

## FOR THE LOVE OF MY DREAM

An infatuation that became the greatest dream and love of my life began with a family summer road trip. I was born in Miami, Florida and had the fortune of arriving on the journey that has been my life, into a family of loving and caring parents and siblings. My father was a quiet and honorable man who brought with him what I imagine was the good moral quality of normal nineteen fifties mid-westerners. Born in Kansas City, he married my seventeen-year-old mother at the young age of nineteen. In temperament, my mother is the opposite of my father, being a talkative and spirited woman. Being responsible in nature, my father quickly found and held a good paying job for the railroad giant, CSX. My mother settled into the marriage as a dedicated wife, homemaker, and mother. The first three of four children were born in their home town of Kansas City. Though very happy in their new life and setting, my father dreamed of moving to a warmer climate. This was because the winters, walking the cold, snow covered railway lines, were taking its toll on his health and spirit.

I shared some traits with my father, including this dream-driven nature to achieve happiness. But, fundamentally and ironically, his dreams were more practical and his choice of climate was the polar opposite of my preference. I might even say that it was the hot, humid, and boring topography of south Florida that helped to spur me on to my dreamland. That's not to say that I did not enjoy my early years in Miami. On the contrary, all of my childhood memories are happy ones. I recall outings to the seashore, play in our pool, and football on the lawns and the street of my single family neighborhood. Later, as a teenager, I remember countless walks of exploration along the canal networks of a nearby golf course where I became fascinated with aquatic life, especially fish.

### A Budding Sage

My first real hobby was learning about the art and science of fish keeping. For me, the underwater environment was an alien world of hidden wonders. I imagined it to be as mystical and alluring as the realm of Merlin or of Gandalf, and I was compelled to uncover its secrets. Like a sorcerer's apprentice, I studied the most advanced books on the subject of aquariums that I was able to lay my hands on. And through the satisfying of my new dream-driven obsession, I simultaneously discovered the reality of the sciences of biology and chemistry. So that, in addition to enjoying the aesthetic beauty and entertaining behavior of aquatic life forms, my mind began to develop a scientific rationality. This association of art and science became central to a lifelong enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world. Though not strictly religious in thinking, it suggested to me that it's creator must be the greatest of artists and scientist.

Through both my successes and failures maintaining freshwater aquariums and ponds, and eventually saltwater aquariums, I developed an understanding of the complex interactions of plant and animal life, and the means by which I could control the important environmental parameters to achieve my desired results. I imagined that the growing mastery of the miniature ecosystems I had created and maintained was providing me with a glimpse of insight into the under-workings of the world. Like a

budding sage of nature, I felt as if I had embarked on a journey into "what lies beneath", if you'll pardon the expression, the human superficial experience of reality.

## The Rapture of Enlightenment

My next great interest was inspired by Carl Sagan's television series *Cosmos*. I had been a fan of documentaries and movies about nature and space, and I enjoyed science classes the most in school. But, the knowledge that I was accumulating in my mind was disjointed. I had yet to put it all together as a logically arranged system. As if my growing base of knowledge was floating around in my mind as capsules of understood elements and fragments of facts and assorted information. Watching *Cosmos*, I found that there was a general theory of understanding that I had not fathomed existed. I was overwhelmed by the glory of the unification it all - of the Earth, the Universe, and of living matter. The perceptual impact of this grand realization made it the most spiritual and transforming period of my life. It was during that phase of enlightenment that a scientist was born.

The exploding sense of wonder and awe for my reality that I experienced could be compared to an entity of a planet forever shrouded in clouds suddenly seeing and knowing of the starry heavens for the first time. In fact, the rapture of this enlightenment caused my young mind to fall in love with both the wonders of the Universe and the power of science. For the first time I was sure I knew what I wanted to do with my life. Science had become my new obsession.

## A Rocky Mountain High

Before the intellectual part of my mind began to grow, first inspired by aquatic life and then the Universe, there was a child-like dream quality to my thinking and perception of reality. It was mostly centered about what was fun, funny, or neat. I loved playing just about any game or sport. I loved my tracked race cars and my train set. I loved my Choparoo low rider tricycle. I didn't like school very much, but I do recall joking around with my school mates, and how we thought that "The Three Stooges" were unbelievably hilarious. Still, being home meant endless fun, and I was most fond of that.

So it was that, for me, the summer breaks were most definitely the most wonderful time of the year (along with Christmas, of course). And, some summer breaks were even more wonderful. These were the summer's that my father drove the whole family out west to visit relations in Kansas City, and to site seeing adventures further to the west. So it was that on one magical summer day I found my dreamland - the high mountains of Colorado!

I can't remember the words I used to express my feelings at the time, but I'm sure they were the best ones that I knew. It was a form of non-intellectual rapture, I guess. It was the stuff of dreams. The kind of dreams that don't require any explanation, or would be diminished by unnecessary thought on the point. It just was. A Rocky Mountain High!

## The Power of Three Dreams

So it was that in the latter half of my teenage life I had three major fascinations. These were aquariums, science, and Colorado. My interest in fish blossomed when I became employed at a pet store that specialized in fresh and saltwater fish. For me, being immersed in what amounted to a zoo of fish species from around the world was fish hobbyist nirvana. Having to keep these fish healthy and being required to explain all of the elements of fish keeping to clients, broadened and honed my base of knowledge. From fish and plant compatibility and health, water maintenance, filter and media choices, and lighting, there were a myriad of possibilities and problems to solve. I fancied myself a sort of fish expert aspiring to be the hero of "Confessions of a Fish Doctor", though never reaching his level of commitment. I was more like a part-time fish doctor. My interest in fish waxed and waned over the years, but I've enjoyed aquariums virtually whenever I've had the opportunity. I would say that the greatest of my successes was in breeding and raising angelfish.

As far as science, I studied and did well in all my classes. I found that I had a natural gift when it came to understanding science. I was not only fascinated with the subject matter, but found that the logic-based reasoning of science was not beyond my capacity. I delighted in my ability to comprehend the intriguing and complex systems of the natural world. With every step, I found that I was both intellectually and spiritually satisfied and entertained. Science was nourishing my young mind with knowledge and filling my soul with a deep love for the natural world.

One way I sought to connect with the natural world, besides the aquariums I tended, was through the hobby of amateur astronomy. I can't quite remember how I progressed in the hobby, but I will never forget my first big telescope. I saved up my earnings while dreaming of telescopes I thought I'd never be able to afford. Then, one day, to my amazement, I saw the very telescope I'd longed to have being advertised in the monthly catalog I'd been drooling over for months, at the unbelievable price of \$777. I had just enough!

