

# OSU/NASA Education Projects: Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP) Archive

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

## Personal Ramblings by Harry B. Herzer, III. Written 2001.

Spacemobile Ramblings

Some Reflections on Spacemobile...How I Got Involved in This Outfit.

A Professional Interlude, or 26 Years With Spacemobile.

by Harry B. Herzer, III

Working on my doctorate at Oklahoma State University, upon occasion I would see these vans emblazoned with SPACEmobile. Looked exciting, after all these were the days that led up to the Moon landing. I managed to meet some of these guys driving those vans who would come through Stillwater on occasion. [Bruce Reskie, Tom Hill, Scotty West, and Jim Poindexter. I got to know Bob Helton because he was one of the first guys to go from Spacemobile to OSU graduate work.. This was the time when OSU had the MSC contract, and was in the process of going national. I can remember over at Ken and Margaret's home sitting in their basement listening to Ken tell about getting the national contract and all of the plans that he had. I was excited for him. But had no clue that I would be involved within a year.]

Dr. Ken Wiggins was the associate director of the Research Foundation at OSU that had supported my research. I was finishing up my doctoral studies in chemistry and science education and happened by the foundation. Dr. Wiggins invited me into his office and said "Harry, are you still looking for a job?" [What a put-down. Yes, as a matter of fact I was. I had two offers in colleges that paid less than I was making teaching chemistry in high school two years before. I didn't think that was much of an advancement. ] Then Ken said "How would you like to work in Washington?" I replied "Yes!, I love the Pacific Northwest!" Ken replied: "No, you dummy, I mean Washington, DC!" Well, within a week, I was on the plane along with Nelson Ehrlich, who was taking a hiatus from his graduate studies in botany. The next day we were interviewed by Ev. Collin, the NASA HEPO. Nelson was interviewing for a position at MSC and I for a position at NASA HQ. I will never forget my interview with Dr. Fred Tuttle, Director of NASA's Educational Programs. At the conclusion of the interview, Dr. Tuttle said "Ah, uh, hmm Dr. Herzer, I want you to think of this position as a professional interlude." This was fine with me because, If I could find a job teaching chemistry at a small college, all I needed to give was 30 days notice. Well, that interlude lasted 26 years! There were offers, but circumstances weren't all that great. The change from teaching chemistry for the love of chemistry to students who wanted to learn chemistry (at least some of them did) to teaching the application of science and the result of NASA's scientific and technological discoveries to wherever it could fit into the existing curriculum was a fascinating challenge.

At this point one anecdote may suffice: During one of the two-week short courses I taught in the summer at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, I had a crowd of about 60 teachers from elementary through high school. A heterogeneous grouping. At the beginning I made the pitch that this workshop was a cafeteria—there will be many ideas, activities, and information presented. Some may fit your needs and some may not. So you may pick and choose. But be aware that you never know what your principle may assign to you in the next few years. After the first day, a rather tall austere woman

approached me with fire in her eyes. "Dr. Herzer, I don't like this one little bit. Being in here with all of these grammar school teachers." It turned out that she was a high school biology teacher. I reminded her about the 'cafeteria approach' philosophy, and to give it a few days. At the end of the last day, this very same woman came up to me with a big smile on her face, shook my hand, then wrapped her arms around me in a tight bear hug, kissed me and said "This is the most rewarding educational experience I have ever had. Thank you!" Aerospace is a fascinating integration of all the sciences and mathematics with application throughout the curriculum.

So, it indeed was my privilege to serve with Spacemobile/ Space Science Education Project /Aerospace Education Services Project (or Program) from 1970 until 1996.

One parting comment is that collectively Spacemobilers have more insight into the actual workings of the schools all across the United States than any group committee or blue ribbon panel. We have been in the auditoriums, the cafeterias, the teacher's lounges, and what is most important—the classrooms. I have seen more substantive differences between adjacent schools and school districts than between states.

There are lots of memories. Many of them center around my colleagues. At the risk of leaving any one out. I will recount a few.

