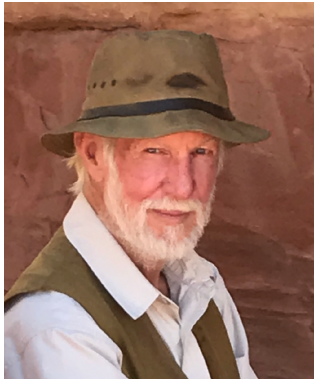


Walt Ebaugh (2017)



*Dec 12, 2018: We are Degrading Spring Creek in Taking Our
Water Supply: What Can We Do?*

May 14, 2025: History of the Rideau Canal

When I graduated from high school, I went to Lehigh University for two years and didn't apply myself academically. The last semester there I received a 0.6 grade point average. That's one C, one D, and three Fs. I withdrew, and the following fall I went to New York and lived in Greenwich Village, and had a job as a sales clerk at B Altman department store, across Fifth Avenue from the Empire State Building. I was in the Men's Furnishings Department, which was just to the right coming into the main entrance. It was there that I learned of John Kennedy's assassination from Santa Claus. A sidewalk Santa came in requesting directions to the men's room. I don't know if you have ever seen a sad Santa, but I have.

In March of the following year, I joined the Navy because the Draft Board was inquiring as to what I was up to. This was prior to the start of the Vietnam War. At boot camp the Navy taught me how to fold my fucking socks and a lot of other things. After ten weeks, at graduation, I was among 1,000 graduating recruits, all lined up on a grinder in 25 40-man companies. One among us was singled out to receive the American Spirit Honor Medal. It was I. I interview well.

I then spent 40 weeks at Electronics School on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. While there, I went to see Bob Dylan perform at the Masonic Auditorium. None of the 39 other guys in my class wanted to go with me because none of them had ever heard of him. It was at that concert that I first saw hippies, with long hair, head bands, and beads. I was the only attendee wearing a dark blue Navy uniform. Joan Baez joined him onstage for part of the show.

I spent the remainder of my four-year enlistment aboard the destroyer USS Fechteler. My brother Will was a shipmate. Very unusual. I joined the ship at Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines. To go aboard I had to cross the decks of the destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy. Two days earlier these were the ships which were attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats. That marked the beginning of the Vietnam War. I got there two days after the War started. We ran with aircraft carriers in the Tonkin Gulf. Launch and recovery of aircraft is way better than fire trucks! During that time, I saw the Forrestal burn. It was America's largest supercarrier. A rocket accidentally fired from a plane about to launch, which hit a nearby plane which caught fire, and the fire spread to other aircraft. The planes were carrying 500-lb bombs which began to explode. They blew holes eight decks deep into the carrier. Fire hoses washed the burning fuel into the guts of the ship. 137 men died, and it changed forever the way the Navy fights fire, now with foam rather than water.

When I was discharged from the Navy, I went back to Lehigh to square myself academically so that Penn State (coed) would accept me. Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in Geology, I was the

Marshall for the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, which is the graduate from that College having the HIGHEST grade point average, and my {expletive deleted} socks were folded.

During the summer prior to my joining the Navy, my friend Don Bartoletti asked me to come along with him to drive to Woolrich, PA, some 45 miles away, in his Ford Model A pickup truck to visit his girlfriend. It was then that I met Michele Boardman. Her father called her Mike, and that's how I met her. When returning home on leave from Naval service I would often have lunch with Michele. When I was discharged from the Navy in Long Beach, CA, Bartoletti was in the area on work, and we drove in separate cars home to Pennsylvania. After the semester at Lehigh, I roomed with him in a little house out across from the State College airport.

Bartoletti owned a popular student bar in town, the Phyrst, and I was a bartender while being a student during the day. On the evening of July 4th, 1968, Mike came into the bar at closing time and picked me up and took me home with her. Several weeks later Bartoletti said to me that Mike had said to him that she couldn't see both of us, and it was going to be me. Four months later we were married, and Bart was my best man.

I stayed at Penn State for an MS and then went out to Boulder Colorado for a PhD in geology. Both of our children were born in Boulder. During my first summer there I was hired by the Denver Water Board to map surficial geology in the upper basin of the Williams Fork River, from which it diverts water into tunnels under the Front Range for Denver's water supply. It is 90 square miles in area, ranging from 9,000 feet to 13,500 feet in elevation, and drains west from the continental divide between Loveland Pass and Berthoud Pass. It is in the Arapaho National Forest, and a de facto wilderness. I spent two months there in the company of my English Setter Tess, coming out each week to resupply food for both of us. I don't know anyone who has spent that much time alone in the wilderness. It is highly philosophical.

