

How We Got to Los Alamos

It was 1967 and I was finishing up my second post-doc at the Catholic University of America (in Washington DC). My major concern was where I should go for my next job. Hopefully it would be at some university with a good physics department where I could combine teaching with some amount of theoretical nuclear physics research. In that post-sputnik era that shouldn't be too hard, right? Well, yes, I did have some nibbles at small schools, but none that I was too excited about. Was there some alternative?

At CUA I had spent a lot of time schmoozing with Clyde Cowan and his experimental group. Some of you may recognize Cowan as one of the two senior authors, with Reines, that did the Los Alamos experiment that *observed* the neutrinos coming out of a nuclear reactor. (These near massless and nearly non-interacting particles had been hypothesized by Pauli some twenty-five years previously.) Anyway, when I mentioned my job search to Clyde, he said "Why not go to Los Alamos instead? They are about to build a meson factory there."

Hmm. "Sure, why not?" He said that I should meet with Louis Rosen, the head of that accelerator project when he came to the American Physical Society meeting that was to be held in DC in April. He would call up his long-time colleague to arrange that we'd be sure to get together then.

And so that happened, Louie and I hit it off. I soon flew off to Los Alamos to give a seminar and for a more formal job interview. This resulted in a job offer, with the idea that I would act as a liaison between the experimentalists building LAMPF and the theoreticians in T-Division. I was to arrive in Los Alamos in August, as there had to be some paperwork done (i.e., getting my Q-Clearance). And Maggie and I had to arrange shipping our (not-very-extensive) worldly goods west by a moving van.

So, to fill the time before then, we went to Madison, Wisconsin, to participate in the University's Physics Summer School. In August, after the School's lectures ended, we decided to see family and friends in Michigan before driving our little Plymouth Valiant on to Los Alamos. To get there we decided it might be fun to take the car-ferry from Milwaukee to Muskegon. Well, driving through Milwaukee was a bit dicey, as there was a race riot going on. This was the Sixties, after all. But we made it to the ferry OK. Of course, we were almost the only passengers on board for the trip across Lake Michigan. As I recall, we spent a lot our time on that boat dancing the polka.

After seeing families, we started our drive west by heading south to Kalamazoo. One of my high school buddies, Doug Austin, had just taken a professorship at the college there. He had been married to a lady who died from breast cancer. They had one child, a daughter. Back in Cleveland Doug had found and married a young widow lady, Gail, who had four sons. They then proceeded to create a sixth child by themselves. On arrival in K-zoo earlier that month they had settled into a large Victorian house on a hill in an older neighborhood. We were to come to dinner and stay overnight before driving on the next morning, a Friday.

I should say that Gail Austin was a very well-organized person and was still setting up house. They did not yet have a dishwasher. So, after dinner, I offered to help with the washing of the dishes. To which Gail said, "No, you go out and play with the boys. *Maggie* will help with the dishes."

I complied with that request. The boys, ranging up to teens, had just gotten one of those new-fangled skateboards. They were already pretty proficient on it. And they naturally wanted to teach *me* how to use it. So my first skateboard ride was down the sidewalk to where it flattened out. Did I mention that their house was on a hill? As I hopped off the board I heard a noticeable cracking sound. And some pain. I was pretty sure I had broken my right ankle.

An ambulance came to take me to the hospital, a new experience for me. Maggie came along and asked the driver why he didn't have the siren going and the lights flashing. To which he said, "Lady, if I do that, it'll cost you an extra ten bucks." We proceeded quietly.

I got surgery to reset my ankle with a piece of stainless steel somewhere in the set of broken bones. And spent the night in the hospital. On my return to the Austins' on Saturday, they set me up on their sofa, where I was royally entertained by the, now, *eight* kids, who had all sorts of games for me and them to play. I said "eight," because after we were *supposed* to have left on Friday, the Austins had some Cleveland friends arriving as weekend guests. That couple brought along their two kids.

As I said, Gail was organized and she coped with the chaos very smoothly. Of course, she had Maggie spending most of her two more days in the kitchen, following Gail's instructions of what to cook and when. Doug and his friend also reloaded the Valiant, which had arrived with the back seat full to the ceiling with many of our earthly goods that didn't go in the moving van. They ended up lashed to the top of the car so that I, with my leg in a cast over my knee, would enjoy the ride west stretched out on the back seat.

To put all of this in perspective, I must say that in one of our high school plays, Doug played the starring role in "The Man Who Came to Dinner." He was a Monty Wooley-like who broke a leg on the icy front porch as he was leaving after dinner. And stayed.

We left the Austins on Monday morning, and Maggie was designated as the driver for the whole trip to Los Alamos. With the stuff on the top of the car she couldn't get the car up to expressway-speed, which garnered quite a few dirty looks from drivers who had to pass us. But, with frequent stops along the way, we did arrive at the Atomic City about on time.