

CHICAGO—WITH THE QUIZ BOWL TEAM

2005

[UPDATE: March, 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.]



David Burrow, Anthony McGuire, Matt Courtney, Gavin Freking, Jacob Hellman, Jeff Lappe, John Kohlhaas, & Jacob Richter
(Photo taken on the ground floor of the John Hancock Center, with a digitized Chicago skyline in the background.)

I did a lot of travels in the past year, and this one was sort of an afterthought. Having taken teams to Dallas, New Orleans, St. Louis, Washington, and New York for national quiz bowl tournaments, I was overjoyed to hear that this year's National Academic Championships would be in comparatively nearby and familiar Chicago. However, while the kids were as excited as ever, that familiarity meant a lot less anticipation for me. It was hard to get "psyched up" for the trip to a place where I've spent a number of long weekends (and would be again later on in the year). **[I'm finding myself in a similar position this year. While our destination (New Orleans) is more distant, having just been there at Christmas, I don't have quite the same anticipation I sometimes do for quiz bowl trips.]** After it passed, it was also harder to get myself in the mood to write a synopsis than it was to write up my July 4 getaway to New York. Nonetheless, this was a very enjoyable trip with a good group of kids, and it merits a write-up as much as any of the quiz bowl trips we've done.

I'll begin as I often have with these quiz bowl trips by introducing our team. The tournament did away with formal introductions this year, so the things the kids wrote up about themselves never got formally read. I'll put them down here, though, so you can get to know our players a little better:

Anthony McGuire – Senior

- Will major in computer science at the University of Northern Iowa
- Voted "class clown" in the Class of 2005
- Has worked at Bancroft Food Center for three years

Jacob Hellman – Junior

- State cross-country qualifier and participant
- Enjoys playing guitar and videogames in spare time
- Is an enormous Dave Matthews Band fan

Gavin Freking – Junior

- Co-captain of BGHS football team, and player on state quarterfinal playoff team
- Letterwinner in football, baseball, quiz bowl, math team, band, and choir
- Member of National Honor Society

Jeff Lappe -- Junior

- Math, quiz bowl, track, football, baseball letterwinner
- Member of the 2004 state quarterfinal football team
- National Honor Society member

Jacob Richter – Senior

- Member of the 2004 all-state choir of Iowa
- Participant in intramurals
- 4-year member of choir, band, and quiz bowl
- 2-year member of the golf team
- Enjoys HALO

Matt Courtney – Senior (captain)

- Student body president
- Voted captain of all-intramural basketball team
- Top fundraiser in Trivia Champions Think-a-Thon for St. Jude's Children's Hospital for two years
- Works in a cornfield and also a pizza parlor

The core of our team would be our captain, who was making his fourth straight trip to nationals and who was essentially our MVP last year in Washington. **[Matt was the first four-year national quiz bowler at Garrigan. This summer two more—Anna Kollasch and Jake Rosenmeyer—will also have that honor.]** Everyone would contribute, though. This was not exactly a close-knit group, but everyone got along reasonably well, and it was not a difficult group with which to travel. (...And, by the way, for those who may not know HALO is a rather violent videogame loosely based on "Capture the Flag" and the Dave Matthews Band is a jazz-rock band that has played such venues as Decorah and that I find one of the dullest musical groups of modern times.) Joining us on the trip was our former quiz bowl captain John Kohlhaas, who had just finished his freshman year at St. John's University.

[The kids who are going to nationals this coming summer had looked up my travelogues of past quiz bowl trips online. Several of them were upset that they've discontinued they've discontinued the player biographies. This was part of a change that allows each team to play more games in the tournament. It does take away some of the fun, though. Some of the kids who are going to nationals this summer wrote up their own bios and asked that I include them in my write-up of the upcoming trip.]