I had to ask permission to spend my entire savings on such a frivolous toy, and I was immensely pleased to find that my dream was not shot down. I called the order line of the telescope company, with doubt and disbelief in my voice at the legitimacy of the sale, and was reassured that the offering was, in fact, real. I placed my order and soon mailed my payment. When it arrived some eternity later, I felt that I surely must be the luckiest kid on the block. I was in nerd heaven.

I must have spent an hour for every star visible to the naked eye looking through that scope. It was equipped with a basic powered worm gear for tracking the turning sky. And, unlike with today's computer driven telescopes, I had to manually locate objects of interest. This gave me a feel for the heavens, like an explorer learning a new route and sightseeing the natural wonders. Sometimes I would consider the long journeys of the many photons of light that had traveled through time and space collected by my scope and focused onto my retina to form an image in my mind. And, as I peered at those many wonders, I would have realized that I was a part of it all. It was all very mind-blowing to me.

There, in my backyard, I was immersed in the cosmos. The sun, the moon, comets, planets, stars, globular and open star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies were all now a part of my dream world. My Celestron 8 Classic was my very own spaceship of the imagination. Looking back, I can't help but smile and laugh at how wonderful and precious is the enthusiasm of the young mind. As with kittens gleefully experiencing the joy of a world of discovery, our minds grow with every exploratory leap and bound.

Unlike the direct connection to nature that aquariums were to me, and the remote yet comprehensible Universe, my fascination with the Rocky Mountains of Colorado was more like a childhood dream that I wished to resurrect and bring to life. I was not so much interested in the science of mountains, nor its ecosystems. My fascination with Colorado was difficult to explain. It appealed to another part of my mind, the purely aesthetic and awe-inspired. I think it was a bit of both of my other two fascinations. There was the direct contact of aquariums and the great majesty of the Universe. Colorado was a sort of compromise between the two, where the Earth reached up into the Universe with awesome grandeur. They call the mountains God's country, and I wanted to live, play, and dream in a heaven on Earth. I was determined to set foot in the Rocky Mountains again. But, as it would turn out, it was a rocky road to the mother load of my dreams.

### In the Summer of My Seventeenth Year

After I finished High School I had to make up my mind about work and college. I was uncertain about how to progress. But there was one thing I knew that I wanted to do more than anything. At last I was old enough, I thought, to go on a road trip by myself. It had been many years since I had been to Colorado, and my dream of returning had grown stronger as I realized that it was becoming a real possibility. So, against my parent's advice, I started off on my first road-trip adventure.

I wished to exercise my free will, to demonstrate my manhood to myself, and most of all, to once again experience a Rocky Mountain high. I wasn't so sure of my ultimate goal, but I had hoped to find a way to live there by some means. So I piled everything I could fit into my 1970 Impala, said goodbye to my family, jammed in a John Denver 8-track, and sang all the way to the land of my great dream.

I remember having the time of my young life! And although I made some effort to purchase some land outside of Leadville, I was woefully unprepared and far too immature to achieve anything more than a really good time. What can I say? I was still a kid. I drove and explored until the money ran out. As it turned out, it was the perfect first trip on my own, and an excellent scouting mission to plan a future stab at staying in Colorado.

As for my greatest dream? Yeah, it seemed real, indeed. The magic was still in the mountains. I started by following my father's tracks and revisited Rocky Mountain National Park and Pikes Peak. And then I broke new ground all across the state of Colorado. I even revisited the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I found that I loved to drive so much that I could not seem to stop myself. It made me feel so free and alive, like a bird taking wing.

I had escaped the steaming heat of Miami, up into the cool and fresh mountain air. I was free of the oppression caused by all the concerns about becoming an adult. I was a dreamer living his finest dream. When the alarm sounded and I turned back home, I knew for sure what I wanted from life. I just had to figure out how to make it work. What's more, I discovered that I was good at driving. This was a trait that I would find useful more than two decades hence. On the flip side, my failure at gaining any real foothold on my dream may have hinted at personal weaknesses that would plague me my whole life. Was it just youthfulness, or a dreamer's mentality, or some other aspect of my mind that undermined my following through with my most desired goal? I was not quite sure.

### In the Summer of My Eighteenth Year

Back in Miami, I made up my mind to attend a community college to see what higher education was like, and to see if I was cut out for it. I had the idea of becoming an astronomer, but I thought something might come of it in any case. I managed an A-average through all of my higher education throughout my life. I was naturally gifted in areas involving comprehension, but not so hot in areas involving memory. I preferred to process logic rather than cram mostly useless bits of information in my head. I told myself that data was for computers and reasoning was for intelligent beings. The truth is that you need both to be successful in the fields of science, in most cases. But that did not deter me from achieving some success in science, eventually.

To earn money, I returned to the same pet store and earned a semi-management position in a part-time status. I usually had the store to myself as the owner was easing into retirement. I enjoyed college and was kept busy attending classes and studying, but during boring times on the job, I would often think of returning to Colorado for another attempt at a permanent relocation. I was not so much unhappy as feeling I was missing out on my dream and a life of far greater happiness. So it was that as the Summer break was rolling around, the longing to fulfill my greatest dream became stronger and most incessant.

In a repeat of the Summer before, I headed out to Colorado to find a place to rent, and a job. I wanted very much to live in Boulder, partly because of the beautiful setting of the CU campus, and Boulder's proximity to the high mountains around Estes Park. I had to work for a year to attain state residency to qualify for the much reduced tuition. And, although I managed to find a room and a job, I could not seem to save any money.

A yet unknown weakness within me reared its ugly head once again. When I worked full-time I found that I did not have the mental stamina to stay in the game. It was not only fatigue, but it was some instability of mind and mood, brought out by long periods of concentration, that undermined my efforts. My behavior would falter and I would experience the uncontrollable urge to escape to freedom. My greatest dream was at stake and I was helpless to command my actions.

During this period, I went on numerous hikes in the mountains. I gradually acclimatized to the thinner air of high elevations and built up my leg muscles as never before. I had a lot to learn about the dangers of the elements of the mountains, and of

equipment. I experienced challenges ranging from hobbling blisters, to severe hypothermia, to nearly falling from cliff faces.