While on my first assignment in Bemidji Minnesota, I got the idea that we could make a fortune on per diem. Per diem then was \$12.00. It was the fall of 1970, Ransom and I shared a room at \$5.00 (it would have been \$7 with television!) Many evenings we went to the GausHaus for dinner. A rib-eye steak sandwich was 1.35 and Grain Belt Beer was a quarter. [It was called Nectar of the Norse Gods, because nobody else would have it.] So it was easy to figure that we were making money.

[Epilogue: it was later that year that I found out that Ransom really didn't care for beer, but he is such a sociable guy that he drank it because I did. I did discover his penchant for whisky sours, but that is another story.]

We didn't spend every night at the GastHaus and occasionally would go out and splurge. We had time to explore because this was SpaceMonth in Bemidji. They bussed kids from hundreds of miles and we did back-to-back Spacemobile programs on the college campus all day long. [This isn't a bad way to learn the program!]

One of the culinary finds was a roadhouse at Ten Mile Lake. They gave us a table by a window overlooking the scenic lake. We ordered steaks and no kidding when they came on those oval steak platters they overlapped both ends. The meat was huge. Ransom's eyes got big. Needless to say he was in hog heaven or perhaps bovine bliss. Ever since when I am dining with Ransom, he will ask the waitress "What is your biggest steak?" When it comes he will calmly remark that "This isn't quite TenMile!"

What is the launch of a Saturn V like?

Upon my first visit to Kentucky Educational Television (Fall 1973), I was ushered into the director's office where all of the educational staff were gathered to 'meet the man from NASA.' The purpose of the meeting was to plan a television program around the SkyLab project. Early in the discussion someone asked "What is it like to watch a Saturn V goes off?" No one had ever phrased the question quite like that and I blurted out "Gee, I need to really think about that. It is exciting and probably about as close to an orgasm...." There was stunned silence, then a titter from Bob Shy and finally the ice was broken. We did have a fruitful discussion about Skylab, program planning. In fact they did a statewide presentations centered around Skylab. This was followed by the Universe and I television series.

Epilogue: The KET Production crew did attend the launch of Skylab. I was watching at a different site but later a note reached me. All it said was "Harry: You were right!"

Travels with Horvath

Anytime old Spacemobilers meet, they tell Horvath Stories. For those who haven't had the good fortune to meet Bill, it is only sufficient to say that he was always 'on.' He lived life and enjoyed every moment—some thought he was the most profane person that ever they had met. Raucous, Raunchy, Ribald—that's Bill. [He has settled down now, but he used to chase anything with a skirt. His bravado was legend. He loved the ladies and many loved him. [My wife, Ar thoroughly enjoyed him.] George Pope, Bill, and I had completed a series of programs in Southern California and were headed in his

Spacemobile north to Ames. As we would pass through a town Bill would have to make a phone call. Frequently he would come back to the van and say that 'her husband was home' or some other line. Pope and I figured that he was merely putting us on and merely calling friends. But at one shopping center in a town I cannot remember, Bill was in a phone booth and I could see him waving and giving us the high sign. He hung up the phone and said "Wait." About five minutes later an MG roadster came barreling diagonally through the parking lot. A tiny but busty (pert?) blonde jumps out leaving the engine running and runs up to Bill, jumps into his arms and gives him kisses all over his ugly face. They rapidly chat for a few moments then runs back to the MG and drives off. What do you make of that?

Bill Horvath was the only Spacemobiler who I know did his laundry while conducting a workshop. We were in a school and across the street was a strip mall with a laundromat. He would put his group of teachers to work, run across the street put in his laundry and run back. Get them started on another phase, run back and put them into the dryer.

While making a presentation at a conference, A lady (a very lovely lady) from Columbia, Missouri preceded me. I went up to say hello. When she found out that I was affiliated with NASA, she asked me if I knew Lou Marshall. I replied that I knew him quite well and asked her if she knew Lou. A moment's pause she said "Yes, but not in the Biblical sense!"