THURSDAY, JUNE 9 → ALGONA TO DES MOINES AND BACK

This year's trip sort of got off to a false start—although one we had planned. While our journey to Chicago would officially begin tomorrow, today most of the group was joining me in taking a school suburban down to Des Moines to see Garrigan alumnus (and former quiz bowl player) Brad Nelson play AAA baseball against the Iowa Cubs. **[Brad was indeed a quiz bowl player, and a very smart student. There's no question, though, that his academic achievements overshadowed what he accomplished academically.]**

We arranged to meet at Garrigan at mid-afternoon, but at the appointed time only one of the team members was there. Interestingly, he was one who had often been late for tournaments throughout the year and who I expected to have to wait for today. He was also the player I knew the least well personally, and we had a nice chat as we waited for the others to arrive. Before too long they did, and we made our way off in the suburban.

The drive down to Des Moines was uneventful—boring even. The kids entertained themselves by listening to music on headphones pretty much the whole way down there. I'm just not a headphone person. While it's kind of nice not to hear music I don't care for or to argue over which radio station we should have on, to me it seems that headphones really isolate people—putting them off in their own world detached from everyone else. Kids who have grown up with them just take them for granted, but I'm glad to have come from a different era.

We joined Doug and Nancy Nelson (Brad's parents) and probably about fifty other people from Algona in Section #11, the "comp" ticket section. **[I'd actually bought tickets for the game, not knowing if it would be possible for Brad to arrange for a big group to get freebies. I think they were \$8 each, so they certainly didn't break us, but we needn't have bothered. Doug Nelson had literally dozens of tickets, though, and he was passing them out to pretty much anyone who wanted them.]** In Des Moines, that section is right behind home plate and features some of the best seats in the ballpark. When I've seen Brad before, I've usually tried to talk with him briefly before the game. Tonight that wasn't possible, because the kids' dawdling got us here without a lot of time to spare. We would, however, see Brad play a very good game. He went 3 for 5 on the night, plus he reached once on an error by Iowa's shortstop. Most spectacular, he Brad had a sacrifice bunt that moved what ended up being the game winning run into scoring position. I've seen Brad play since he was an eighth-grader (almost a decade ago), and this was the first time I'd seen him bunt at any level. He's a big guy who can hit for both power and average, someone you just don't expect to see bunt. Apparently the I-Cubs didn't expect to see it either, because the move worked beautifully.

The kids who were with me tonight were mostly our non-athletes or the ones whose sports interest was limited to cross-country. The team members who were baseball players were playing ball themselves tonight up in Algona. Those who were here were surprisingly interested in the game, though, and while they didn't know Brad well (he graduated the year before this year's seniors were freshmen), they were clearly some of his strongest supporters.

The kids were also entertained by some of the sideshows that accompanied the game. One of tonight's promotions was the appearance of two mascots—Rooster Booster and Donkey Kick—who were sponsored by the Quik Trip chain of gas stations. I'd personally bet they were every bit as inebriated as the "Homer" mascot I got to know up close and personal a couple years ago in Huntsville, but they were certainly entertaining. The kids sort of made them our unofficial mascots and kept referring to them throughout the rest of the trip.

Also entertaining was Jeff, the beer man, an extremely portly individual who'd probably consumed more than his share of the product he was selling. The kids didn't even attempt to buy anything from him, though many people near us did—over and over again. In particular the Algona fire chief had at least eight beers himself. There were also a few college students who probably weren't of legal age among Jeff's customers. I wasn't responsible for them, though, so I'm not going to name names. Being unable to buy beer certainly saved our kids money. Jeff's wares sold for \$5.25 each—which means the fire chief went through over \$40 just on beer.

What our group wasted money on was hot dogs and lemon ice. These were about as expensive as the beer and also priced in such a way that you either had to give a big tip to the vendor or deal with a large amount of change. We all chose to take our change, and the lemon ice girl in particular didn't deserve a tip. She made her way through most of the stadium several times, but mostly seemed to ignore Section #11. One of the kids had to go get her and make her come over to sell to us. **[With few exceptions, I don't care much for roving vendors. It's not like it's that big a deal to go to the concession stand, and there you can buy what you want with the condiments you want. There are a few parks (like the former Comiskey where the White Sox play) where the vendors are part of the ballpark experience, but most of the time they seem to do little more than beg for tips.]**

This was a long game. It ended up going nine innings and ending at 11:35pm. While I'd have liked to visit with Brad afterwards, I knew we had to be on our way immediately. Brad did give a quick wave to the group as he made his way to the clubhouse, but that was the most personal contact we'd have with him tonight.