I absolutely loved hiking. I discovered that hiking was the way I could most enjoy the mountains. For me, sightseeing was not enough to fully enjoy the mountains. I needed a visceral experience. And I needed changing scenes and something physically demanding for the feeling of euphoria to last. It was like the difference between looking at a beautiful woman and making love to her. In a sense, through the experience of hiking, I made love to the mountains. I would set a goal to reach a lake or a peak, and upon arriving, I would feel a climax of mental satisfaction. So it was that I was seduced to ever loftier lakes and peaks by the spirit of nature.

Whenever I returned to Boulder, I would have to face reality once again. Maybe I could go on like this indefinitely, but the hope of a career in science could not be so easily quelled. And the thought of returning to my parents to save money seemed counterproductive and too much like failure. It probably would have been a good choice, but the additional need to strike out on my own persuaded me to find another solution. So I did the unexpected. I joined the Army!

## Cream Puff to Soldier

Why join the Army? What was my thinking? It was mainly about the G.I. bill -- money for college. But, also the fact that room and board was covered, which would allow me to save most of my earnings. And, there was the training, the adventure, and the experience. The military was an alluring mystery to me. The fantastic power of armies and how they apply it seemed to me worth finding out about. To be a part of such a tremendous force was exciting to my young mind, as well. And, I thought it might help me to become stronger as I developed my physical and mental fortitude as I grew into manhood.

The training is divided into two kinds. First, there was the hands on general military training that all soldiers receive to some degree or other. The second kind of training a soldier receives is specific training that depends on the selected Military Operation Specialty (MOS). In my case, having scored well on the exam that is given to prospective recruits, I was offered two upper echelon choices of MOS of tank turret electronics repairer or Hawk missile radar repairer. Long having had a fascination with air and spacecraft, it seemed right to me to choose the one involving missiles. But first I had to make it through basic training.

My basic training took place at Fort Jackson, South Carolina in April of my nineteenth year. My excitement and anticipation turned to shock and fear at the sight and behavior of the drill sergeants. They acted the part of the meanest and toughest dudes I'd ever come across. They were masters of their occupation and they really got to us. No one dared disagree with them as we tried as hard as we could not screw up. If you did screw up you would get a face full of angry shouting and be ordered to give them pushups...one drill sergeant, two still sergeant...until you thought you would pass out. Good times!

I learned a lot and I grew a lot as I made it through basic training. I learned that I had a slight astigmatism and was provided with those geeky black plastic glasses. I thought they had made a mistake when then handed them to me, and I was amazed by the detail I'd been missing. The most surprising thing I discovered was that stars are actually perfect pinpoints of light. And, of course, I learned all the usual things like how march, how shine your boots, how to shoot and clean your rifle, how to dig a foxhole, and how to hurry up and wait.

I don't remember too many details, but I remember crying one time early on after I was made to do pushups. The shock and stress was too much, I guess. I handled everything pretty well after that. I remember a really cool night exercise with laser-like tracer rounds flying overhead that reminded me of Star Wars. And, how I got to fire through a night vision equipped M-16. The eye up was frayed so I pulled it off and took aim. When I pulled the trigger, the metal ring around the eyepiece recoiled back into my brow and gave me a small scar so I would never forget. I remember calling home and complaining about how basic was the hardest thing I'd ever done.

The best part of basic was sharing the trials with guys who were in the same boat. We made it through as a team. That really helped. It's a soldier's right to complain and we did plenty of that. We cracked jokes, we sang in unison, and we became soldiers together. We gained respect for our drill sergeants and the Army. We came to understand that it was logical for them to be so tough on us. After all, it was their job to turn cream puffs into lean, mean, fighting machines. And, that drill sergeants go through what we went through indefinitely, earning them great honor. We were so proud of ourselves and pleased when, at last, we were granted leave at the final ceremony.

## Redstone Arsenal

My military specialty training was thirty weeks of electronics and radar theory. The school was located at Redstone Arsenal, outside of Huntsville, Alabama. Redstone and Huntsville had been instrumental in America's early rocket development programs. I visited a nice museum of space history while there. They had many rockets on display, as I recall, possibly including the greatest in history - the Saturn V. That I was studying the Hawk missile system at such an historic setting made me feel a bit like a physics student might while attending the same college where Newton had worked his genius. I was inspired by the shadow and the wake of greatness.

Life at Redstone was far more civilian-like compared to how it had been at basic training. Instead of common barracks and bunk beds and foot lockers, we were housed in modern structure, dorm style, multi-level buildings. There were three full beds and a full bathroom in each room. And the training hours were far more sustainable, compared to the sleep-deprivation standard in basic, with the evenings normally free. It seemed too good to be true after the intense and exhausting experience of basic training.

I went through school as part of a class of nine Soldiers and Marines. The classrooms and curriculum were very much as they are in college, though we did not move much from our assigned room, and we worked straight through the day with only

short breaks. We learned about the theory of electronics. How resistors, capacitors, diodes, transistors, and other components are cleverly integrated on circuit boards to achieve some desired functions. And, we learned how electronics can be used to transmit and receive radio and microwaves to detect aircraft and guide missiles. All quite fascinating. I thought it ironic that someone such as myself, who loved airplanes, would now be in the business of shooting them down.

About the only story that really sticks in my head from the time is an outing I had to a cave in the surrounding hill country. An army buddy had been told about it and we decided to have a look. After some searching, we came across an unmarked hole in the ground. I had never spelunked before, but I was young and gung ho, so I put aside my fears and crawled in. In hindsight, I realized that I had been reckless with my life.

At first, there was a vertical drop of about thirty feet, followed by a long horizontal run for hundreds of yards. There were narrow places where we had to crawl and squeeze our way through. At other sections, the cave opened up into room-sized caverns. A trickle of water ran along the floor and sometimes pooled, especially in the wider spaces. This hinted that a flash flood caused by local or upslope rain was a common risk. The floor and walls were of clay and limestone, and many crickets crawled about. I had worn my camouflage fatigues and discovered after that no amount of washing would get the clay out. But, what spooky, adventurous, and memorable fun it had been!

## A Wet Wonderland

As we neared the end of our thirty weeks at Redstone, we were asked where we would like to begin our tour of duty as Hawk missile radar repairers. The options were Germany, Korea, or the States. I asked to be sent somewhere out West. When my orders came through I was not disappointed. I was assigned to a battalion stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, just south of Tacoma.

The most extraordinary aspect of western Washington is the ceaseless drizzle. For nine months of the year the clouds did not part, but once. Thankfully, there was little to no snow, with temperatures rarely dipping below freezing. And, the summers were absolutely glorious, with most days being perfect. The forests were blessed with a marvelous lushness granted by the generous rain.

