

# A QUICK GETAWAY

## DALLAS & OKC - 2005

[UPDATE: May, 2011—As I gradually go back over my old travelogues, I'll be leaving the original text intact but adding additional comments in boldfaced enclosed in brackets to expand on what was originally said. I'll also add some additional scanned photos to enhance the original travelogues.]

I basically planned this trip on a whim. As a "World Perks" member (something I had to do to book tickets online), I got an e-mail from Northwest Airlines last spring announcing a fare sale. I browsed through their fares while I was giving a test in my college Statistics class and came upon one I couldn't resist—a round-trip fare from Minneapolis to Dallas for just \$149. **[I'll be doing a similar trip later this month for about double that fare.]** My friend and former student Brad Nelson was now in AAA, and one of his road trips would take him to Oklahoma City, which on a map looked to be just a short drive (three hours or so) north of Dallas. Car rental in Dallas also turned out to be quite cheap (about \$15 a day), so it seemed like the trip would be an interesting and affordable getaway.

My plan was to see ballgames in Oklahoma City on Saturday and Sunday nights, and then make a whirlwind tour of Dallas on Sunday. Everything looked good on paper, but it turned out almost nothing actually went as planned. It was still an interesting and affordable getaway, though, even if it wasn't exactly the trip I had in mind.

### FRIDAY, JUNE 24

I waited around home this morning for my mail to come, so I wouldn't have to stop it or worry about too much accumulation. Finally, about 10:30, I set out for the long weekend.

I had an uneventful drive northward up highway 169. It had been a while since I'd taken this route **[and I'm not sure why I took it on this trip—in time, if not miles, it's definitely shorter to follow I-35]**, and I was reminded just how much the Twin Cities metro area has sprawled in recent years. When I first moved to Algona, I used to drive up 169 to a mall in Eden Prairie, which at the time was near the southern extent of the Cities. At that time the town of Belle Plaine marked the halfway point between Mankato and the Cities. Today the suburbs have crawled southward to the point that Belle Plaine is essentially the start of the Twin Cities—even though it's more than twenty miles from the beltway. There's still a lot of trees and farmland in the area, but there's a lot of condos and office parks, too.



Website plot map of suburban development  
in the southeast part of Belle Plaine, Minnesota

recommend the suburbs. Minneapolis and St. Paul are tree-filled and relatively unpolluted cities. Most of their neighborhoods feature

There's also **a lot** of traffic. U.S. 169 has been four lanes wide through here for decades, but even at midday it was packed. From here onward there were stop lights every couple of miles, and traffic seemed to be backed up all the way from one to the next.

I've lived all my life in small towns, and I often enjoy "getting away" to big cities. Never, though, have I been able to figure out what attracts people to suburbia. Back in the days when suburbs provided fresh air, big lawns, and a chance to escape urban congestion, moving to the suburbs made sense. That's not what most suburbs are today, though. To me there's not much difference between a suburban "condo" and an inner city "rowhouse", except that the city home is close to good transportation and has more going on in its neighborhood.

**[Another thing I've never understood about suburbs—which is shown in the map at left—is the proliferation of curving roads and cul de sacs even on flat terrain. To me straight, through streets are far preferable and provide better mobility.]**

In the Twin Cities there seems to be even less to

single-family homes with lawns and lots of nearby parkland. In places like Shakopee, Chaska, Jordan, and Belle Plaine, the developments are either condos or enormous houses crammed on tiny lots. They were built on former corn fields, and they rarely have any trees at all. No one seems to have thought of parks in the suburbs, and with such small yards, there seems to be nowhere for the kids to play (which makes it no surprise that on the day I'm writing this *USA Today* had an article saying that kids today spend almost all their playtime indoors). The traffic is dreadful [**these days almost invariably worse than in the city proper**], but you can't get anywhere without driving—there's basically no public transportation.

Obviously lots of people like living here, though. The population of the actual Twin Cities hasn't changed much in a generation, but the suburbs are growing rapidly. Even though you couldn't pay me to live here, over a million people seem to find the place appealing.

I made my way northward to I-494 and then crawled eastward along the archaic beltway (which was also under construction) to the area near Mall of America in Bloomington. Just east of there I exited and drove to the 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue park-and-ride, near the end of the Hiawatha light rail line. While Bloomington is also technically a suburb, it's close-in and big (actually the third largest city in Minnesota). Because of that, in many ways Bloomington thinks, acts, and votes urban rather than suburban. While most suburban Minnesotans overwhelmingly opposed the rail line, Bloomington supported it. Today they're gloating as the line carries almost four times its projected ridership [**it's about seven times projections as of 2011**], many coming from Minneapolis to work or shop in Bloomington.

The commute to the city is also quite popular, as was evidenced by the fact that this park-and-ride was almost entirely full. I found a space (I think one of six out of hundreds in the lot) near the far end of the long, narrow lot—probably a quarter mile from the train platform. [**They've since added a ramp that roughly doubled the size of the park-and-ride.**] I missed a train while I walked from my car to the platform, but fortunately they come frequently. Just a few minutes later another showed up.

The car I entered, like many I'd see today, was entirely covered with an ad for Apple's I-pod music system [**which was new and trendy, rather than ubiquitous, in 2005**]. When companies buy ads like that in Chicago, they cover the metal part of the cars, but not the windows. Here, though, everything was covered. I'd seen buses like that before, but never a train. I can't say I enjoyed sitting in a car like that. From the inside of the car I could see out the windows, but the advertising cover made for a weird, distorted view that made me feel queasy when I looked out. I've never been somebody who felt the need to spend my life listening to music, so I probably wouldn't buy an I-pod anyway. If I were in the market, though, this ad campaign would definitely make me less likely to buy one. [**They currently have similar ads on the light rail advertising the travel delights of Montana and North Dakota. I'm tempted to write the tourist boards in those states to tell them I've cancelled a trip due to their annoying advertising.**]

I took the train to the Government Center stop. There's not a station or even a real platform at Government Center, just a wide sidewalk with a bumpy strips at the edge. [**It's basically a glorified bus stop.**] The stop is right in the heart of downtown Minneapolis, surrounded by glass towers and bridged by skywalks. It's weird to think most of the skyscrapers here are twenty to thirty years old; they all look brand new.

I made my way to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and started walking south. Before long the skyscraper forest gave way to a seedier and more low-rise neighborhood whose main features were the Hennipian County Jail and the *Star-Tribune's* printing plant. Just beyond there the street curves to cross over I-94 on a vast viaduct. While I was walking over the expressway a pretty girl who seemed a bit under the influence of something stopped me asking if I could tell her how to get to "the park". There are probably a hundred parks in the city of Minneapolis, though I can't say I know of any (other than the restored riverfront) that are particularly near downtown. I had to tell her that I honestly didn't know. She sort of stumbled on her way, and hopefully eventually made it to a destination.

Once I crossed the interstate I had a lovely walk through a charming neighborhood. The street narrowed, and the sidewalk was lined with trees. The buildings here are entirely brick, and all appear to be about a century old. Everything has been meticulously kept up, though. The side streets were mostly single-family homes, while 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue itself was lined with small apartment buildings and commercial buildings with apartments upstairs. Flower boxes hung from the apartment windows, and there were also flowers in planters at the edge of the sidewalk. The people here are a mixture—mostly white, but with some blacks and Asians too. Pretty much everyone was young, and—no doubt—they were all wealthy. I'm sure I couldn't afford to live here, but it was certainly nice for a walk.

My destination was just south of here, probably a mile south of Government Center. I ended up at the Minnesota Institute for the Arts, the main art museum in the Twin Cities. Surprisingly there's no admission to see the main exhibits here. The main part of the museum is pleasant, but has nothing in particular to recommend it. They have examples of almost every artist you can think of, but you've probably never heard of any of the individual paintings. The layout is awkward [**something that seems to plague most art museums**], making it hard to locate specific things. I had a lot of fun, though, just wandering around and seeing what I happened upon.