The kids mostly slept on the ride back, but I had to drive. We ended up getting back to Algona around 2am, which made for a very short night.

FRIDAY, JUNE 10 → ALGONA TO CHICAGO

... A very short night indeed. We had to leave around 7:00 in order to make it to Chicago before the height of afternoon rush hour. That meant about four hours in bed for me.

Some of the kids were already at Garrigan when I got there, and the others arrived shortly. We got packed quickly and were on the road ahead of schedule—a very pleasant change from some years. Also pleasant was that they'd packed surprisingly little luggage. While we were all cramming into one suburban, both people and bags fit with no real problem.

We picked up the final member of our group in the nearby town of Wesley. Also making the trip to Chicago (in a separate vehicle) were this kid's parents, his sister (a former quiz bowl player who had helped chaperone kids at nationals several years ago), and her husband. They were very concerned that we stick together the whole time, that the vehicles not lose visual contact. They'd even brought along a set of modern-day walkie-talkies that we could use in case we couldn't see each other. Things never work as planned. When we eventually did lose visual contact on the Northwest Tollway in Illinois, the walkie-talkies brought only static. My back-up idea was to call the parents on their cell phone, but apparently they had their phone turned off. I'd written very detailed directions, though, and apparently they worked okay.



Packing up the suburban

From Wesley we made our way east to Clear Lake and then up I-35 to Minnesota. There was construction in Minnesota, where they seem to be completely rebuilding the interstate. Things were rather bottlenecked, and I wasn't completely comfortable negotiating a big SUV through the extra-narrow lane. We made it through okay, though, and exited onto I-90, which we'd follow for the rest of the day.

We stopped at a rest area near Winona, where the guy who was driving our tandem vehicle (the sister's husband) told me in a rather snotty voice, "you could drive a little faster, you know". The speed limit in Minnesota was 70mph, and I had the cruise control set just above that—probably 71 or 72 mph. While a fair number of cars passed us, we passed several ourselves—and I really don't like to be in the position of having to pass people all the time. I also didn't care to invite a ticket in a school vehicle, though it turned out I needn't have worried about that—we didn't see a law enforcement vehicle anywhere in either Minnesota or Wisconsin. I just sort of grunted a response and proceeded to drive at a speed where I felt comfortable. **[Having gotten familiar with all the school vehicles, I've since found out that the speedometer on the blue suburban tends to consistently register higher than any of the other vehicles. I was likely going less than 70, even though my speedometer showed more than that. On later trips I've been scolded by those driving the blue suburban because they thought I was speeding, when in fact I'd set the cruise on a different vehicle at exactly the speed limit.]**

The kids seemed to feel that one of the coolest parts of this trip was being able to say they'd been to Wisconsin. While it's really not very far from Algona, not a single one of those on the trip this year had ever been to America's Dairyland. They seemed more excited to cross the river to LaCrosse than some group's I've been with were to see New Orleans or the Atlantic Ocean. They were also surprised at how rugged eastern Minnesota and western Wisconsin are. Margaret and I laughed at an Amtrak description of the "mountains" along the Mississippi, but compared to the marsh and prairie by Algona, the bluffs that line the river really do seem

mountainous. Our captain said it reminded him of the area in West Virginia and the Maryland panhandle we went through on the way out to Washington. It does look a lot like the eastern Appalachians, and since everyone agrees that Morgantown and Cumberland are mountain towns, I suppose giving the same moniker to LaCrosse and Tomah isn't that much of a stretch.

We had lunch just north of Madison (Exit 109) at one of those truck stops that has a food court with several fast food options. Every last one of the kids chose A&W, based mostly on the recommendation of our captain, who had recently had an enjoyable meal at the A&W in Cresco while doing farm work in eastern Iowa. Seeing our kids create an instant line, I made a detour to the pizza place next door (Rocky Rococo) and had finished my entire lunch by the time most of the kids were just getting their sandwiches.