The near-coastal region of Washington State is a wet wonderland of mountains, volcanoes, and temperate rainforests. Most prominent on the horizon is the towering and massive volcano named Mount Rainier, which rises up above the surrounding mountain range as a shepherd to his flock. Further north and into Canada is the forbidding Cascade mountain range. To the southwest is Olympic National Park, one of the wettest wonderlands of ferns and great coniferous trees in the world.

The reason for all the rainfall is a perfect storm of oceanic weather and mountain topography. Moisture laden Pacific air is driven by the jet stream eastward into the coastal mountain ranges of the Northwest. The air is forced upwards as if up a great ramp of earth, cooling it and thereby causing much of the moisture to condense and fall

to the ground. Amazingly, east of the coastal mountain ranges runs a "rain shadow" of deserts, which are testimony to the efficiency of this process. I would spend a two weeks on a training exercise in this rain shadow. The region is called Yakima and is a dry scrubland coated with an odd smelling greenish dust that permeates everything.

The coast itself is like much of the west coast north of San Francisco. High, steep cliffs overlooking the cold, windswept waves of the North Pacific. Conifers falling from the eroding cliffs and others carried to the sea by rivers flowing from inland forests, are tossed about against the rocky shoreline where they are stripped of bark and made into natural works of art. The shoreline is comprised of grey to green flattish and rounded stones ranging in size from pebbles to small boulders. They too have been lovingly worked by the waves, and are even sorted into like-sized accumulations arranged according to the patterns of nature. I enjoyed camping there on the beach amongst the tree sculptures, with the sound of the pounding waves and hissing foam seducing my mind into a peaceful trance.

Life at Fort Lewis was much like a civilian eight to five job. Because the Hawk missile system was designed to be mobile and rapidly set up for action, everything was either towable or haul-able. The testing stations for the radar components were much like air-conditioned cargo containers that could be moved on flatbed trucks. The walls were jammed with panels sporting numerous indicator lights, dials, and digital readouts, and about as many connector jacks and switches. The radar dishes and missiles were mounted to trailers, as were the generators. Everything else was moved in trucks and other vehicles.

At the base we tested circuit boards sent to us from bases around the world. We used manuals to run the boards through a series of tests. Wrote up the results and sent them on to the next link of the chain. I never actually saw a hawk missile fire, but their appearance, mounted in groups of three, impressed me quite a bit. And, the radar was capable of detecting and guiding the missile to targets near the ground, including helicopters, by use of Doppler shift.

The barracks were a traditional two story design like the kind I was housed in during basic training. But, the interiors had been remodeled and divided into private rooms with two or three beds each. After work, I was usually free to do what I pleased, on or off base. I decided to attend a local community college and I managed take enough courses to acquire an associate degree, along with the transferred credit from my Miami stint.

The most interesting and pivotal course of that period was a class and lab in geology. Carl Sagan had not really touched on geology much in Cosmos, and southern Florida has few rock outcrops. So, geology was a bit of a lost science for me. That may seem ironic given my fascination with science and my love of the Rocky Mountains, but at that time those two inner realms occupied different regions of the gray matter in my head. Like Spock and McCoy, they were worlds apart. But, the professor who taught the course was as gifted as Sagan had been. He showed me just how to bring those worlds together, sort of like Kirk. So that, on the stage of my life, geology rocks!

Looking back, nothing really stands out aside from my explorations of the natural wonders, my geological stirrings, and the almost ever present drizzle. I remember three

consumables that I have not been able to find since. These were Hula-chews, a chocolate-covered coconut treat, Fisherman's Chowder, a clam chowder with chunks of fish, and Rainer Beer, the regional brew. Probably most practical of my endeavors was the rebuilding of the heads of the engine belonging to my Dodge Ram Charger, which I accomplished with the help of a base engine shop. Man, that 440 could make that 4x4 rocket. I was even stupid enough to run it down a rocky beach. That stunt resulted in a lesson I was to painfully learn a couple of years down the road to my greatest dream...

## Freebird

I was released from the Army with an honorable discharge in the summer of my twenty first year. The Hawk missile system was being replaced with the Patriot missile system. The Army no longer had use for our specific skills. We had to choose between going back to school for nearly a year of Patriot missile training, which required reenlisting, or being kept busy until our term expired. In the the short term they assigned us to any duty from munitions guard to pallbearer. For those of us that did not choose to reenlist, the Army found ways of cutting us loose. My way out was missing a few too many early morning physical training drills. I'm not a morning person and I had grown too fond of Rainer beer, often finding myself on the afternoon drills for the overweight. But, it worked out perfectly as I had completed just enough months to be granted the tuition for college I had wanted.

I hadn't yet exactly decided my next step in my still young life. And I had a several weeks before the Fall semester would traditionally start, so I decided to take the long way back home to Miami. I drove down the Pacific coast road all the way from Fort Lewis to San Francisco. Then I headed east on Interstate 70 to Denver. Then south to Las Cruces, New Mexico, and all the way into Florida on Interstate 10. I had often wondered about my future over the course of that drive, but I wanted to visit my family, and it seemed the only certain destination that did not require a decision.

The best part of that road trip was driving the incredibly winding roads of the West Coast in my blazing Ram Charger. You actually drive two or three times the distance as a bird flies. I felt that I was a free bird after all of that being ordered about. The g-forces and views on that road, winding up and down and in and out of narrow cuts in the cliff faces, added much to my feeling of freedom. The endless expanse of the ocean laid before me far below was as a tapestry of deep blue waves highlighted by crests of white, inspiring thoughts of the infinity of time.

I drove along for the pleasure of driving and the views the road brought to me. Skillfully hugging curves and effortlessly climbing up steep inclines as if experiencing the thrill of a dogfight. I was a fighter jock winning a war of ecstasy. I only landed to gaze or camp or for whatever beckoned. Fortunately, gas was cheap back then, as that thirsty 440 managed a sad ten miles per gallon, city and highway.

But, as if waking from a dream, with my mission heroically completed, I dropped down into San Francisco. While there I took a leave from nature and enjoyed the works of man. I drove over and walked on the Golden Gate Bridge. I visited gardens and a

museum of art. I navigated the insanely narrow, winding streets and wavy hills of the city. Once, I could swear I spied Robin Williams jogging in a park. I was a big fan of Mork from Ork as a kid. Perhaps Boulder wasn't orkish enough for Mork. Nah-no. Nah-no. Ar ar ar.