I paid an admission to see the temporary special exhibit they had here, a gallery dedicated to the St. John's Bible. I hadn't even heard about this project until Margaret told me after she had visited here. Apparently the Benedictine monks at St. John's Abbey in nearby Collegeville, Minnesota (where a number [**more like a couple**] of my students have gone to school) commissioned a grand, illuminated Bible. It's like those that date to the Middle Ages, but in a modern translation (the RSV, which I hadn't realized Catholics ever used) and with modern artwork. It's still a work in progress (so far they seem to have finished the gospels, Acts, Psalms, and the Pentateuch), but it's clear the end result will be truly magnificent.



Part of a page from the St. John's Bible

Imagine how enormous the final work of the complete Bible will be. **[In fact it's seven enormous volumes.]**

Having looked at maps ahead of time, I planned to go south from the art museum to Lake Street, where I could catch a bus back to the Lake Street light rail station. Unfortunately, things didn't work out quite as I planned.

First, Lake Street was quite a bit further south than I had imagined, nearly a mile if I had been able to go straight. More importantly, just south of the museum, I-35W cuts diagonally through the neighborhood, making almost all the nearby streets dead ends. I wandered through a neighborhood that grew increasingly seedier the further I went—not really dangerous in the afternoon, but definitely not a place I'd want to stroll through late at night. It didn't help that I stood out like a sore thumb as a white man in an almost exclusively black neighborhood.

I finally did make it to Lake Street, though quite a bit west of where I'd intended. Having walked a long ways, I was more than a little thirsty. So, I stopped into a White Castle for some lemonade and a tiny square burger. Across the street from there was a K-Mart. I had some "K-cash" from the Garrigan scrip program, so I decided to browse through the store. I felt a little awkward walking in there lugging a shopping bag from the art museum, but no one said anything. Indeed, as is often true in big-city stores, lots of the shoppers were carrying bags from other stores. I bought some pop and chips so I wouldn't have to patronize the hotel vending machines, and then made my way back to Lake Street.

There were plenty of bus stops along Lake Street. Unfortunately buses weren't stopping at any of them. There was construction a little ways east of here, and all the buses had been diverted around it. I probably could have attempted to figure out exactly where they'd been diverted to and then made my way there, but I figured it was just as easy to walk to the Lake Street station. It was an interesting walk through what has to be just about the most urban neighborhood in Minneapolis. Called "midtown", the neighborhood around Lake Street is a poverty-stricken area with all the gritty "charm" of Cleveland. **[Of all the places I've been, it's actually probably most like Los Angeles.]** The ethnicity changed as I walked eastward—black Americans, "white trash", African immigrants, American Indians, and finally Mexicans. The side streets are full of wood-frame homes that look like they're just about to fall down, while Lake Street itself is a business strip filled with small shops catering to all those various ethnic groups.

I walked over two miles along Lake Street before the buses finally re-joined the street. It was only a couple blocks from there on to the station, so I just kept walking. Lake Street station is elevated high above the street. I walked in and found the escalator was broken, so I huffed and puffed my way up to the platform. The first southbound train had two cars, one covered with an I-pod ad and the other without. I made a sprint toward the back of the train so I wouldn't have to squint through the dots in the ad and had a much more pleasant ride back to Bloomington.

I just dumped my stuff in my car and caught the next train (actually the exact same train I had come south on) back to Minneapolis. I ended up going right back to Lake Street. It was dinner time now, and I knew there was a variety of fast food places just east of the Lake Street station. I used some more of my Garrigan scrip at Wendy's, where I enjoyed a taco salad, iced tea, and a small frosty.

The next train in the station had just one car, and it was covered with an I-pod ad. So I again suffered as I rode all the way to the end of the line at Hennipan Avenue.

The actual production work on the Bible is being done at a "scriptorium" in Wales. This being the 21<sup>st</sup> Century rather than Medieval times, the basic design and layout (right down to the line breaks and position of each word on the page) is done by computer. The actual production, though, is done in calligraphy with quill pens on vellum. Each page measures two feet by three feet, and even those without illustrations are truly works of art. The illustrations make this Bible really spectacular, though. Each is hand painted with embellishments in gold and silver leaf. It's all lavishly and quite expensively done, and it really is quite beautiful.

I couldn't resist stopping by the gift shop, where I paid more than I should have for a copy of the Gospels from the St. John's Bible. That volume alone is about the size of the lectionary book that Catholic churches use for mass—and that's printed on paper, with each page about two-thirds the size of the actual vellum pages. I can't

I wandered a bit along the newly gentrified avenue and browsed through a Border's bookstore there (where I spent yet more Garrigan scrip). Then I caught another train back to Bloomington. **[I don't think they have any one-car trains on the Hiawatha light rail these days. They've since lengthened the platforms to accommodate three-car trains, which they run at rush hour and for special events like Twins games. Even on weekends and late at night the trains have two cars now.]** Thankfully it was well after rush hour by the time I got to the park-and-ride, and traffic moved fairly smoothly on the beltway. I drove west about five miles to a towering Clarion Hotel I had stayed at before. I was redeeming hotel points (almost everything I did on this trip was either pre-paid or free), and this hotel provided very good value for a small number of points. I checked in easily and made my way up to my sixth floor room. I watched a bit of TV and had an uneventful night.

**[The hotel I mentioned is no longer a Clarion, which is too bad. It was one of my favorite places to stay. Since it switched its affiliation (I think it's a La Quinta now), most of my Twin Cities stays have been at a Fairfield Inn near Mall of America. While more expensive than the Clarion was, it's still fairly reasonable (particularly in winter), and being just a short walk from the light rail makes it convenient to everything in Minneapolis.]**

## **SATURDAY, JUNE 25**

I was up shortly after 6:00 this morning and on my way before 7:00. I drove east along the beltway to one exit east of the park-and-ride (34<sup>th</sup> Avenue) and then made my way north to the Humphrey Terminal at Minneapolis—St. Paul International Airport. This terminal, which used to serve international flights, now serves a variety of strange airlines pretty much nobody has ever heard of (though apparently it will soon be home to every airline except Northwest). Because comparatively few flights go out of there, parking is quite a bit cheaper at the Humphrey Terminal than it is at the "real" airport terminal (the Lindbergh Terminal). It's still no bargain, but it was definitely worth it to me to park here and take the light rail train one stop north to my actual destination. **[The banishment of all but Northwest to what is now Terminal 2 never came to pass. What did happen was that of the seven concourses in Terminal 1 (Lindbergh), 5½ were dedicated to the hometown airline (which has since been bought out by Delta). One concourse served all the other SkyTeam airlines that were codeshare partners of Northwest, and the other half a concourse served most other "major" airlines (United, Continental, American, etc.) Today Terminal 2 (Humphrey) serves Southwest and AirTran (two "no frills" carriers), Sun Country (a Minneapolis-based airline that connects the upper Midwest with resort destinations in Mexico and the Caribbean), and Icelandair (an airline Margaret and I will fly later this summer—they have one flight a day between Minneapolis and Reykjavik in summer only). The train, by the way, is free to connect from one terminal to the other, and parking at the remote terminal is becoming VERY popular.]**

Parking at MSP is weird. Once you commit to entering the parking ramp, you must first decide whether you want "long term" or "short term" parking. I chose "long term" (which is cheaper) and then had to decide between "levels 3-5" or "levels 6 – 8". While I worried that the lower levels might be full, that's what I chose. Immediately I reached a gate where I had to scan a credit card to enter. I didn't even receive a receipt, just directions to scan the same card upon exiting. (I'm still wondering what they'd do if I lost that card.) I then went up one of the steepest curved ramps I've ever been on. I had to gun the engine, and I could still only make it up in first gear. I ended up at Level 3 and found plenty of available parking right away. I purposely drove to the far end so my car would be in an easily identifiable place. Then I made my way to the elevator and went down to the "skywalk" (actually a ground-level walkway) that connects the parking ramp to the light rail station.

