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Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Spacemobile Experiences by Garth Hull. Written 2001.

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by Garth Hull

I joined the Spacemobile program the first month of January in 1962. I received a letter from NASA in November of 1961. At the time I was teaching science and mathematics courses at Fridley High School in Fridley, Minnesota. I was interviewed for the position in Washington D.C. by Herman Weinstein who was contracted by NASA to manage the program. We then journeyed over to NASA Hdqs. where John Sims and Everett Collin continued the interview. One of my colleagues was confused by the reference to NASA During that time Nassar was the President of Egypt. Adding to the confusion was Nassau in the Bahamas. So when Herman directed us to go over to NASA he needed to clarify the acronym. I would learn over time that acronyms would be a continuing challenge to understand.

I was asked to join the program. My Principal accepted my resignation and then I returned to NASA Headquarters for a one week training program in early January 1962 The Friday of that week a large map of the United States was positioned in front of the room for our class of eight. Our names had been pinned to the locations we would be sent. My name along with Mike Donahoe were attached to California. As we all stood in front of the map Mike turned to me and asked 'Who the Hell is Hull'. I had been sitting with him most of the week so over the next 25 years he had ample opportunity to learn my name and was reminded of his question on numerous occasions.

Our next assignment was to have field experience. I was sent to Minneapolis along with Bob Johnson. We were trained by Hal Plummer who had been a consultant to NASA during the formative months of NASA's Educational Programs Office. He had a national reputation for his lecturing on behalf of the Atomic Energy Commission. When Bob Johnson flew into Minneapolis from his home in Maine he carried a brief case. When we arrived at Plummer's home he opened the case and provided us a large Maine lobster. We enjoyed that evening a wonderful lobster dinner. Over the course of the next few weeks we conducted programs in various Minnesota schools.

After returning to NASA Headquarters we were assigned our vehicles and equipment. The eight of us were given our marching orders in teams of two. Mike and I headed for California via the way of Houston, Texas. Our first program together was at the Shamrock Hotel in Houston for business leaders interested in the space program. Another task was to visit with the Principal of Clear Lake High School to explain NASA's educational program and alert him to the plans for the Johnson Space Center. Needless to say, we learned more from him than I believe he gleaned from us.

Then via the White Sands Proving Grounds we arrived in California. Our first school visit was in Long Beach, California on February 20th, the day that John Glenn went around the Earth three times.

With that dramatic start Mike and I worked our way throughout California. During this time we were assigned to NASA's Headquarters Western Operations Office in Santa Monica California under the direction of Art Costa who later became a Professor at Sacramento State University in California. We soon learned that it wasn't wise to bide our free time by planing

Chess as Mike would beat me while reading the newspaper more often than not. Mike and I worked on the same unit for almost six months in most cases doing two schools a day. Mike and I usually shared the program. I would alternate with him doing one half. His introduction for my half included 'I'm too fat to be an astronaut and he's too tall. During the summer of 1962 NASA was provided a presence at the World's Fair in Seattle, Washington. Herman Oberle was the lecturer on site in Seattle to run the program. Most if not all the lecturers rotated to work the Fair. A home was rented near the Fair grounds to house the various lecturers. Our task was to hold an audience for 30 minutes explaining to them our goal for landing men on the Moon by the end of the decade. After my stint I conducted a teacher workshop in Portland, Oregon and then established residence in Palo Alto, California to continue the work associated with Ames Research Center.

While working in northern California other lecturers were sent to work with me. Most of them stayed long enough to be trained and then move on to other parts of the country. In the latter part of 1962 I was transferred to Los Angeles. We had numerous opportunities to conduct teacher workshops complemented by the assembly programs. We did very little work in the classroom. A demonstration that generated a great deal of interest during these days was using liquid oxygen. We carried around a large dewar of oxygen which we used to help students and teachers understand the fuel/oxidizer mix necessary for NASA's propulsion systems. One of our lecturers later used cigars for the fuel source.

An exciting dimension to the program as it developed in the latter part of 1962 was the international program. Each of us had international credit cards and were prepared to represent NASA eventually on all the continents except Antarctica. My assignment came in the spring of 1963. I was assigned to train the Science Editor for the Amsterdam Telegraph and an engineer with the Netherlands space agency. The tour of duty was six weeks. The three of us gave programs for hundreds of teachers who were attending an annual convention at the Hague. The accomplishments of our manned program were moving at such a rapid pace that it was a challenge to keep informed. To kick off the program I gave a lecture to the Embassy personnel and the team was invited to various functions as well.

In January of 1963 Ames Research Center hosted a Spacemobile conference. Scott Carpenter was a featured guest. At each conference one of us was asked to present the auditorium lecture. Mike was given the task with Scott Carpenter in the audience at Rickey's Hyatt House in Palo Alto. Most of us dreaded the task of lecturing before our peers and in this case Scott Carpenter. Mike decided that he needed his own equipment so he left the conference and drove back his unit overnight from Los Angeles to give the program. Mike grazed Ev Collin's ear during one demonstration which added to the lessons learned.

Finally after 18 months in the program I was asked to join NASA Ames and had the opportunity to establish an Educational Programs component to the newly established Public Affairs Office. A few years prior to that Ames had a Public Information Officer who shared a secretary with the Director. Needless to say there was a lot of interesting work to be done.

During this time the Spacemobile staff was a group of very talented science and mathematics teachers. Several of these personnel including myself had been involved with the teacher training programs funded by the Atomic Energy Commission and the National Science Foundation. So we were applying lessons learned during those assignments to our new role with NASA. Most of our work in the west was linked to State Departments of Education. In California, Earl Sams, Science Supervisor for California was influential in providing us opportunities to serve teachers and students throughout the State.