Striking east, I crossed up and over the Sierra Nevada mountain range by way of Yosemite National Park. I was greatly impressed by the awesome power glaciers can wield to sculpt mountains. I should have predicted that I would return to California on many occasions. Continuing east, I revisited some of my Colorado dreamland, but time was pressing and I figured I'd be back again. I just need some time to sort things out.

The worst part of the trip was the endless miles of Texas stretched along I-10. It was as hot as hell and my air conditioner was out. To make matters worse, the scenery across Texas on that route is dead boring, at least it seemed that way to me after seeing so much grandeur. So I drove non-stop through the night, popping No-Doze along the way, and on to the only place I could really call home. It was not the only time I had driven 2000 miles without more than a catnap. But, I wouldn't recommend it!

Rock-it

I was staying with my parents once more. It was nice to feel again a sense of home. Two of my grandparents had passed on during my tour of duty, but everything else was about the same. I considered returning to Boulder to resume college, hopefully at CU, but I would have to live there a year before I could qualify for the tuition break.

I had never seriously considered a University in Florida, but it seemed the safer and financially logical choice. I could be with family if I stayed, and I could vacation in the Rockies in the summer. So, I had a look at Florida International University. I'd been leaning toward Astronomy since I'd thought about college, but geology had become a new fascination. The Geology Department at FIU occupied an entire floor of a large five story building. It must have agreed with me because I started as a geology undergraduate that Fall semester. It pleased and satisfied me to be back on an academic course.

Geology was probably the best choice for me of all the sciences. I've never regretted that decision. I became very interested in the specialized science of every class. Being truly interested in the subject matter made my college days very enjoyable and rewarding. I even thought that the life of the perpetual student was what I wanted most. I did not want anything to distract me from my love for science and my dream of becoming an exceptional scientist. But, as fate would have it, I fell for a fellow geology major and got married.

Marriage naturally meant that half of my fascination, energies, and focus were now being spent on a woman. It was true love and great fun and it worked out well for me, as I shall recount, but it altered my trajectory to one below what had been a total commitment to studies. We moved to a cramped dorm on campus at first, and then an apartment. Then the bills and the school loans piled up, necessitating a real job. Thankfully, before that happened I had a most amazing Summer in Colorado.

As I had twice before, I drove from South Florida to Colorado. But, this time, in the Summer of my twenty second year, I had no intentions of staying. This would be a vacation, pure and simple. Two semesters had gone well and with them came new found understanding that would deepen my appreciation of the mountains. I also had a 4x4 to explore the many off-road trails which allowed for easy access and camping in previously unexplored valleys. I even brought along my Celestron C-8 to enjoy the night sky. I had roughly three months to live my dream and I was without a care in the world. So it was that tragedy struck hardly after my journey began.

## Phoenix

I was happily cruising through Georgia when I began to notice a vibration and a faint hum. I suspected it was a tire out of balance. The kind you can temporarily develop if a rock becomes lodged in the tread. I should have pulled over to check because it turned out to be something far more serious. Suddenly there was a loud bang and I could tell that my right rear tire had blown out. Damn! And that's a new tire. Were my thoughts.

I pulled over on to the shoulder of the Interstate and had a look. Sure enough it was deflated. I complained to myself about what a crappy time for a flat it was. But, something else got my attention in a hurry. I noticed a strange smell and could see smoke. I imagined that the brakes had heated up and wondered if the emergency brake had been slightly applied. But then something terrible happened. The tire burst in to flame!

Before I could do anything the right rear of my car was in flames. I wanted to retrieve all my valuables before all would be lost. Yet, I was concerned about the possibility of the gas tank exploding. I jumped in the front seat and grabbed the most valuable items, other than my telescope. I had locked it in a plywood vault I had constructed. There was no way to retrieve it. I backed away and watched my dream go up in flames. The right rear window blew out next. I was about to give up all hope when I heard a siren.

Turning my head to look, I could see a fire truck approaching. It had only been minutes and I was amazed at its appearance. I had no phone to call. It was the luckiest break I could want. The firefighters quickly put out the flames. Everything was drenched and black soot covered everything, but most of my gear was salvageable and my telescope was well protected. I thanked the guys and asked if they would call for a tow truck. Before long my poor Ram Charger was at an auto shop and I was checked into a nearby motel.

Restless, I worked through the night, removing everything and cleaning what I could. A deranged person turned up at one point and, after shooing him off, my all nighter became one of guard duty too. I had a 9mm, 1911-like pistol and I wasn't afraid to use it if I had to. With the stress of this misfortune, a dangerous lunatic lurking about, and what was left of my valuables scattered around on the ground, my Army training

had kicked in. While there was still a chance to salvage my dream, I was prepared to fight for it.

In the morning the mechanic diagnosed my wreck and concluded that a bad bearing, caused by lack of maintenance, had led to the blow out and burn up. The gear oil was like mud and when the bearing could take no more due to inadequate lubrication, the friction generated so much heat that the tire expanded because of the air pressure build up beyond capacity and blew out. The axle was so hot that the rubber actually ignited after I'd stopped as the cooling effect of the flowing airstream was lost.

But, as luck would have it, everything else was functional. The mechanic scrounged up the required parts from salvage yards and even cut a piece of plywood to cover the hole where the window had been. The body had been warped too much for glass to fit anymore without body work. I was up and running in a couple of days. I learned that I had been ignorant of the maintenance requirements of off-roading. He explained that you should always check your gear oil after running through deep water. It dawned on me then that my stunt on the beach back in Washington about a year before had finally reared its ugly head of retribution. Man!

To make a long story short, I made my dream come true despite this test of my will. I refused to go back. I thanked my lucky stars and rose from the ashes triumphantly, and soldiered on. My vacation was all I had dreamed it would be, and more. I ventured up 4x4 trails, I hiked and backpacked, I communed with the heavens, I panned for gold, and I even explored the geology of the Rockies with the help of a guidebook. And, still far and above it all, was my first summit of the icon of Rocky Mountain National Park.

I spent two nights up on Long's Peak. It was the single most amazing experience of my life. I remember the thrill of exploration and the challenge of the mind and body that was heightened by my youthful spirit. It was the awesome beauty of the mountains and the magic of the weather that mesmerized me. It was dehydration and fatigue that gave wings to my mind. It was saving a life on the decent that gave it meaning beyond myself. Miraculously, I rescued a teenage boy who had taken a tumble off the summit of Long's Peak.