Before long another I-pod covered train arrived. Fortunately the entire ride to the Lindbergh terminal is in a tunnel, so there was nothing to see out the window anyway. (I still don't know why they'd cover over the windows, though.) It's about a two-minute trip to the Lindbergh station, which is located underneath the parking ramp between the "G" and "C" concourses. I made my way up a series of escalators to the skywalk that connects those concourses. There's a security checkpoint right in the skywalk, and without checked luggage I was able to go through there with no problem at all. **[A hint for anyone boarding at MSP is that the skyway checkpoint almost never has a line and is usually the easiest way into the airport.]**

I had quite a bit of time to kill before my flight left, so I got some exercise wandering the long concourses of MSP. I bought a roll and coffee at Cinnabon and a croissant at Burger King, again using gift certificates from Garrigan scrip. I was pleasantly surprised that the airport had recently changed its policies, requiring concessionaires to charge the same prices here that they do in other Twin Cities locations. That new policy makes MSP just about the cheapest airport anywhere.

I pretty much circled the entire airport and finally made my way back to the gate on the G-concourse where my flight was leaving. They were certainly in no hurry to board. In fact, they finally started "pre-boarding" about the time we were scheduled to leave. I was sitting clear in the back, so I was among the first to board. I waited a while, waiting for the seats to fill up. Surprisingly, they didn't. The DC-9 had a 2-3 configuration, and I was sitting in the aisle seat on the "2" side, next to a businessman. When they announced that the doors had been closed and we realized the row in front of us was entirely empty, I moved up to that row so each of us had more space. It's the first time in ages I've been on a plane that wasn't sold out.

We left the gate about twenty minutes late but took off quite quickly. The flight southward was dull and uneventful until we approached metro Dallas. Did I say before how much the Twin Cities suburbs had grown? Dallas/Fort Worth seems to extend literally **forever**. (In fact, a week later I'd fly to New York, and even it seems to have less suburban sprawl than north Texas.) Weirdest was

large tracts of land that will be suburbs, but aren't yet. They've already paved the little circular drives; they just haven't put up the condos. It's one of the strangest places I've ever seen.

The development rapidly got very dense as we approached Dallas—Fort Worth International Airport. Located almost exactly halfway between Texas' "Twin Cities", DFW is surrounded by freeways and warehouses. We landed quickly, but then seemed to taxi practically forever. I don't think I've ever taxied longer on landing than I did at DFW. We went south a long ways, crossed over the airport expressway, and then went back north nearly as far as we'd come south. It seemed to me that we basically circled the entire airport. The whole time we seemed to just crawl, too. DFW has a "Skylink" train system that connects its many terminals, and the trains zipped along **much** faster than our plane did.

We officially landed 10 minutes late, but it we were about half an hour behind schedule when we finally pulled up to a gate. I quickly made my way out of the concourse. I badly needed to use a restroom, but I realized that all the restrooms were on the concourse, beyond security. I had little choice but to wait until I found something else.

DFW is a **very** complicated airport. There are **lots** of different terminals, plus numerous other buildings. I had rented a car, and to get to the "unified rental car facility" [**actually a very smart idea at a major airport**], I had to take one of several free buses operated by the airport. Once I figured out which one, I had about a fifteen-minute ride before finally arriving at what was basically a big parking ramp near the south end of the airport. The lower floor is an enormous lobby ringed with desks for all the different rent-a-car companies. I first used the restroom and then went to the Alamo desk.

Check-in here was a bit slower than other times I've rented a car, but there were no real problems. The strangest thing was that the guy at the desk wanted my cell phone number, supposedly in case they need to contact me during the trip. [**This was right when cell phones were starting to get popular, and I still rarely used mine. Today I wouldn't think twice about that request.**] Since I never call myself (in fact, I rarely use my cell phone at all), I didn't know the number off the top of my head. What I did was give him my home number, implying (though not actually saying) it was the cell number. All he really wanted was something he could put on the form, so everyone was happy. He asked if I was interested in an "upgrade" to a bigger car; given the present price of gas, that was certainly **not** something I wanted to do. I also declined insurance and the other various extras.

The agent asked if I needed directions out of the airport. Having been thoroughly confused by the bus ride, I told him I definitely needed them. The agent agreed that DFW was a very complicated airport, and he gave me some of the most confusing directions I'd ever seen to leave the place. Fortunately, they were in writing. I thanked him and made my way to the cars. I had my choice of any of the cars parked in the "compact" aisle. All of these were the same model, Pontiac Sunfires, just in a variety of different colors. I chose a white car with Illinois plates (interesting, since I rented a car with Illinois plates in Kentucky last summer), gave it a quick inspection, and then headed out to the exit.

If you're in the market for a car, **don't** buy a Pontiac Sunfire. I've rented several cars in the past few years, and this was definitely my least favorite. While it used quite a lot of gas (probably around 25 mpg) it had remarkably little power. Worse was its visibility. The thing had an enormous blind spot and a spoiler that blocked about a third of the back window—definitely not what I wanted when negotiating urban interstates. I pretty much cursed the car the whole time I had it, but I did get through the trip safely. [**Interestingly, at the time virtually all the rental car companies listed their economy model as "Chevy Metro or similar". A Metro is what I drive normally, but I don't think I've ever rented anything remotely similar to it.**]

The directions the agent had given me basically were designed to have me avoid paying toll on the highway that runs through the airport. I ended up driving on the access road the entire length of the airport and then merging onto the airport expressway just past the tollbooth. I then had to quickly merge left for a left exit shortly ahead.

I made my way west on TX-114, a six-lane expressway that runs past endless "big box" stores in the northern suburbs of Ft. Worth. Traffic moved fast, but not annoyingly so. The development petered out a little ways past Grapevine, but I could see what looked like an enormous skyscraper off in the distance. It turned out this wasn't a skyscraper at all, but rather the seating bowl for the Texas Motor Speedway. This enormous complex must seat close to 100,000. [**I just looked it up on Wikipedia, and in fact the capacity is 191,122. I can't even imagine going to an event with so many other people.**] I've never been a racing fan, but obviously a lot of people are.

Right at the speedway I exited onto I-35W (35 splits in Dallas and Ft. Worth, just like it does in Minneapolis and St. Paul [**though in Texas it's "E" that's the busier branch**]), which at this point is a four-lane road through a positively rural area. For about ten miles there was nothing but fields and ranchland at the side of the road. Technically I was still in metro Ft. Worth, but I could have as easily been in western Kansas.

Traffic picked up at Denton, the place where 35-W and 35-E join. 35-W is four lanes, and 35-E is apparently six, but they merge onto a single four-lane interstate. There was construction just beyond the merge, and traffic came to a stop where everything came together. I crawled past the construction and then started moving again.

It's developed along I-35 pretty much all the way up to the Oklahoma border, and they have an urban speed limit (60 mph), which people came fairly close to obeying. That was one of many things that the trip from DFW to my destination in Oklahoma City longer than it seemed on paper. Most of these suburbs, though, went past fairly quickly. Unfortunately, just south of the Oklahoma border things came to a stand-still and stayed that way. It ended up taking about two hours to move just five miles. I turned on the car

radio shortly after we stopped and listened to an Atlanta Braves game that had just started. It was the top of the eighth inning when I finally made it to Oklahoma.