There are so many stories, but one with a bit of historical context that I recall was at a Summer Space Extravaganza at the University of Nebraska, such personages as Ev. Collin from NASA HQ, Georg von Tiesenhausen from MSFC (one of Von Braun's 'boys') and yours truly were invited to a luncheon with some local folks. During lunch Ev and Georg who had been friends for several years, began reminiscing about World War II. Ev was a bomber pilot and Georg was working with Von Braun at Peenemunde. Georg got to talking about a project had been working on. A modified V2 that could be launched from a submarine. Their plan was to send a bunch of U boats to lie off the coast beyond New York City and Washington DC. If successful that could have altered the course of the war. Ev was reminiscing about the places he flew. It seems that Ev was a bomber pilot and had made several runs over Peenemunde. With that Georg pounded the table and exclaimed "Ev, you sonofabitch, you were bombing me!"

[Epilogue: they remained good friends.]

How to treat astronauts...[When Spacemobilers are nearby...]

I don't mean to be crabby...

Minot Parker and I were assigned to the Space Extravaganza at the University of Maine at Orono. We were asked if we would like to go out to the airport to meet the astronaut who was coming in. Stu Roosa (Apollo14 CMP) had been assigned, but at the last minute the powers-that-be assigned a (then) unknown astronaut Dr. Joe Allen. An astronaut is an astronaut, so sure. The arrival time was scheduled for 7:30, so Minot and I figured it would be after their dinner hour, so we had a quick supper and went out to the airport. Sure enough Joe Allen flew in in a T-38. The dignitaries greeted him and we chatted for a few minutes then the motorcade went off to his hotel. We all reassembled there where our hosts bid Joe a "Good night, we will see you in the morning." The three of us stood there for a moment. Joe had a puzzled look on his face and said "Have you eaten?" We lied. "Sure, lets grab a bite." We repaired to the bar/restaurant and had a drink and looked over the menu. When in Maine, have a lobster, which Joe did. I wasn't really hungry, so ordered a crab salad as did Minot. When it came they were out of crabmeat, so they substituted lobster. Joe had a ball attacking his lobster. Of course he had professional instructions from Parker! Given the choice between scavengers, if I had to give up Maryland citizenship, I would take lobster.

There is an epilogue to this story. As the evening progressed we discussed many things including SkyLab where Joe was on the support staff. He and Owen Garriott were instrumental in putting together the SkyLab physics films which have been the best that NASA has done for high school physics. He mentioned the footage of the coalescing colored water droplets. When the film was run in reverse it became a great model for nuclear fission. Chance favors the prepared mind—Joe has a PhD in nuclear physics from Yale. [Note: today in this age of videotape and DVD—how do you run the images backwards?]

I'll sign anything as long as it isn't a check.

Typical for NASA sending all kinds of propaganda and biographical sketches announcing a particular astronaut who will be speaking. In this case it was Stu Roosa (Apollo 14 CMP). Who did they send? Dr. Joe Allen who, at the time, the public hadn't a clue about. Dr. Allen made a major address to a crowd of approximately 3000 senior citizens in the auditorium of

the University of Maine. This is 1975 and the guy looked like a refugee from a Junior High School—but when he opens his mouth... Wow what a marvelous speaker—bright, articulate, warm and puppy-dog friendly. The crowd loved him. Afterwards, these blue-gray haired ladies were mobbing him for his autograph. Joe didn't flinch and must have signed several hundred of those programs that were printed with a picture of Stu Roosa and the Apollo 14 logo. [I meant to ask Joe if he signed any of them Stu?]

I'll be through that in a couple of minutes.

Minot and I accompanied Joe out to the airfield for his departure. His T-38 was fueled and ready. We went into the flight readiness room to inquire about the weather. The guy said that there was a cloud bank from 15,000 to about 30,000 feet. Joe laughed and said "I'll be through that in a couple of minutes."

When he took off he had barely left the ground when he pulled back on the stick into what appeared to be a 60 degree angle. Zoom and he was gone! Oh, yes. As he pitched up and was ascending he wagged his wings. What a guy!

