no one's surprise there wasn't much open in the airport when we got there. And the connection in Houston was tight, so there was no time for a decent breakfast this morning. I did manage to get a cup of coffee, but nothing as substantial as an [Egg McMuffin](#). In lots of cases the airlines have stopped serving meal thingys and now sell snack boxes that contain non-perishable, ahem, edibles. You know, stuff like a [Slim-Jim](#), saltines, a bag of raisins, some Hall's Mentholyptus, a tub of salsa and a [Chap-Stick](#). In Texas that should be washed down with a [Dr. Pepper](#), but that's a story for another time.

So anyway, the Roaming Gnome was a little hungry for the three hour ride to LA. Fortunately, [Continental](#) rolled out cold cereal and a banana. Now, I'm not a big fruit guy, and in my opinion, bananas have about six hours in their lives when they're edible: all yellow—not green or black—cold, and no bruises. Today, however, I ate the banana.

When we hit the ground it was nearly noon. Bob deGroot picked us up, put an [In-and-Out Burger](#) in our hands—this was much better than the cereal OR the banana—and whisked us off to an elementary east of Hollywood for some hands-on science with the student affiliates of [Los Angeles City College](#). In-and-Out is a Los Angeles tradition and features thick burgers with all the trimmings, but unfortunately they don't offer Monopoly playing pieces. On balance, we finished ahead. Bob thought of bringing along everything including breathmints and baby wipes. The breathmints were great, but it was too tough to get the [back teeth with the baby wipes](#). At the school, the fifth grade was orderly, the college students were knowledgeable and professional, and their advisors, Aaron Brown and Dennis Mitchell were very good with the kids.



Bob did a masterful job with LA traffic. We spent most of the time on freeways and somehow were always going counter-flow to the traffic.



Next up was [Cal State University at Los Angeles](#) for an unbelievable celebration. Carlos Gutierrez and Stan Pine greeted us and showed us around. All the students doing research had posters—including two Project SEED students from last summer; the Chem Club did hands-on chemistry open to the campus (their liquid nitrogen ice cream was the best we've had all week) there were plenty of refreshments, and most important, they had this huge poster welcoming me, and they gave me one of their spiffy Chem Club baseball shirts. This is a great bunch of students.



Finally, we zipped off to [UCLA](#) to hear about their teacher outreach program. Sarah Tolbert and her volunteer grad students have developed a series of experiments for high schools based on nanotech. From building a solar cell with nanoscale TiO<sub>2</sub> to a functioning scanning tunneling microscope, they have created six perfect inquiry-based labs. They deal with modern technology and inspire students to “inquire.”



This was kind of a sentimental journey for Dave, who was a postdoc at UCLA in the mid '90s. When Bob parked the car in the garage, Dave took us to the exact parking space from which his car was stolen twelve years before. It kind of surprised me that you could be nostalgic about that sort of thing, but it was a tender moment. He added that everything turned out all right since the insurance company fixed the damage the thieves inflicted as well as other wear and tear.

Herb Kaesz took us for dinner and conversation with some students and faculty before being whisked back to the airport for the red-eye. That kind of describes the day: airplane, whisk, zip, whisk, airplane. After security we passed a McDonalds and I bought a Diet Coke having two Monopoly pieces. Nothing. We've lost our mojo.

Terminal 1 in LAX needs a bit of a face lift. I found four electrical outlets within 200 feet of our gate and three of them didn't work. Eventually I wound up sitting underneath a bank of phones, and leaning against an ATM to get my computer charged up. Epilog: the plane we were on had power outlets—first one I've seen on US Air. Oh well.

What's in the player: We met up with Lynda Jones who, for the last five years or so, has been developing a high school chemistry course that is augmented by song and special gestures. She gave me a set of her tools called HOLY MOLEE and we gave the songs a spin. The idea sounds a little unusual, but when you think about it, all of us looked for ways of learning and remembering the concepts in chemistry, and songs seem easier to remember than the equivalent text. I'll bet it works. Fess up, oldsters. A lot of us know all the words to American Pie. How tough could "The Emission Spectrum Groove" be?

This was a challenging travel day and an incredibly uplifting personal interaction day. We met some neat people doing incredible things, and most of them were students. This discipline has a great future.

---

October 22, 2005, 3:00 PM  
Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania and St. Louis ,  
Missouri

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to  
[ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

I know why they call an overnight flight a red-eye, but when you wake up your mouth tastes like you gave your cat a bath. Maybe call it a fur-tongue. But on balance, it worked out pretty well. I've had less sleep some nights this week and felt pretty good as we got a

quick shower and headed for the Pittsburgh Section's gala event at the [Carnegie Science Center](#) (CSC).



celebrating [National](#) visible from the approach weren't able to see it. We

of the week, and while I was bloviating to Dave about something, I looked down at the dashboard where there was a lit sign that said "Air bag: On." How did it know?