I suppose the reason for this back-up was construction just inside Oklahoma. The road narrowed to one lane there, and it people had to merge. However, if everyone had merged when they were first warned to do so, there wouldn't have been any problem. The problem was that far too many idiots felt compelled to drive all the way to the bridge before they even attempted to merge. **[I've run into similar problems in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Far too many people insist on waiting to the last second to merge, instead of getting over before there is congestion. In the process they create more congestion for everyone.]** Moreover, lots of people seemed to ignore that there were even lanes painted on the road at all. They just sort of drove down the center, not even bothering to notice there were stripes painted below them.

Compounding all that, like most Texas interstates, this one had access roads at the side. All that separated the main interstate from the access road was a level patch of grass. When people got frustrated with the back-up, many of them zipped off onto the access road, which soon became backed up itself. That became even more of a problem because the access road didn't cross the Red River into Oklahoma, so right at the bridge there were essentially four lanes (two from the interstate and two from the access road) trying to merge down to just one. It was just chaos.

While lots of people zipped across the grass to the access road, it's obviously not legal to do so. A car behind me did exactly that only to be stopped by a police car almost immediately. The access road moved faster than the interstate, but having been stopped, the car was still behind me when I got to the bridge.

As I sat parked in traffic I could see the heat gauge on the car creep higher and higher. I didn't want the car to overheat, so I turned off the air conditioning and opened the windows to let in the 97° air. Still the temperature rose as I idled, so I eventually turned the climate control to "heat". That managed to cool the engine and send the dial back to where it should be. I was soaked in sweat, but at least the car was running.

Once I did make it to the bridge and everything merged, traffic flowed fine. There was about ten miles of single-lane road in Oklahoma, but everything moved okay. I turned the air conditioner back on, and the car ran fine. Beyond there the interstate seemed practically empty, and with the 70mph speed limit I just raced along. The surrounding countryside is beautiful forested hills **[whenever I've been in Oklahoma, I've found it a surprisingly beautiful place]**, and it made a very pleasant drive.

It's about 200 miles from DFW to downtown Oklahoma City. I had figured about three hours for that trip, but even in good traffic it would have been a longer. With the delay at the border it was closer to six hours than five. I had expected to find my hotel, relax a while, and then make my way to the game; but I was in a bit of a rush when I finally got to my destination.

Downtown Oklahoma City is basically encircled by interstates. I made a left exit from I-35 onto I-40 west at the southeast corner of downtown, and then before I had actually joined the other interstate I made my final exit. When I turned to go to my hotel I was amused to see that the car right in front of me had plates from Davidson County, Tennessee—almost certainly fans or staff of the Nashville Sounds.

I was staying at the Courtyard by Marriott. This is a **much** better class of hotel than I'd normally choose, but in Oklahoma City it was not all that expensive (\$85). Parking in a nearby ramp was additional, and with tax the whole thing came to almost exactly \$100. Essentially, though, this was also pre-paid. Through the Garrigan scrip program I had bought a \$100 Marriott gift card, so from my point of view now the place might as well have been free. Using that gift card was almost more trouble than it was worth. The girl who checked me in was very pleasant, but she hadn't ever seen one of the cards before in her life. She had to call two different people to assist her with how to enter the thing into her computer. It turned out she just had to scan it like a credit card, and—in fact—it came it showed up as "Visa" on the folio. **[I think this is the only time I've ever had trouble with a gift card at a Marriott property. I often run into clueless employees at Choice Hotels (Comfort, Quality, Clarion, etc.), but the Marriott hotels seem to train their employees better as to how they need to process different forms of payment.]**



**Courtyard by Marriott – Oklahoma City, OK**

Time was of the essence now, so I rushed from the parking ramp to my room. I had a quick shower to rinse away the sweat that had accumulated while I was stuck in traffic and changed into fresh clothes. Then I set off on foot to the ballpark.

Oklahoma City's ballpark is in an area called Bricktown which is one of those places that was probably very seedy a couple of decades ago but has since been sandblasted into the most happening place in the city. Today it's a neighborhood of overpriced bars and chain restaurants frequented by white suburban couples looking for a properly sanitized taste of urban life. **[I broke out laughing when I read that description in doing this revision. It does sum up what Bricktown is, though, and pretty much every city in America has a similar neighborhood.]** Bricktown Ballpark (it actually has some corporate name, but everyone calls it "the Brick") fits right in. A brand new park with just a few old-fashioned details, it's a squeaky clean taste of suburbia right in the heart of downtown. In fact, the place looks a lot like the park this club's major league parent (the Rangers) built in the actual suburb of Arlington, Texas. **[The Rangers, who in 2011 are Brad's employer, now have their AAA affiliate in Round Rock, Texas, a suburb of Austin. In a couple weeks I'll be flying down to Dallas again, but south instead of north to make another visit to Brad.]**



Website photos of what was then SBC Bricktown Ballpark – Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

**[I'm pretty sure in the rush to get to the ballpark I left my camera at the hotel. At any rate I have no pictures of my own of "the Brick". Being able to add some to this travelogue is one of the wonders of the internet.]**

I had arrived about an hour before game time, hoping to be able to chat briefly with Brad after infield practice. There was already a big crowd at the park when I got there. They had a special promotion tonight, giving away Mickey Mantle statuettes. I hadn't realized until today that the famous Yankee was from Oklahoma, but obviously thousands of fans knew that and wanted a figurine of their native son. They were already given out 2,500 little Mantles by the time I got to the gate, so I didn't get any special souvenir. By game time the park was essentially full, and apparently they had the second largest crowd in their history tonight—about 11,000 all together.

The Sounds had already finished infield by the time I got there, and there was no one at all in the dugout or on the field. So, I spent about half an hour roaming the

concourse and checking out the many opportunities Bricktown Ballpark had to separate me from my money. Since I hadn't eaten since breakfast, I did part with quite a bit of money for a ballpark dinner. It was horribly overpriced, but Bricktown did have one of the best selections of ballpark food I've seen in a while. An interesting surprise here in "Indian Territory" was Indian tacos made with fry bread,

similar to the Navajo tacos I'd had in New Mexico years ago. They also had a collection of permanently parked pushcarts vending the various styles of hotdogs that are popular in different parts of the country. There were about five choices all together, ranging from Boston's Fenway franks to the grilled Dodger dogs they devour in Los Angeles. I had a classic Chicago dog—something that stood out since you can't get them at either Wrigley or Comiskey, just in hot dog stands all over the windy city. Both the taco and the hotdog were good, as was a slice of pizza I had later. **[I don't remember a lot about Bricktown Ballpark, but I do have fond memories of their food.]**

Eventually players started trickling out of the tunnel in the visiting dugout. The park isn't set up particularly well from a fan perspective (though the players probably like that), but I managed to make my way to a section where I could get fairly close to the field. I saw Brad come out, and he was stopped by a mob of kids that wanted his autograph on the Mantle statuettes. He signed a few and then started trotting to the field. I called his name, and he turned and came back to shake my hand. It was nearly game time, so this was just a quick greeting, but he definitely made me feel welcome. I've never been to a game where Brad didn't seem truly pleased that I had come.

My seat was in row "L" of the section right behind home plate. (It always intrigues me that the "comp" seats at most ballparks are some of the best seats in the house.) Most of the people in front of me were baseball people—reporters and scouts from other teams who used radar guns to clock each pitch. My row seemed to be the start of actual fans, including some twenty-something people on dates and several families with elementary and middle school children. Almost no one seemed particularly into the game. They cheered a lot more when the T-shirt gun went around than when their team was actually at bat, and no one seemed to care at all that I was cheering for the visiting team. (There appeared to be one other Nashville fan here too, an old man about six rows behind me who may well have been driving that car I saw by the hotel.)

Since this was Mickey Mantle Day, they had Mantle's son throw out the first pitch. The younger Mantle, wearing a blue Hawaiian shirt, was sitting a few rows in front of me for much of the game. His father had a big reputation for carousing, and—at least to a casual observer—it appeared that trait ran in the family. He certainly went through plenty of beer. Several people bothered him during the game for an autograph, though why anyone would particularly care about Mickey Mantle's **son's** autograph, I don't know.