I was headed back down when I saw him tumbling off the summit far above me, almost cartoon-like, down a snowbank. I worked my way up to him and saw that he was suffering from shock from the fall, and hypothermia from being soaked by the wet snow. He seemed coherent, but I knew first hand how either condition can kill. So, I raced back down to my backpack and retrieved my sleeping bag to put him inside. When I returned, he was already shivering uncontrollable and incoherent. Some of his family members in the surrounding heights were calling out to him, but they were unable to locate us. I finally got their attention and they recovered him. I like to believe that I saved a life that day.

I imagine now that God had blessed me with a glorious summit experience, and I repaid him by following His guidance to save that boy. I did not find God then, even though the experience was heavenly and I admired His great works so deeply, yet I believe that he was with me all the same. It was not until I found myself in a pit of hell

many years hence that I called out to God in desperation. You'd be amazed at the places He would go to be with you, to paraphrase a song.

## Sharing the Dream

Returning home once again, I was immensely pleased with my new strategy to study hard to be all I could be as a scientist, and to travel to Colorado or other places of interest in the summer. I assumed that I would enjoy many years of this most excellent cycle. But, before the next summer rolled around I was dating my would be wife and becoming ever more distracted. I even decided to take her along with me to our Geology Department field camp, which all graduates must pass. It is generally held in arid regions where rocky outcrops of geological interest are plentiful. This year it would be in southeastern California, which presented the chance of a fun-filled road trip of exploration and discovery. So we got married and set off to experience a nature lover's rocky and romantic honeymoon.

I drove out there in a big Chevy van gifted to me by my father. I removed two of the bench seats so there was plenty of room for two. We camped in the Rockies for a while and she fell in love with Colorado too. She loved the outdoors and was athletic enough to keep up with me on all but the toughest of treks. We shared the kindred spirit of the athletic nature lover. I thought that I had chosen well and that we might have a future together.

We then drove through Utah and hiked in the desert wonderlands of Arches, Bryce, and Zion National Parks. Arches encompasses many of the finest natural rock arches to be found anywhere. I would describe the prized views as a collection of a science fiction artist's imaginative portrayals of Mars. The red sandstone desert, with its odd rock formations of parallel fins and hidden coves, is the ideal setting to create and display such remarkable wonders of erosion.

I would describe Bryce National Park as a mesmerizing alien landscape of innumerable pinnacles crafted in a multitude of seemingly unearthly bright hues of red. In contrast, Zion National Park is a lovely and comforting realm that must have seemed a heaven on earth for the ancient peoples of the region. I remember hiking up a winding stream that flowed down through a narrow and sculpted canyon from the heart of Zion. We had to navigate from bank to bank, negotiating jutting wall rocks, boulders, and pools of deep, cold water. I'll never forget how my girl, at a misstep, plunged completely into one such swirling pools.

Next was a hike down the Grand Canyon in Arizona. There was a mile of elevation change from top to bottom on that hike. But that's not the hard part. It's the mile of elevation change from bottom to top that's the killer. The descent lulls you into a false sense of ease, which you pay dearly for with every step back up the relentless climb. It was the opposite of the trek up to the summit of Long's Peak, with pretty much the same change of elevation. Only, going down a canyon, you are challenged the most at the end of the trek when you are more spent. Ascending a mountain, you are fresh at the start when the trek is most challenging, and then you are assisted by gravity on the

return. Making it even more difficult were the rising temperatures and radiant heat of the barren sunbaked walls of the canyon.

Yet, it was a fantastic experience traveling back through the geological history recorded in the rock, while taking in the most splendid and awe-inspiring vistas of depth and color. The rocks of the Grand Canyon were laid down over a span of around a billion years, and have been exposed by the gradual erosion of the Colorado river over roughly the last million years. It is truly the grandest expose' of the Earth's long history in the world.

We were in geology heaven as we savored every view down the tight switchbacks of the plunging canyon walls. The cold and rushing water of the Colorado River was like the fudge at the bottom of a delicious Rocky Road Sunday. There on the banks, we cooled our well worn feet while scanning the dizzying heights to the brilliant sky far above. We explored the canyon bottom as if it were another world until we could put off the return hike no longer.

It still amuses me to think just how much my leg muscles had burned with every grueling step as we approached the plateau above. I can say that they burned more than they ever have in my whole life, by far. The nearest burns were the ones I routinely experienced while downhill skiing some many years yet to come. Mercifully, we both had time for our legs to recover on the drive to our next memorable hotspot, Death Valley.

## Hell's Deep

As we neared Death Valley I noticed that gas stations were becoming far between. I checked my map and planned for a fill-up some one hundred miles from the valley, but when I arrived in the late afternoon I found that it had shut down for the day. The van's tank was nearing empty and I had doubts about making it another hundred miles. Fortunately, the topography of the region offered a simple solution.

Death Valley is cursed with the lowest elevation on the planet. Normally any such low valley would be filled with water, but the hot and arid climate means that the little water that does run into it evaporates. This is exacerbated by the fact that it is the hottest place on the planet, in part, because of the additional thickness of the atmosphere above it due to its depth. The atmosphere acts like an insulator by trapping heat radiating from the ground. In effect, the additional thickness of atmosphere over the valley floor acts as if you were to add another blanket to your bed covers. And, with clear skies the norm, the ground becomes thoroughly baked.

Because the valley has no outlet, being an enclosed basin formed by tectonic forces, the ground rises up to higher elevations in all directions from the valley floor. This made me realize that I might be able to coast all the way down to the very bottom with the engine shut off. But, it was a leap of faith as well though because I did not know that the road did not have some climbs over ridges or what not. At least I could save my remaining gas if I needed to reach the campsites at the bottom.

So, I got the van to a promising descent along the way and I put the transmission in neutral and shut of the engine. The steering and brakes were weak without the hydraulic assistance, but it was controllable with some effort. Down and down we rolled for what seemed like hours, going faster here and slower there, and passing seemingly tortured low hills displaying the strangest of colored minerals. Finally, we arrived at the fiery abyss within an hour or two of sunset, giving us time to have a look around. I was relieved to have made it down with enough gas to drive a bit and was pleased to find what amounted to a one horse town where we would be safe and comfortable, or so I thought.

Although the sun was setting when we settled down for a night in the van, it was still 120 degrees. I had thought that all deserts are cold at night because the dry atmosphere above does not hold the day's heat as well as a moist or cloud-covered sky. That is not always the case, as I learned. It wasn't until after midnight that I felt that I could even attempt to sleep when the temperature finally dropped to a barely bearable 107 degrees. This high temperature was only tolerable because deserts are characterized by a dry heat. I'd rather take 107 in the desert than 95 in humid Miami. This is because sweat more easily evaporates and provides evaporative cooling in low humidity air, as opposed to it uselessly dripping off as it does more so in higher humidity air. The next day we limited our excursions to non-athletic nature loving because I hate the heat. It was really cool to have the experience, but there was no way I was spending another night in that deep hell of a valley.