It's too long a story to recount here, but I've always been wary of [Pittsburgh](#) since the day I was told by the President of the [City Council](#) in a public meeting to leave and never come back. My history notwithstanding, there are still strange things about the 'burgh. Coming into town there is an exit off the expressway for the "[Convention Center](#) and [Strip District](#)." That can't possibly mean what first crosses your mind.



The CSC is a neat building; great exhibits, a place to get lost in. Friday night the Section entertained a huge crowd of [girl scouts](#) at an overnight "lock-in" and they worked on an NCW activity badge. NCW is a multi-society event here, involving ACS, AIChE and primary sponsorship by two spectroscopy societies.

A number of student affiliate groups had stations for hands-on chemistry, from fingerprints to slime. [Pitt](#), Duquesne, [Clarion](#), [Allegheny](#), [Seton Hill](#), Geneva, [Carlow](#), Indiana (PA) and Chatham were all represented, as were the [Western PA technicians group](#) and a high school, [Shadyside Academy](#). The heart and soul of this event, who has been for the last seven years, is Mike Mautino, current chair of the Committee on Community Activities. It's really classy.

I visited with all the student groups. I noticed that the [Carlow University](#) group consisted totally of women, and remarked positively about it. They said that's not too unusual for a women's school. I was reminded of a t-shirt I saw somewhere that said, "[Stupidity is not a crime](#), so you're



free to go.”

We toured, schmoozed, ate, thanked and jumped in the car since we had a tight connection for [St. Louis](#). It was a rainy, cool day in Pittsburgh, perfect in its own way for the [Pitt Panthers](#) football game at [Heinz Field](#) right across the street from the CSC.

Right about noon, the football traffic was peaking, and although we were going the opposite direction we had to get a cop’s permission to cross that traffic. After seven minutes of no movement on our side, our time was evaporating. About the time I decided that the fake heart attack was not over-the-top for this situation, he let us through.

In the end, we made it in good time and headed for [Chicago](#). In the terminal at [O’Hare](#), Dave said, “You know, I’ve seen some of these people before on this trip.” I said, “Really, there are

only about six unique people in the world and everybody else looks more or less like them.” I think we both

need to head home. On the plane to St. Louis, the flight attendant noticed that we were wearing matching shirts. We told him about NCW and he acted very interested, then backed away slowly. They [train](#) these people very well.

We arrived in St. Louis right on time and Lisa Balbes and Ted Gast picked us up. Lisa, being a dedicated reader of the blog, graciously presented us with two unopened [Monopoly game pieces](#). We needed the [Pennsylvania Railroad](#), but we still can’t quite drive it home. Greg Wall met us at the Science Center, where there were kids galore at this traditional event. [Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville](#) had about 150 volunteers and there were also volunteers from other universities and a number of companies. The support was super, and so was the reception with the [St. Louis Academy of Sciences](#), which included a look at an old Disney ride from the ‘60s, [Adventures in Inner Space](#). A specialty of the Academy is highlighting the relationship between [Monsanto](#) and [Disney](#) over the years. Lol Barton of [UMSL](#) needed to hear the theme song “Men and Molecules” a number of times so he could sing it to a class. It is pretty catchy, I have to admit.

We went to dinner at [McGurk’s](#), an Irish pub downtown, mainly to hear the German band that was to be playing for [Oktoberfest](#). Add some [South American Dancers](#) and it would be time for [Kofi Annan](#) to show up. Halloween is coming and



as you can see from the pictures, maskers were out early to inadvertently help us celebrate the end of [National Chemistry Week](#). Initially, we thought it was a delegation from the [Illinois Heartland Section](#)—Vicki Finkenstadt said they might come down. The maskers said no, they'd never heard of Peoria, but National Chemistry Week might be worth a tumble. We thanked them for their support.

Ted was really disappointed that the German band wasn't coming until 9, so instead, after dinner, it was frozen custard at [Ted Drewes' place](#), also a St. Louis icon. Great stuff—nothing like eating a frozen treat outside in a 43 degree drizzle, but this was worth it. Ted Drewes' is located on the old [Route 66](#), and it provokes a lot of nostalgia for the era of transcontinental roadtrips. This has been a great ride.



So tomorrow it's an early call for the trip to [Dallas](#). The grand finale.

---

October 23, 2005, 5:00 PM  
Dallas, Texas

[View Comments](#)

Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

Overtime on National Chemistry Week, but zero hour for Mole Day, and most importantly, the last leg of the Extreme Tour. This is also the last day of the [Texas State Fair](#), which is a pretty big deal. The [Science Place](#) is on the State Fair grounds in Dallas.



[Mole Day](#) is a great day to celebrate, and an impossible one to explain. It makes as much sense to most people as December 26, "[Boxing Day](#)," in England. I mean, who would dedicate the day after Christmas to fist fights?

I try to explain it by saying that a mole is the [conversion factor](#) that allows chemists to change weights of materials into numbers of atoms, and it's the numbers of atoms reacting that's the secret key to chemistry. And people nod their heads knowingly. Then they say, if it's so important, why name it after a [blind burrowing yard nuisance](#)? Why not a robust animal like a rhino? I have to admit, the thought of a one rhinal

(1 R) solution does have some appeal.