There were two overweight, annoying boys sitting right behind me who mostly fought during the game. They both came across as spoiled brats, and mom and dad didn't seem to care how their precious darlings acted in public. One of the promotions during the game would give coupons for free tacos if the home team scored in a particular inning. When they announced that, one of the kids bellowed "I wanna taco!" and proceeded to keep bellowing it for about ten minutes. His brother joined him, and it was clear they both cared a lot more about tacos than baseball. They'd go hungry, though; the Oklahoma Redhawks were scoreless in that and most of the innings.

The fat kids stood out because they wore T-shirts they had apparently gotten on vacation in Texas. The shirts said "KEEP AUSTIN WEIRD – SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL BUSINESSES" and had artwork that definitely fit the "weird" theme. I have no clue what, if anything, might make Austin weird. About the only thing I know about the Texas capital is that it's the home of Dell Computer (though the Dell I'm typing this on was made in China and shipped to me from Tennessee). "Buyblue.org" gives Dell one of their lowest ratings, meaning the company contributes heavily to conservative politicians (unlike most computer companies, which tend to support Democrats). I'd expect that in Texas (and I bought the computer only because it was dirt cheap), but it doesn't seem to fit a place that bills itself as "weird". Then again, MTV apparently picked Austin as the happening place this year's *Real World* is set in, so who knows? **[In researching my upcoming trip, I've found that Austin, which is primarily a college town, is by far the most liberal place in Texas—not that that's necessarily saying all that much. "Keep Austin Weird" is apparently a registered trademark, and –who knows?—I may own one of those T-shirts myself before long.]**

While I paid a lot more attention than most of the fans, I must confess that this was really a very boring game. Oklahoma had apparently lost something like fifteen games in a row, and the Sounds won this one in a rout. Unfortunately Brad Nelson had very little to do with that win. I knew he had been struggling at the plate lately, and it definitely showed tonight. He was 0 for 3, with a strike out, two pop-ups, and a walk. This series in Oklahoma turned out to be his last in AAA for a while; right before Independence Day the Brewers sent him back to Huntsville and promoted an outfielder named Nelson Cruz. Brad's been doing great back in AA—batting around .450 with several home runs and walks—so hopefully he'll be back up before long. **[He did, and he's played primarily at the AAA level—with a couple stints in the majors—since then.]**

I went back toward the visiting dugout at the end of the game, but again it was hard to actually get anywhere near the field. I could see Brad looking around as he made his way toward the tunnel, probably looking for me. I couldn't catch his eye, though, so our brief pre-game chat was the only actual contact I'd have with him on this trip. So as Brad made his way to the clubhouse, I made my way out of the ballpark and back to the Courtyard by Marriott (which may well have been the team hotel, but I couldn't say for sure **it is the sort of place AAA teams tend to stay at**)).

This really was a very nice hotel—at least on the surface. I had an enormous corner room on the fifth floor, with huge windows that overlooked Bricktown. In addition to the bed there was a desk, a table and chairs, and a recliner. There seemed to be lamps everywhere, which—when all turned on at once—provided sufficient light. The way the room was set up, there was a little corridor (actually more of a long hallway) that connected the bedroom and the bathroom. The bathroom was also immense, with a marble shower and counter and brass fixtures. **[The layout really was quite strange. I had been upgraded to a corner room, and I assume the standard rooms have a bit more traditional design.]**

It always intrigues me that “cheap” hotels provide a lot of free amenities, while “nice” places charge for absolutely everything. On the desk in the room was a bottle of water with a notice that said a “nominal” charge of \$4 would be added to my bill if it was opened or moved. There was the same coffee maker found in many cheap places, with a notice that the first bag of coffee was complimentary, but if I choose to use the second (which was already there) I would be assessed another “nominal” charge of \$5. Local phone calls had a \$2.50 connection charge, and while a lot of places now offer free internet access, here I could use WebTV for “only” \$10. The cable TV options in the room were fairly limited (they always are at “good” hotels), but I could see pay-per-view movies for “just” \$14 each. They even had a flyer that told me I’d be assessed a buck a sheet if I used the stationery in the desk drawer—which basically means I’d be paying to advertise this hotel. You’d think that at \$85 a night they could afford to provide the same things places charging half that rate give out free, but oh no! It surprised me there wasn’t a meter charging me for how much water I used in the shower. I wouldn’t have really used most of these amenities anyway, even if they were free. Given their attitude, though, I made a point of taking the one complimentary bag of coffee. All those “nominal” charges certainly won’t make me race to stay at another Courtyard by Marriott. **[In fact I purposely avoided staying at one in Providence a year ago, opting instead for a Hampton Inn that had a more expensive base rate but no hidden charges.]**

Something else that was strange about this hotel, given that it had a very elegant atmosphere, was that the beds weren’t very good. My king-sized bed was certainly huge, and it was covered with enough pillows to service the whole hotel (most of which ended up on the floor), but the bed itself was soft and flimsy—almost more like an overgrown cot than a real bed. Again, I’d expect a “good” hotel to have good beds, something better than I’d get at home. This was definitely nothing special, though. It’s not really surprising, then, that I didn’t really sleep all that well tonight. **[Apparently Marriott had just recently re-done the bedding at the entire Courtyard chain. If this was typical of the new beds, I can’t imagine why they made the change.]**

## **SUNDAY, JUNE 26**

Most cheap hotels offer a complimentary continental breakfast these days. Not so at Courtyard by Marriott. A big flyer in the room invited me to join them in the restaurant for a “deluxe buffet breakfast” for another “nominal” fee—just \$8.95. It may well have been a good breakfast, but I refused it on principle. Courtyard’s cheaper brother, Fairfield Inn, provides an excellent breakfast for free; I’d think they could do that here, too.

I made a brief walk around Bricktown **[which was absolutely dead on a Sunday morning]** and then checked out of the hotel. The girl at the desk seemed surprised that there were no charges on my bill besides the basic room charge and parking, but I managed to check out efficiently.

I had pretty much decided that I wouldn’t be back for a second game in Oklahoma City—it was just too far from Dallas, which was particularly a problem given that I had to fly out early tomorrow morning. So I set off to enjoy a more leisurely day than I had originally planned. **[Originally I’d planned to spend part of the day in Dallas, head back to OK City, and then go back to suburban Dallas after the game—which would have meant I’d end up spending pretty much the whole day on I-35.]**

I first stopped at a Conoco station just east of Bricktown, where I parted with about \$20 to fill the Sunbird with \$2.19 gas **[a price I look at longingly now that the local price is \$3.89<sup>9</sup>]**. I then set out down I-35, stopping for breakfast at a Waffle House in Norman. I paid about the same for breakfast there as I would have at the hotel, but here I got to be entertained by the local color of the Waffle House clientele. In Norman everyone in the place (except me, of course) was Indian. I hadn’t realized there were actually that many Indians in Oklahoma these days, but I might as well have been in Gallup this morning. **[It’s especially surprising that there were so many Indians in Norman, which is primarily known as home to the University of Oklahoma. I just checked census data, and apparently about 5% of Norman’s 100,000 or so people are Native Americans. I suppose many of them must live in the neighborhood where this particular Waffle House was located.]** I had a pleasant breakfast at Waffle House and then also stopped at a nearby 7-11 to get some coffee to sip while driving.

I had no desire whatsoever to repeat that back-up on I-35 (though since Oklahoma doesn’t have those access roads, it was probably less of a problem southbound), so I took a different route down to Dallas. I turned off the interstate at Ardmore and followed U.S. 70 east to Durant. From there I took highway 75 south into Texas. Route 70 made for a lovely drive. It was a scenic route through a resort area, and while it was two lanes, the speed limit was 65-mph most of the way. (I’ve always thought in Iowa it would make more sense to raise the speed limit on two-lanes than on interstates. **[It seems to me that the congestion on a road would be a better factor in determining speed than the number of lanes.]**) Traffic was light, and I had a very pleasant drive. I stopped to use the restroom at a truck stop just inside Texas. It’s pretty much solid suburbs for the seventy miles from there on to Dallas. Traffic picked up, but it was still not a bad drive.