### Yosemite's Enormity

In contrast to the dry and devilishly hot basin that is Death Valley, Yosemite is a heavenly highland born of glaciation. It is unlike any mountain landscape on the earth. The rock of the region is almost entirely composed of a white granite that was extensively carved by glaciers during the recent ice ages. In geological timescales, it is a newly exposed and pristine example of how glaciers may glorify mountains.

What most makes Yosemite National Park wonderfully special is the dramatically fantastic scale and form of the iconic Yosemite Valley. Towering vertically from the flat valley floor are great walls of glacier hewn granite, appearing to me as if cleaved by the Hammer of Thor.

Gracefully falling down the great walls in seeming slow motion was meltwater from the snowpacks far above, producing the most extraordinary and stunning of waterfalls. As the water fell it was caressed by valley winds that carried mists like blowing strands of hair. With unrelenting power, the falling stream created its own downward streaming mist-filled wind, which billowed outward from the crashing torrents, generating a cooling and drenching thunderous cloud of water and wind. I carefully made my way to the base of one such waterfall across wet and slippery stones into the deafening and engulfing storm. I reemerged invigorated and cleansed of worldly sin as if baptized by mother nature.

Down from the valley to the west are the royal sentinels of Yosemite, the Giant Sequoia. Living in sheltered groves amongst their coniferous brethren, they stand proudly like kingly ents of the forests. The gigantic trees are the largest individual life forms in the world and may live to be 3500 years old. I walked in a forest of wonder while hoping that no one would ever cut those precious giants down. The thought of destroying those magnificent and divine creations of nature for a pile of wood seemed to me to be akin to an evil deed of Melkor. I imagined my favorite Sequoia, known as the Grizzly Giant, making battle with legions of axe and chain saw wielding orcs.

Above and to the east of Yosemite Valley are glacially rounded mountains of what is called exfoliating granite. After the glaciers that covered the mountains melted away, the granite has been slowly adjusting to the geologically sudden loss of the overburden pressure of the weight of the ice. In doing so, the surface of the mountains sloughs off thick slabs of granite, revealing fresh and smooth new surfaces. The process works to both rejuvenate and preserve the landscape's unusual topography.

From above Yosemite Valley, I looked down to the valley floor far, far below. Although I had hiked in steep terrain before, I have never felt the dizzying fear imparted by a truly vertical cliff face of such enormity. It is a view to behold and gives one respect for the nerve of the rock climbers dangling below. But, there were other slopes on the rounded mountains that I dared to brave. The steepness and smoothness of those slopes caused me to place each step with the care of a brain surgeon.

## Field Camp and Beyond

Finally, it was time for us to show up at field camp. We were in a class of about eight and instructed by two professors. We scoured around California for a variety of geological sights of both fascination and instruction. We learned how to identify the signs in the rocks so to construct geological maps. We then used the maps to interpret the geologic history of a region. It was challenging, fun, and enlightening. It showed us how to apply classroom and lab instruction to the real world. It gave me the confidence to conduct my own field research for my master's degree and beyond.

We returned to FIU and continued taking classes to earn our degrees. Two years later we both had bachelor's degrees in geology. The next phase of college would strain our relationship to the breaking point. Our roads to master's degrees would turn out to be rocky for both of us.

We both chose bachelors projects in micropaleontology. Following that, I had trouble deciding on what specialty of geology to commit to for my master's thesis. She decided to follow the same professor to another university in North Carolina for her master's research. He did not have money for me, however. So I decided to follow her and find a job as an environmental geologist.

It was working at first, but I found that the work was both unsatisfying and overwhelming, and I eventually quit. Between odd jobs and her stipend, we survived. We visited the Smoky Mountains several times and I made a trip to Colorado to find

myself. I decided that I would return to FIU to work on my masters and carry on a long distance relationship.

Things were going well for both of us at first, but the distance was a strain. I felt that we were drifting apart and that we would end in divorce if we did not live together. I persuaded her to move back to FIU so that we could pursue our master's degrees together. There was some lasting friction on account of my insistence, but things worked out for us.

## Grad-Times

When I was a graduate student I assisted a professor on a research mission to Colima Volcano. We flew into Mexico City and we had a chance to see the pyramids and the famous statues. The city was much nicer than I expected. One thing that immediately struck me was how people drove on the highway from the airport. Although it all looked modern and in good condition with well-marked lanes, the traffic was a total chaos of cars and horns with no one paying attention to lanes what so ever.

On the way up to camp on the shoulder of Colima, the Mexican military was tasked with transportation and the clearing the road for us. I guess it was a gesture of appreciation because the professor was doing research on predicting eruptions. Such work could be used to issue evacuation and save lives, and was especially relevant in the case of Colima given the fact that it was an active volcano. Unfortunately, they did not reappear when it was time for them to return. So we had to carry all we could some thirty kilometers down the deserted slopes of the volcano before we were able to hitch a ride with a farmer.

Still, it was a great experience despite my bout of Montezuma's revenge that conquered me upon returning to Miami. I had a chance to climb an active, fuming volcano, and to see the modern big city, my ancient ruins, and the tropical countryside of Mexico. It means more to me now that I've been led to believe that I am a descendent of the daughter of Montezuma and Cortez on my mother's side through about twenty generations. Maybe that's why I'm smart and nutty, and maybe it's why I was attracted to my half Native American-half Portuguese Brazilian ex-wife. Ar, Ar, Ar.

My wife was the best company and a great help when she accompanied me on my master's research road trip to California. I chose not to return to Mexico because of money and logistics. Instead, I would study an active hydrothermal system in Long Valley caldera. Like Yellowstone caldera, the region is dotted with hot springs and fumaroles, and even host to a hydrothermal power plant, which the area I studied surrounded.

The research was demanding and involved multiple electrical resistivity surveys that allowed me to peer into the subsurface. This technique worked well because hydrothermal fluids contain minerals that strongly effect the electrical conductivity of the ground. Combining individual surveys optimized to detect the conductivity at various depths beneath the surface permitted me to map the underground hydrothermal zones

of activity in three dimensions. It was a successful and valuable experience in the realm of science.

My wife's master's research was concerned about mercury in the ecosystem of the Florida Everglades. The goals of her research were to determine the sources of mercury and how it is mobilized by organic processes. She collected soil samples from different depths across the vast wetlands, sometimes needing to plunge down head first into water frequented by alligators, and both poisonous and giant snakes.