Did you get me a room?

Fred Bell and I had made arrangements to meet one evening in Pikesville, KY. This was good because this was my first year with Spacemobile (1970), and Fred gave me some good tips on model repair as well as presentation tips. We parted the next day as I headed for Jenkins and he somewhere further north. There are no motels in Jenkins, so I headed down to Wise, Virginia. As I was checking in here comes Fred Bell... His first words were "Did you get a room for me?" So I had the pleasure of two nights with Fred. My sides ached.

Rolling along with Rolling Rock.

Eastern Kentucky is dry, very dry. So, unless you bring it with you, you can't even get a beer—unless you find a bootlegger. But in Wise, VA I managed to get a case of 7oz. Rolling Rocks. Then couldn't find a styrofoam cooler (This is 1970.) So I bought a plastic wastebasket. I iced down the case. What foresight. When I finished at Jenkins I headed to Hazard. This was a Friday evening and as I approached Whitesburg the traffic was hideous (It was their homecoming.) and moved at a snails pace. Not to worry! I had my now properly chilled Rolling Rocks to keep me company! Remember this was 1970 and a few beers were not hazardous to driving AND my bladder had better capacity!

It is a pleasure to meet you Dr. Ehrlich.

The fates decided that I would spend the weekend in Hazard, Kentucky. I found a suitable motel. In the restaurant after dinner I was chatting with the motel manager and mentioned that I was with NASA. This was 1970 and he was suitably impressed, so I gave him my card. He looked at it and said "It is a pleasure to have you here Dr. Ehrlich!" No, I had heard correctly. In the batch of cards every 48th card was one of Nelsons!

Moon Rocks: There are lots of stories about carrying Moon Rocks. I vowed that I could carry them as far as they had come. I did that and then some.

Where two or more are gathered.

On a North Central flight coming through Sioux Falls, I had shown the Lunar Sample Disk to the Stewardesses (They weren't flight attendants yet.) She mentioned it to the Captain, so I showed the cockpit crew. When we deplaned the Captain had me show them to some other folks and within a few minutes we gathered quite a crowd.

Coming through Customs at Toronto, the agent asked what was in the metal case. "Moon Rocks" was the reply. I could see skepticism on his face. So I showed him. He said "Wait a minutes, sir." He invited all of the customs agents over and I showed the rocks giving a mini lecture which one of the agents was translating into French. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the gathering throng waiting (not quite) patiently behind the blue line. So, I stretched out the mini-lecture as long as I dared! Then I was whisked through. I got out of there as fast as I could!

Going through Canadian Customs is not always easy. Going through in Winnipeg the second time, I was asked about my presentations. Was I bringing in any audiovisual materials, etc. Of course I was bringing in slides which I intended to bring

back with me. The agents were puzzled. I was going to be lecturing and giving out literature and not receiving any remuneration. They finally solved their dilemma by giving me a temporary work permit.

Airports are not the only place where Moon Rocks cause a stir. An example was in a restaurant in Chicago with Dr. Margaret Lindman (of Northeastern Illinois University) and several other Chicagoans. No, Chicagoans are not blasé. I was sitting there quiet-like with the metal case. Margaret remarks to the waitress "Do you know what he has in that case?" So, I showed the waitress, the hostess, the owner, the chef, etc. These Moon Rocks have been in many kitchens. In San Juan, the assistant manager of the hotel was so impressed that he took me to the bar and gave me chits for free drinks.

The list of stories about Moon Rocks go on and on, but there is one that must be told.