I flipped through stations on the radio dial as I drove and settled on a fascinating talk radio station from Dallas. I’d always pegged Dallas (which is, of course, our President’s hometown) as just about the most conservative place on the planet. This was the first of several things that would prove that wasn’t entirely true. KXEB, which is part of the Air-America radio network, was significantly more liberal than I am—and in Texas, that’s definitely saying something. It intrigued me that the advertisers on this “dark blue” radio station were almost exclusively business-oriented. There pitched lots of investment opportunities and business publications, plus many things related to travel. I suppose they’re appealing to the same young businesspeople I always see in Chicago—people who are socially liberal but still always out to make a buck.

**[Air-America no longer exists. Despite what conservatives rant, liberalism is rarely profitable in the media, and talk radio is far less popular among liberals than conservatives. Liberals tend to be skeptical, and they're not going to just blindly believe what some self-proclaimed "expert" on the radio says. President Bush did provide a convenient target for conservative commentators, and Air-America had a reasonably sized audience through his Presidency. They lost their main target when Obama was elected in 2008, and with that election they also lost most of their audience. Air-America filed for bankruptcy shortly thereafter. Many of the network's former commentators went on to work for MSNBC, the unapologetically liberal answer to cable TV's ultra-conservative Fox News. Others have become professional talking heads who make the tour of TV and radio talk shows, usually as the token liberal in a mostly right-wing panel. One Air-America alumnus went on to an even more distinguished career. Comedian Al Franken went from low-rated talk radio show to the U.S. Senate.]**

I was pleased that Choice Hotels (Comfort, Quality, Clarion, Sleep, Rodeway, and Econolodge) was among Air-America's biggest sponsors. I've probably spent more lodging money at Choice properties over the years than at all other hotels combined, and it was good to know they supported liberal causes. When I got home I checked Choice out on "Buyblue.org" **[which also ceased to exist after Obama was elected]** and found out they had a perfect 100% rating—meaning they're among the best corporate supporters of liberal candidates. Owned by a consortium of British and American interests, Choice has a C.E.O. who was the former speaker of the Maryland state house whose wife is chair of the Maryland Democratic Party. In addition to liberal politics, they also give large amounts of their profits to such charities as Habitat for Humanity. I'd always gone there because they have decent, well-located motels at a reasonable price (definitely better value than Courtyard by Marriott), but I'm glad to know my money went to reasonably good purposes. (By the way, Marriott had a pink—or mildly conservative—rating **[hardly surprising for a company whose executive board is dominated by Mormons]**, and Accor, the French owner of the Motel 6 I'd stay at tonight was dead neutral, meaning the company totally avoids all politics.)

"Buyblue" also told me another Dallas institution had surprisingly liberal politics. It's not really a surprise that pretty much every oil company is extremely conservative. As a matter of fact, there's only one place you can buy gas that has a "blue" rating. I would have expected it to be a California-based company like Arco or Union 76. In fact it's 7-11, which is based right here in Dallas. They don't contribute heavily to political causes, but almost everything they give is to the left.

I've checked "Buyblue" and similar sites a number of times since first reading about them last Christmas in Oregon. I'm not wealthy enough to let politics dictate entirely where I spend my money, but when there's a choice, I'd rather support progressive corporations—or at least companies that didn't give heavily to Bush and his cronies. The combination of that and which companies are part of the Garrigan scrip program have made a lot of my buying decisions in the past year. For instance, I'd rather spend my money at K-Mart (which supports my school and is neutral politically) than at Wal-Mart or Target (both of which refuse to participate in the scrip program and donate heavily to Republicans). **[Both Wal-Mart and Target have since joined the scrip program, and since the death of its founder, Wal-Mart has become somewhat less conservative. Trendy Target is the darling of wealthy young yuppies—many of whom are quite liberal. The company, though, is one of the most right-wing corporations there is.]** Similarly I'll shop at Hy-Vee (which is expensive and conservative, but takes scrip) and Aldi (which is cheap and apolitical), rather than Fareway (which doesn't take scrip, refuses to accept returnable bottles, and is a big supporter of right-wing causes). **[Fareway has also since joined the scrip program. I still don't shop there very often, though.]** It's not like I'm formally boycotting most of these places, but when I can I try to support the "bluer" companies. Surprisingly, so does a lot of Dallas.

I made my way down highway 75 to Plano. There probably was a time when Plano was a completely separate city from Dallas, but today it's basically an inner suburb. **[It's almost unbelievably astounding just how much land the Texas cities take up. People who describe L.A. as spread out and suburban need to take a look at Texas.]** It's also where DART, the Dallas light rail line, ends.

I'm glad I had checked the Dallas transit website ahead of time, because I'd have never found the park-and-ride otherwise. The DART station is not marked at all from the highway, but I knew to exit at Parker Road. The station is actually about two blocks south of Parker Road, and while there is a sign from the main street, I missed it the first time I drove past. Eventually I found my way to the enormous parking lot, though, and I made my way toward the platform.

An elderly couple was at one of the vending machines when I arrived. They'd obviously not used DART before and were trying to figure out what they needed to do. The directions on the machine were actually quite clear, and I basically read them aloud to the couple. They needed to buy a local ticket (either \$1.25 for a single ride or \$2.50 for an all-day pass—about the cheapest day pass available anywhere). That would work on all trains and on all the buses in the city of Dallas. The machine also sold express tickets, but those were only necessary if you wanted to go to Fort Worth.

I bought my ticket quickly and made my way toward a waiting train. The couple was still confused, though. They wanted to know how they could tell which train to take to go to the convention center. There's only one line that goes to Plano, so they really didn't have any choice. The system has a second line, but both run together downtown—so, chances were, they'd just stay on this train until they got there. I assured them there would be a map of the system in the car (which, of course, there was) and then boarded. They fumbled a lot more with the machine, and the train ended up leaving before they boarded. That meant they'd have a twenty-minute wait for the next train out.

I've taken "light rail" systems in several cities, some of which I liked and others I didn't. Mostly cities build light rail (rather than a traditional subway or el line) because they're comparatively cheap. Often, though, they end up being less useful than a more expensive system would be. I have to give Dallas credit, though. For the most part, they did light rail right. Unlike Minneapolis, they

didn't put tons of money into the trains. Dallas has very simple, rather old-fashioned looking cars on their trains. They're not eye-catching and futuristic, but they don't need to be. The stations are also not elaborate, but they're clean and functional. Most important, though, the vast majority of Dallas' light rail route runs in an exclusive right-of-way. Except for right downtown, the train doesn't have to stop for traffic (or make traffic stop for it). The suburban stations are spaced quite far apart, so the train can serve as truly **rapid** transit.



**Website photo of a DART light rail train**

They've also done an outstanding job in Dallas of generating development around the light rail stations. New apartments have gone up near almost every station, and there are also a lot of pedestrian-oriented businesses near many of the stops. They're creating the type of neighborhood you'd expect to see in New York or San Francisco—which for a far-flung, low-density city like Dallas is definitely something new.

I got another clue that Dallas was not the ultra-conservative place I had imagined inside the train cars. They have an electronic read-out at the end of each car that alternates a crawl of news headlines with announcements of community events and advertisements for various sponsors. One of their biggest sponsors was Planned Parenthood. I don't think I'd seen them advertise on transit even in Los Angeles or New York, but here in Dallas they were right up there with Walgreen's and 7-11. There was also an advertisement for the United Church of Christ, the church I'm a member of and one not at all apologetic for having liberal views. Again, not what I'd expected in Texas—but I sure wasn't complaining. **[I have no idea who sells the ads for DART, but it certainly was an eclectic combination.]**



**Giraffe Statue – Dallas Zoo**

**further north.]** I walked around SMU for a while and then used the restroom and had some coffee at a Burger King on the strip. Then I made my way back to the station.