I tagged along on one such excursion as an assistant on an airboat. I really enjoyed the ride, swaying to and fro amid tall grass and brush, accelerated to surprising speed by a large propeller, almost as if flying. The views were lovely and the wind was a godsend in the sweltering heat, but the lack of a windshield turned me into one in that bug infested and brush riddled grassland.

That's not to say that I did not enjoy the Everglades. After all, the wetland was to me like my teenage aquatic world of canals had been, only much, much bigger and more wonderfully populated by fish, reptiles, and birds. I recall that we once rented a canoe and paddling for many miles on a voyage of quiet and peaceful discovery. In such a two dimensional world, horizons, skies, and fanciful birds are the graces of the land.

## Graduation Present

My wife's master's degree was concentrated in ecological geology, mine was in geophysical and volcanic geology. She worked on soil in the Everglades, I studied fumaroles in California. I was awarded my masters before her because she had to start over when she joined me at FIU. So I found a job as an environmental geologist once again, working at Miami International Airport. Again I found the work unsatisfying, but managed to hang in there for a while. Finally, she was awarded her degree and we were free to move to Colorado, at last!

One good thing about getting married was that I gave up on my desire to pursue the life of a traditional academic scientist. If I had taken that road I would have been compelled to live where ever it would have been most logical for my career. Buried in research, I would have squandered the physical capacity and the spirit for adventure of my youth. Being free to make the choice to move to Colorado was essential to the realization of my greatest dream. And, working as an environmental geologist, though not inspiring, offered the opportunity of saving enough money to make a successful move more attainable.

So, in the spring of my 29<sup>th</sup> year, we drove to Colorado with all our belonging in a Uhaul truck, with my Z28 in tow. We moved into an apartment and began to live the dream. I could not have been happier, and the next ten years or so were the best in my life. I fulfilled all of my Coloradan dreams and then some. We adopted our first cats, I became an accomplished enough model airplane pilot, I became fascinated with Mars and published research, I learned to ski, and I learned to ride a motorcycle and drive a

semi-truck, and I wore out my knees hiking as I reached middle age. If I could go back in time and do it all over, I would.

## John, the Coloradan

Things I liked doing the most during my life as a Coloradan was to hike. Hiking helped to course blood through my brain, maximizing performance, while my mind was free and my spirit uplifted. I thought that if I were one of Tolkien's Valar, his "Powers of the World", I would be the one that made and resided in the tree lines of mountains. I would reside among the beautiful rock outcrops, and waterfalls, cascades, streams and pools, the flowers and bushes and trees. It had a young and clean feel to it -- not too many bugs. And you could see all around you and easily find a path around vegetation. And the views were unobstructed, yet you had shelter and wood at hand.

I enjoyed the tree line so much that sometimes I fancied that I was so at home there because I had evolved in the Ice Age mountains of Europe so that my mind was more attuned to, and in harmony with the environments of mountains. At tree line, I found the gardens of my delight. Indeed, I believed that for myself, anyway, the mountains were the best landscapes that the Earth had to offer. That, on this thing I thought of as my ride as a conscious being in a grand cosmos, on this beautiful and ancient jewel of a planet, I would seek oneness with the universe, and find eternal perspective on reality on the grandest stage that Earth had to offer to me. Like the way I felt under a dark, starry sky, but in a more physical and direct way.

The kind of hikes I made would change along with the seasons of Colorado's Rockies. Just how far up the mountains I could reach in a day was partly controlled by the snow line, meaning where last winters snowpack had melted up to. Earlier in the Spring, I would start in the foothills, and progress up in elevation as the snowline rose. For most of my summer hikes, it was a good seven miles or so to reach the particular upper lake of a unique valley, a pass, or a summit. But, in winter, wearing special boots for traction on packed snow trails or snowshoes on unpacked trails, I would often only make it up to some lower lake. During peak summer hiking season in Colorado, which I considered to be the four-week period from mid-July through mid-August, and which I referred to as "prime time" because this was when the snowpack was mostly gone, and yet the flowers were still in bloom, I liked to hike one day, and then rest two. But, the biggest hikes up to the summits of the highest mountains might happen as late as early September.

I also enjoyed riding my motorcycle or driving my sports car through the twisting mountain roads. The challenges and g-forces of the curves and slopes made for an exhilarating game that felt like like flight. My Kawasaki Drifter and my supercharged Z28 were my trusty steeds. Music usually accompanied me on my wheeled adventures and transits to trailheads, and often on the trails as well. I had always found that music could touch my mind in ways that enriched my experience of consciousness. In Beethoven, I found my deepest musical euphoria, but I more often listened to rock and thought highly of Led Zeppelin and Tool, to give some idea of my range of interest.

As far as my interest in airplanes was concerned, the art and science of flight had mesmerized me since childhood. A quadruple whammy of aircraft elements - the ingenuity that man's flying machines represented, the fascination with the machines themselves, aircraft's entertaining and important link to history, and the sensation and thrills of flight itself - were like magic to me – I was hopelessly seduced. I especially enjoyed learning about the early aircraft through World War I and the pioneers of controlled flight, and World War II as stage to the final and ultimate development of propeller powered aircraft. Although I admired jet powered aircraft, finding beauty in their designs, I held that World War II aircraft were imbued with a kind of art, like fifties cars, and because they represented fully evolved creations at the cusp of the evolution from propellers to turbines, they were a very special case and class of the creations of man in the annals of history.

My largest model was near 1/4 scale, 100+ inch Spitfire powered by a twin cylinder, 3.00 cc, 4-stroke, nitro-fueled engine. It was a sweet ride and it flew like the real thing -- like a dream! And the engine had a sound that complemented its beauty of design. The power and grace of the plane and the beauty of the design convinced me that the Spitfire would be the plane that I would fly if I could live the life of a World War II fighter pilot. I believed as many do that the Spitfire's role in the Battle of Britain, dogfighting Messerschmitt 109's, was like a fated role of a star player, executed perfectly, at a crucial turning point in the history of the war. I thought that flying a Spitfire in the Battle of Britain would be an E-ticket for sure for a history and plane buff. I kind of fell in love with the Spitfire, after my first love, the P-51 Mustang. But the truth is that I am just too big to fit in the plane. Anyway, I was really just another armchair fighter pilot. So, flying my remote control planes or leaning way over in a curve or on a ski slope were as close to flying a Spitfire that I would likely ever get.

THE END

John Arfstrom