I am always careful when choosing a campsite, and one evening I had selected a place about 200 feet above tree line, with sun in the evening and again in the morning, and a small seep for water. I was cooking dinner on my Svea stove, sitting on my Thermarest and leaning back against my pack, when I noticed something in the grus on the ground. Grus is the term for the pea-sized pieces the crystalline rock weathers into that makes it a bit like walking on marbles. Small chips and flakes of chert colored cream and pink and black were scattered about among the grus. They all displayed conchoidal fracture like that of glass. I got a major buzz on as I realized that a stone-age hunter had selected this site for his camp and had been sharpening his stone tools. These flakes were the waste from that process. For

For the entire four years in Boulder, I worked full time for the Engineering Geology Branch of the U.S. Geological Survey, on a project that served as my dissertation at CU. I mapped the Bedrock and Surficial Geology of the Big Horn quadrangle in north-central Wyoming. You can order it from the USGS web site. The quad had 77 landslides in it, and I studied the process causing them, including placing many monitoring instruments into one of the slides.

Following our time in Boulder I taught in the Geology Department at Allegheny College for five years. During that time the College gave me an Excellent Teaching Award, if you can imagine that. (all that I have ever been is a teacher. It comes from being the eldest of four boys. I was ahead of them, and had to tell them things, and I just never stopped telling).

I then founded Nittany Geoscience, a groundwater consulting firm. The clean-water work involved developing wells as sources of supply for industries and municipalities, and the dirty-water work was for the

control and cleanup of groundwater contamination at industrial sites. We tripled the well water capacity of the State College Borough Water Authority. We drilled 13 wells, and they didn't want to keep a well unless it made at least 500 gpm. We had one dud, and it was 400 gpm. We brought in some big wells, many over 1000 gpm. The dirty-water work was for industrial clients including Merck, and General Electric, and many other companies. I worked on projects for Merck at their manufacturing sites in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, Virginia, and Puerto Rico. I had water supply projects in Trinidad and Tobago. I came to have 50 employees.

I viewed running the company in two ways. One was it was like a kid rolling a hoop by whacking it with a stick. You can't steer it very well, but you know that you have to keep whacking it. The other was that it was like riding a tiger. You can ride a tiger by grabbing its ears and wrapping your legs firmly around its waist. But the dismount? I got a call one day from a former grad school colleague who worked for Chester Engineers, a large municipal engineering company in Pittsburgh, who asked me if I would be willing to speak with Tony Lisanti, whom I knew was their CEO. My first thought was, oh, Walter gets off the tiger. I said yes, and they bought my company, and during the proceedings they in turn were purchased by USFilter, who was then bought by Vivendi, a French conglomerate who owned Universal Studios and Seagrams, and now my company. We kept getting boxes of hats.

I ended up going with Chuck Blumenschein, a water treatment engineer with the former Chester Engineers, to a project in Turkmenistan, the most Soviet country I have ever visited. We were joined by Beyhan Nakibogolu, CEO of a Turkish construction firm, and shepherded in country by a Culligan (also a Vivendi company by now) employee. He was a very nice young Turkmen named Recep Recepof, who said to me "When you come back, I will fix you up with a Turkmen wife." I said "Recep, that won't be necessary." And he said to me "You will find it to be very comfortable." Later, at the Culligan International headquarters in Bologna, during a meeting, Beyhan was talking on his phone, and I said to him "Are you speaking with Recep?" And he said yes. I asked him to tell Recep that I said hello, and he did so, and he replied to me "Recep said to tell you that everything has been arranged." As it turned out I did not return, but I have had some interesting experiences doing international work.

I stayed on for three years to get my staff tightly integrated into the acquiring entity, and then I said to them, "My main job here has been to transfer role and responsibility from me to you. And the measure of my success is when the phone rings and it's never for Walt. I said we are there and retired at age 58. This now is the best part of my life. My grandkids are in my life, and while they know that I am their grandfather, they also know that I am a different sort of grandfather. Yes, they respect me, but more importantly, we are truly friends. I teach them things.

So, it's an engaging life, and I am having a complete blast. The life of the mind is the best, and I am enjoying it all, while sensing the closeness of the end, which I do not fear in any way.

Edited 12/20/2024