I pretty much spent my day touring Dallas by DART. Past Plano the train passes through both of Dallas' beltways. It amused me that the two ways to get avoid downtown Dallas the close-in LBJ Freeway and the more distant George W. Bush Turnpike. It's a fascinating reflection on both of the city's native sons and the politics of their two eras—Johnson representing a time when big government was a good thing that built roads and provided public services and Bush representing a time when "privatizing" was the way go. I know I'm hopelessly lost in the past, but I really would rather pay my taxes up front than be nicked and dimed to death with endless "user fees". **[Amen!!!]**

I made my first stop at Mockingbird Lane, mostly because the name amused me. The only time I'd heard of such a street name before was as Lily and Herman's address on *The Munsters*. Wherever that Mockingbird Lane may have been, it sure wasn't Dallas. The station itself is underground, with a new apartment complex directly overhead. Just to the west is the manicured campus of Southern Methodist University, and to the east is a surprisingly well-maintained '60s shopping strip **[of course, there's less weathering in Dallas than there is**

Next I went to the Dallas Zoo, which is clear at the south end of the city. The station is right next to the zoo, though I didn't bother spending \$12 to go in and see the animals. I had read that there was an enormous sculpture of a giraffe at the entrance. That sculpture turned out to be at an entrance clear on the other side of the zoo from the train station, but I had fun wandering around until I found it. The sculpture (which is metal, and rather abstract) was interesting—though the real sense of accomplishment was in just finding it.

I took the train back north. A little ways south of downtown there is a fascinating swamp area, probably the flood plain for the Trinity River. The train crosses the swamp on an extremely high trestle, with lovely views all around. North of there is a rather seedy area and then Dallas' version of "Bricktown", anchored by an enormous warehouse that used to be Sears' distribution center for the southern states and is now filled with apartments.

I got off at West End station, which is about a block from the Texas School Book Depository from which Kennedy was shot. I saw that when the quiz bowl team was here on their first trip to nationals, so I skipped the tour today. Instead I spent some time walking around downtown Dallas, just seeing what there was to see.

Honestly, there's not all that much to see—especially on a Sunday. Downtown Dallas is one of those places where people make money on business days, but it's virtually deserted on the weekend. There's basically nowhere to shop, and no one (except a few homeless people) appears to live downtown. There are quite a lot of restaurants, but they're only open for breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday. Today the whole place was about as dead as could be. **[Having been to a lot of cities, the lack of downtown residences is the biggest problem in downtown Dallas. Successful cities are those where people actually live downtown, where there are condo towers as well as office towers.]**



**Kennedy Memorial Plaza – Dallas, Texas**

quick once over, and then just kept on walking. **[This really is one of the ugliest monuments I've seen anywhere. It looks—apparently intentionally—like an unfinished building without windows. I would think the late President's family would be insulted by it. The plaza is surrounded by equally soulless "brutalist" buildings, so I suppose the place fits in well with its neighbors. It really is a pathetic urban space, though.]**

I walked past Dealy Plaza, which looks much as it did in those famous pictures from 1963 **[the place could be described as both "classic" and "dated"]**, and on to Kennedy Memorial Plaza. I didn't even know there was a Kennedy Memorial in Dallas, and—trust me—if you're reading this, it doesn't need to be on your "must see" list. Located right next to the Dallas County Jail, this National Park Service property was probably built as an urban renewal project back in the '70s. It's pretentious and not particularly attractive. The thing consists of four walls without a ceiling, which supposedly somehow symbolizes Kennedy's world view. I took a brochure, gave it a

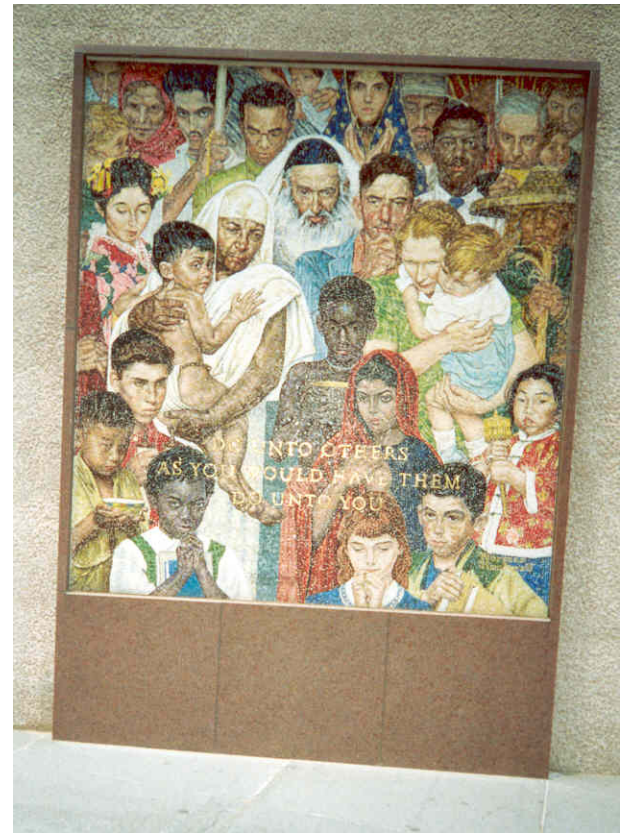
Much more interesting was a place called Thanksgiving Square. In fact, this was one of the nicest little parks I have seen in any city. Located right in the heart of downtown, Thanksgiving Square was constructed for the U.S. Bicentennial in 1976 (again, probably an urban renewal project—but that's not a bad thing). It's basically a multi-faith shrine dedicated to the concept of giving thanks. The place is very strictly non-sectarian. It fascinated me that while the chapel was originally built by a coalition of Protestant groups, a local Moslem congregation maintains it today. They hold Christian (Methodist/Presbyterian), Jewish, and Moslem services here weekly, and they make it clear that **anyone** is welcome to enjoy the facility and use it to express their thanks.

The park area features numerous places you can stop to relax, meditate, or pray. One of the nicest of these is a mosaic reproduction of Norman Rockwell's "Golden Rule", a lovely painting that shows people of all ages, sexes, colors, and faiths together in prayer with the words "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" stenciled in gold at the bottom. Underneath the park is a

museum (suggested donation \$2) that traces the history of giving thanks in all cultures and the American Thanksgiving holiday. For the Bicentennial President Ford donated the official declarations of Thanksgiving that had been signed by past Presidents to this museum, and the Presidents since then have sent their Thanksgiving proclamations here as well. Those form the focal point of the museum. Upstairs is an inter-religious chapel featuring a spectacular spiral-shaped stained glass ceiling. They invite visitors to write what they are thankful for on a slip of paper and place it on a table at the center of the chapel. I did so and then lingered a bit, probably having a deeper religious experience than I would have if I'd attended church today. **[This is a wonderful little park, and I particularly love the fact that it is extremely religious without being tied to any specific beliefs.]**

I left Thanksgiving Square and got back on the train at the Ackard stop **[which was a long and awkward walk from the park]**. I went north a couple of stops to Cityplace, which is located deep underground just a little ways north of downtown. I made my way up a series of long escalators and emerged at the foot of a high-rise luxury apartment tower. Dallas is a very wealthy city overall, but the neighborhood I was about to walk through was definitely one of the most upscale places in town.