But I digress. The biggest deal at the State Fair is, of course, [Big Tex](#). Big Tex is 8,000 feet tall and greets all visitors to the Fair in a basso profundo. We were concerned when hurricane Rita was aimed at Dallas because if she knocked down Big Tex his face would have destroyed [McKinney](#).

The best part of the State Fair is the food. State Fair food was initially defined by the [corny dog](#) (that's a corn dog for those of you north of the Red River), the turkey leg and the corn on the cob; however, food R&D organizations the world over innovate to make each State Fair a new taste sensation.

Three things are required for successful State Fair food: it must be battered, fried and served on a stick. Beyond that, all bets are off. The fried Snickers bars and Twinkies are nice, but passé. This year a contest was held before the Fair for new foods. The fried sandwich competition was judged by [Elvis impersonators](#). One was reviewing the battered and fried [peanut butter, banana and jelly sandwich](#) (on a stick). He said, "I've had fried peanut butter and banana before, but adding that jelly sets it [ON FIRE](#)."



There are also games of chance. Well, really they're games of certainty. No matter how badly you want that five-foot tall stuffed gorilla, no one can throw a ball in exactly the right spot to knock the cats down—at least not without the proprietor wanting them to. These games were invented so that men could spend outrageous amounts of money in a vain, tragic, testosterone-soaked attempt to impress women. More than one back has been thrown out on the strength test.

Important safety tip: Stay away from the booth that guesses age and weight. Not a single good thing can happen there. Deep in the apocrypha is my own personal experience years ago at the [Lake County \(Indiana\) Fair](#). So long ago that the tattoos were the ones who

only women with ran the [Ferris wheel](#).

Dave and I got to Dallas on Carroll to pick up my son  
Then we headed downtown.  
had some non-standard  
get there, and initially had  
problems. A friendly and  
us the definitive instructions  
smoothly from there.



time and came to chez Quin and some props. Since the Fair is on we directions on how to some navigational helpful policeman gave and things went

We met Summer Smith, official NCW muse at the Science Place and prepared for the show by [Diana Mason](#) and the [University of North Texas Mean Green Demo Team](#).

When it comes to chemistry education, Diana is aces, and today's show was no exception. She and the UNT students did a really nice job of engaging the audience, and it was a fitting end to the tour.

Of course we headed out to the Fair for lunch between shows. Quin had a corny dog, Dave a Lone Star shaped burger (sort of) and I had the [bratwurst with sauerkraut](#). Yes, I know it's not Wisconsin, I just like bratwurst.



When we packed it all up, Quin and I took Dave to the airport. We stopped on the way to see the [Mustangs of Las Colinas](#), a bronze sculpture of horses that is my favorite spot in the Dallas area. Then finally to the [airport](#), a final handshake, and the great adventure was over.



What's in the player: [James Taylor](#), "October Road." This recent album has a number of fall related songs and like hot apple cider goes perfectly with cooler weather. It carries the sense of season as far as it can go, teasing us about the end of the year with Taylor's version of "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." This is, of course, a throwback to the days before we found ourselves saying, "If the Halloween candy's out can Labor Day be far behind?"

October 23, 2005, 9:25 PM  
Dallas, Texas

[View Comments](#)  
Send your comments to [ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org](mailto:ExtremeNCWTour@acs.org)

### EPILOG (or Epi-blog as the case may be)

The Extreme Tour is over. What started as a silly idea in my head turned into a dynamite event that staff and members alike got into and enjoyed. We had people greet us with posters using the Tour logo; quoted the blog and podcasts to us, contributed to the internet radio and most importantly picked up the true spirit of NCW; that is, Chemistry is fun, Chemists know how to have it, and Chemistry means benefits for us all.

This adventure also gave us an opportunity to explore new venues for informational exchange, like streaming audio and video, blog and pod casts, and several new digital formats and conversions. This experience will be transferred into future technical offerings and services.

There are too many people to thank here individually, but I want to name just a few. First, the Department of Local Sections and Community Activities did a super job on lining up events and handling logistics. The chemistry.org team—Louise Voress and Christine Brennan, among others—took the challenge to break us some new territory and they exceeded every expectation. Sarah Bladermann of the Office of Member Information served as our e-jay. Jane Shure and the communications group set up our radio interviews and promotion and cheered us on. Kelley Maddox in Travel kept us where we needed to be. There were hundreds of people in the Local Sections who said, “Extreme Tour? Cool! I’ll take a piece of that” and went on to make it a huge success.

We’ll keep the pledge lines open for [Project SEED](#) for a while to collect our final numbers. Thanks to everyone who helped us help economically disadvantaged kids experience research. While not on the tour, I should mention my partners in the Presidential Succession, Chuck Casey and Ann Nalley, who had their own events last week, working to make NCW a universal celebration in the chemistry community.

Dave and I posed for one final picture at DFW. Maybe there’ll never be another week like last week. Maybe.