During the Oklahoma City Community Involvement Program of 1973, we had quite a crew. The guys from JSC, and a bunch from OSU. We would gather Sunday evening in the motel with Dr. Wiggins to plan out the activities for the week. Martha Nell Dodson was the local coordinator. During the second week I had a meeting with Martha Nell and one of the local teachers. Martha Nell came in just fuming. After a few minutes she calmed down enough to speak, but she kept saying "That @#\$\$% Tom Hill! That SOB Tom Hill!" Finally she became calm enough to tell us. It seems that Tom had hidden her Moon Rocks (The large display specimen.) She kept saying "I've got to get him back." Well Martha Nell had a son who was on the Oklahoma City Police Force. So I suggested that she have him arrested. "I'll do it!!!" Was her reply. That weekend I had another assignment, so didn't attend the Sunday meeting. But I heard about it! It seems that the gang were gathered around the room. Tom was leaning back in a chair near the door, when a knock occurred. He merely reached around and flung the door open. An Oklahoma City Police Officer in uniform entered carrying a clipboard. "Is there a Mr. Tom Hill present?" Tom almost fell out of his chair and stood up. "Yeth Thir" he said. The officer began to read a list of charges including leaving the scene of an accident. Tom was meek and mild and kept trying to answer the questions (license number, vehicle description, etc.) Tom is a big guy, but the officer was bigger. He had out the handcuffs and was getting ready to put them on when he said. "Mr. Hill, perhaps you better read my name badge." It said Dodson. It took Tom a long minute to make the connection. Finally someone managed to get Tom Speechless!

My car visited Jack Daniel's first.

The fall of 1973 Spacemobile Conference was held at MSFC. So Jack Bannister and I decided to take my LTD on a trip from DC through Pennsylvania, across to Kansas City, Emporia, back to Kansas City and down to Huntsville. However, during the conference Ev Collin insisted that I accompany Bob Shy (who had been invited to the conference to give a presentation) to Houston to view some engineering footage in preparation for Kentucky Educational Television's SkyLab production. But after we were finished, so was the Spacemobile Conference. I flew instead to Nashville where I met up with Jack and my car. Then I found out that he, Minot Parker and Bill Horvath had sneaked out one afternoon and driven up to Lynchburg, Tennessee to visit and take a tour of the Jack Daniel's Distillery. Boy was I envious. However I have managed to make it back there several times, but not with my car. I wonder how many Spacemobiles have visited Jack Daniel?

There are several other stories that occurred at the same conference. Larry Crum (Hampton Roads Television) came in and gave a presentation on his Mars movie series. But it seems that Larry neglected to zip his fly. I took Larry out to the airport so that I could also pick up Bob Shy from Kentucky Educational Television. Larry and Bob were friends, so they had a few minutes after Bob arrived and Larry left. I asked Bob If Larry mentioned his predicament. So naturally I told Bob. When Bob got up to speak he began by addressing the women (our administrative assistants) who were sitting in the back. "If you see that my fly is open, I want one of the ladies to inform me..."

Also one evening, I couldn't get in to my room. It seems that Duane Houston, my roommate was 'entertaining.' I shall not mention her name, except to say I was envious!

So I went looking for Ev Collin (I was leaving for MSC the next day.) but couldn't find any trace of him. He certainly wasn't in his room. Years later (over a few drinks) he told me. It seems that one of the AA's needed some 'counciling' or 'advice' or... Once again, my lips are sealed. But that isn't all the activity that happened. This is the conference where Jim Poindexter and Berta eloped! [Are the conferences today as active?]

Miracle on 32th Street? [Gimble's is just down from Macy's]

Sometimes we get assignments that are strange.

Through some bureaucratic shenanigans a Space Extravaganza was held at Gimbel's Department Store in New York. In order to breathe some life into this seedy aging department store, they had space exhibits on every floor and spacemobile presentations in their auditorium. NASA contractors and space-related ventures were involved including Space Camp. Curt Graves (who is always up for a good time) and Bill Nixon assigned Ransom Ritter, Jack Bannister and me to help out. I was to demonstrate the new laser disk technology and guard NASA's "touchi-feelie" Moon Rock. [This sample doesn't get out much and is the only one other than the one in the main hall of the Air and Space Museum. I was impressed to have it on display—but kept wondering about the prohibition against "commercial establishments." This was not "shared space" in a mall.

There were a couple of incidents. Bill Nixon was walking through the store in his usual stance and demeanor. A lady walked up to him and inquired where she might find mens underwear. Bill haughtily replied that he didn't work there. I was surprised that he didn't reply "Would you like to see mine?"