Near Cityplace Tower is a string of rowhouse condominiums on dead-end courts that look very suburban, even though they're not much over a mile from downtown. The neighborhood also features the sort of businesses you'd find in an upscale suburb—Borders Books; Bed, Bath, and Beyond; Home Depot; etc. They all have entrances that face onto the street, with enormous parking lots in the back. Running south from Cityplace to downtown is McKinney Avenue, which is **the** happening place in Dallas. Restored trolleys run along McKinney (though their schedule is infrequent enough that it was quicker for me to walk than to wait for one), and the street is lined with cafes, night clubs, and coffee bars that serve a very obviously well-heeled clientele. The only place I stopped in the neighborhood was a Walgreen's, where I bought some orange juice to re-hydrate myself after sweating in the sun. I had fun walking down McKinney and staring at all the pricey places, though.



**Golden Rule – Thanksgiving Square**



**Downtown Dallas skyline**

Back downtown I saw one more public square, Pan-American Plaza. While Dallas isn't really a particularly multi-ethnic city, its Texas location is appropriate for a salute to the whole western hemisphere. The plaza features a sculpture by an artist from each country in the Americas. It's supposed to communicate the theme of world brotherhood. I don't know that I'd have gotten the theme without an explanation, but it was an interesting little sculpture park. **[I hate to say it, but I honestly don't remember this park at all.]**

I made my way north a ways and got off at the Spring Valley station, which is in the city of Richardson, a suburb that straddles the two Dallas beltways. I was thirsty again (in the 100° heat that happened every time I stepped outside), so I stopped into a Wendy's for some iced tea. The workers here were Hispanic, but the customers were mostly well-dressed black people. Richardson was fascinating because it was a wealthy suburb that was almost entirely black. That's not something you see much in the North. I got the feeling there were a lot of wealthy black suburbanites in Dallas, though.

I had apparently just missed a train when I left Wendy's, and I had a long wait for the next one. Eventually it came, and I made my way back to Plano. It was dinner time, so before I actually merged onto US-75, I stopped at a Whataburger on the access road. **[Access road businesses are everywhere in Texas.]** I ordered a salad (something the boy at the counter obviously didn't expect a man to order) and one of the largest drinks I've ever seen. Then I went back to the car and made my way onward.

I exited onto Texas highway 121 and drove through the area I had seen from the plane yesterday. This is land that in a couple of years will be housing developments. Today it is mostly wasteland, broken up occasionally by major malls. It was weird to drive through, and it would be interesting to come back once the place has filled in.

I drove west for about half an hour until I finally got to I-35E in the city of Lewisville. This is one of those suburbs nobody's ever heard of that would be a major city (80,000 people) in Iowa. I drove north two exits to Corporate Road and then north for about half a mile on the access road to the Lewisville Motel 6. There was definitely not the elegant atmosphere here that there was at the Courtyard by Marriott, but this place only cost \$35 a night, including free parking, free coffee **[though as I recall it was a pretty nasty brew]**, free cable TV, free local calls, and a free notepad and pencil. They settle your bill at check-in at Motel 6, so there's nothing that can be added to it. Motel 6 was definitely not luxurious, but I felt it was more worth its rate than the place I stayed last night. **[I've had a few unfortunate experiences at Motel 6's over the years, but most of them have been perfectly adequate.]**

I settled into the room and spent most of the evening reading through the Sunday papers and enjoying the Whataburger salad (which really was very good). **[Almost every fast food salad I've had has been very good. They tend to be extremely overpriced, though—often double the cost of a big burger.]** I had to be up early tomorrow, though, so before long I was off to bed.

## **MONDAY, JUNE 27**

I was up around 5:00 this morning and left the Motel 6 at 5:20. I stopped at a 7-11 to gas up the car (which must be returned full, or they charge you \$5+ a gallon to fill it) and then headed west to the airport. I drove about fifteen miles on a road that kept alternating between being limited access and being a suburban strip. Eventually I turned south onto International Parkway and into DFW.

Like most of the newer highways in Dallas, International Parkway is a tollroad. I probably could have driven along the access road like I did when I picked up the car, but it was easier just to pay the toll. It intrigued me that use the same tollbooths to pay for both road toll and airport parking. I got a ticket when I entered the north end of the airport that I presented again at the south end. Since I'd just driven through, the toll was \$2.00. If I had been there longer than an hour, I'd have paid a parking fee (\$2 per hour for up to 8 hours, \$16 a day thereafter) instead of the road toll. I paid my \$2 and made my way to the rental car return area, which is on the roof of the same parking ramp where I'd gotten the car. Then I caught a bus back to my terminal.

They have different buses to each of the many different terminals (I think there are twelve in all), but I happened to luck out with a bus to "E" waiting when I finished returning the car. Bus "E" made three stops at the huge horseshoe-shaped terminal. The first was for a bunch of South American airlines I'd never heard of, and no one got off. The second was for Continental and Northwest, and I was the only person to get off there. Everybody else was headed to the third stop, which was apparently for Dallas-based American Airlines (which occupies all or part of six different terminals here).

I made my way to a self check-in machine and scanned my credit card. I had a bit of confusion when the machine asked me to enter my destination. I typed "MSP", the code for Minneapolis—St. Paul International Airport. It came up as "unrecognized" and asked the question again. When I read more closely, what they wanted was the first three letters of the destination, not the airport code. I typed in "MIN", and quickly got my boarding pass. For an airport like MSP (which I think is actually in Bloomington), that's a really stupid way of entering the information.

Security was quite busy, but the line moved right along. Something unique in Dallas was that they had plastic bags for passengers to place their personal items in at security. Most airports have big tubs for that purpose instead. Supposedly there were also slippers you could put on after taking off your shoes, but I just went through in my stocking feet. **[I really don't follow the people who get all huffy about having to remove their shoes at security. To me it seems like one of the more reasonable rules (far more reasonable than the three-ounce limit on carry-on liquids), and it's just not that big of a deal to slip off your shoes while going through the metal detector.]**

The flight to Minneapolis was overbooked, and the woman at the desk was asking for volunteers to take another flight two hours later in exchange for a free travel certificate. For the first time in my life, I was in a position that I could take her up on the offer. I've already redeemed my certificate for yet another trip I'll be taking (to Miami) this summer—not a bad deal for sitting around bored for two hours. **[Who knows, maybe I'll luck out and have an overbooked flight when I head down to Texas again in a couple weeks.]**

... And I definitely did sit around bored. Terminal E at DFW was big, but it was also very dull. I had some time to kill. The most exciting thing I did was walk up to the Skylink station where the new train connects with all the other terminals. It intrigued me that the train is entirely in the secure part of the airport. It's set up so that once you've gone through security at any terminal you can easily

access all the other terminals. That would be good for someone who had to transfer here—especially given that American alone uses several terminals. **[This really is a great positive feature. Other airports with multiple terminals would do well to follow suit and build their people movers beyond security.]**

I had breakfast at Burger King and some pretentious coffee from the Hudson News bookstore. About 9:30 they started boarding the second flight. **[I think the Delta equivalent of this flight is the one I'm scheduled to fly back on this year.]** This one was also oversold, but I was not in a position to try to milk the deal even more. I boarded fairly quickly, and we left the gate about 10:05. We taxied for what seemed like forever, and then the pilot just shut down the engines. He told us there were thunderstorms in Minneapolis, and we were not being allowed to take off at this time. He estimated the delay would be around forty-five minutes. Since I did have to teach a class tonight, I was gritting my teeth wondering if it was such a wise idea to have taken the later flight. It turned out the delay was only about half an hour, though, and in fact were only about fifteen minutes late landing at MSP.

We had an uneventful landing, and I was surprised to find it was overcast but not at all wet in Minneapolis. I took the train to the parking ramp and exited quickly. It rained on and off on my way southward. I stopped only once, at a Kwik Trip in Faribault, and was home before 4:00. I'd had an interesting trip—not really what I expected, but interesting nonetheless.



**“Self portrait” of David Burrow in Dallas, Texas**