[NOTE: I presume that someone has sent in the wireless microphone story about Bill during the Princeton High School program in Cincinnati. If not I will tell you the true story.]

An interesting sidenote. One evening as Jack, Ransom and I left by the employees entrance, we could hear sounds coming from Fifth Avenue. It was the skirl of the pipes. "I exclaimed, ach mon, The Pipes!!!" Sure enough there was a lone piper (A Buskar Piper?) So we stopped to enjoy. Jack being the consummate social animal, said to me "Harry, you like the bagpipes and Scottish music. Request something." I replied that bagpipe music all sounds the same. If I requested something, he probably would tell me that he just played it. A moment later a fellow walked by and dropped a bill into the piper's box and said "Play Sweet Bonnie From Clyde." Sure enough, you know what is coming next. He said "Ach mon, I just finished playin' it"

At Gimbel's I tended the laser disk player. It was a new toy then and all that was available was space scenes, both still and movie. At this time it had to be operated by a hand controller. I would occasionally put it on slow forward to simply flash space scenes while I wandered about the area. The Moon Rock was guarded by a rent-a-cop. Occasionally folks would have questions about the lunar samples and I would gladly answer their questions. This particular morning a rather seductively dressed attractive young woman came through, touched the rock and then asked about it. Her basic question was now that she actually had touched a piece of the Moon, could she Moon other people?" You know that I said "Sure!" She smiled turned around and bent over! The rest, as they say is history...or is it her-story?

Things that happen...

The Richardson, Texas Community Involvement Program had been cooked up by my former boss at Shawnee-Mission. Dr. Leonard Molotsky had taken a fat early retirement and became Deputy Superintendent at Richardson ISD. To plan the program I was in Dallas for NSTA. While manning the NASA booth, Two very attractive teachers came up to see what we had. I noticed that their name tags indicated Richardson, TX. I started to give them a line of guff about their school district and their new superintendent and deputy superintendent. At this point they couldn't figure out how I knew anything coming from Washington, DC. After the convention, I had a meeting with Leonard. He asked if I would like to see some of the schools. Sure. One the way to one of the junior high schools, he mentioned that they did have some teachers who were ever bit as good as those in Shawnee-Mission. So we walk into an 8th grade Earth Science class. You can guess. Kathie Bush one of the gals I was giving fits at the convention. She about lost her composure when she sees the Deputy Superintendent walk into her classroom with this smartass from NASA.

But that is not the end of the story.

The actual community involvement program was a success. Some of us held workshops prior to the actual beginning (to get the teachers ready.) Norm Poff and I did most of it and met for lunch with some of the teachers. Kathie Bush was one of those teachers. I was impressed by her knowledge of geology and what she was doing with her students. Norm Poff who knows a hell of a lot more geology was even more impressed. [Needless to say the Community Involvement was a success.]

This is not the end of the story...

Cut to CAST (The Texas Science Teacher's convention: Conference on the Advancement of Science Teaching that was being held at Lamar University in Beaumont, TX. I managed to get invited onto the program. The big news when I arrived

and saw Kathie, Catherine, and Myrna was "Myrna is getting a divorce." Oh the shock of it. Two nights later when a bunch of us were having dinner on a riverboat cruise, I was sitting next to Kathie. During dinner, she leaned over and whispered in my ear "You think yhou were shocked to hear about Myrna. The real shocker is that I am getting a divorce!" I almost fell into my soup. Well, as soon as I got back to the office I called Norm and told him. Not long afterwards I heard a comment that someone saw Norm with a pretty woman. I kept quiet. The following summer was the Famous Teacher in Space. Guess who came to help as an unpaid volunteer? Kathie Bush.

OK: You know the rest of the story: She is now Kathie Poff. [I officially became a cupid.]

Epilogue: Teacher In Space selection program. Two teachers volunteered to help. Kathie Bush got a husband and Pam Mountjoy Bacon got a job.