I had intended to buy gas at lunchtime, but there wasn't a drop to be had in the entire truck stop. They had huge signs giving a price of \$2.29 a gallon, but every single pump was out. So I stopped again just south of Madison in the town of Stroughton, where I paid \$2.35 a gallon but actually was able to fill up. (I hadn't yet gotten used to seeing a "2" at the front of gas prices at the time, and it's almost scary to think that since then I've paid as much as \$3.19. **[As I write this, the price in Algona is \$3.74⁹, and the radio said that the average nationwide was \$3.86. I'm sure it will be over \$4 when we head down to New Orleans at Memorial Day.]**)

The vehicle we were taking was the school's blue suburban. While it has fewer miles than the white suburban, most of the kids don't like it as well. The blue suburban has vinyl upholstery instead of cloth, and it doesn't have a separate climate control for the back seats. That was a bit of a problem today. The weather was actually a bit on the cool side for June, but the sun beating through the windows made it very hot in the rearmost seat. I responded by turning the air conditioning up to full blast, which made those of us in front literally shiver and those in the middle seat a bit on the chilly side. The kids in the very back were still uncomfortably warm, though. When they complained, our captain quickly scolded them—noting that last year we went through almost the entire trip without any air conditioning in the white suburban because of an electrical problem. If he could put up with that, they could put up with this.

The kids were mostly lost in their headphones again this afternoon, and the dull silence made me very drowsy. I'd have told John to drive, except that this wasn't an area I figured he'd really want to be driving. The corridor from Madison to Janesville to Beloit to Rockford is one of the busiest stretches of highway anywhere. Two interstates and a major U.S. highway all run together on an obsolete freeway that has just two lanes of traffic in each direction. The area is right on the edge of one of the largest urban areas in America, and it's a major truck route. I don't think I've ever driven it when it hasn't been packed with traffic, and today was certainly no exception.



Website photo of the Northwest Tollway in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois

not unheard of, 88 minutes is the single longest time I've ever seen. I was thankful we weren't going all the way downtown, though less thankful when I figured out that the biggest part of that delay was at the O'Hare toll plaza about a mile and a half ahead of us. It took more than half an hour just to get to the toll plaza. The one consolation was that the cash lanes were actually moving faster than the I-Pass "express" lane. **[At the time I-Pass lanes were new, and cars had to slow down to 15mph or less to go through those lanes. There was also only one I-Pass lane at each tollbooth, while the O'Hare plaza had about a dozen cash lanes. They've since re-structured all the toll plazas. Now every lane accepts I-Pass, and you can drive through them at highway speed if you have a transponder. The cash lanes have been diverted to the side (you essentially exit and then re-enter the interstate), and there are only a couple of cash lanes these days. That's definitely sped things up for the I-Pass users and reduced the overall congestion on the tollways.]** When we got to the plaza itself I could see the blue line 'L' trains go by just south of us. At least four southbound trains passed before we paid our toll.

While I cursed the traffic, I was able to make my way into Illinois and on to Rockford without incident. I was intrigued to discover that they'd recently doubled the fares on the Illinois tollway. They now charge nearly a dollar at those all too frequent tollbooths. Traffic lightened up past Rockford (it always does, even though you're closer to Chicago, and while it picked up at Elgin, the road increased to six lanes to accommodate it. We made our way at roughly the 65mph speed limit all the way from Madison to O'Hare.

We suddenly hit the brakes right at the Des Plaines oasis within sight of O'Hare. They had one of those digital signs there giving traffic information. This one informed us that the time on the Kennedy Expressway was 88 minutes to downtown. While an hour between O'Hare and the Loop is

Most often when I come to Chicago I leave the O'Hare toll plaza, race across four lanes of traffic on the Kennedy, and immediately exit onto Cumberland Avenue. There's a hotel there (formerly a Clarion, now a Ramada **[it's since changed to a Holiday Inn]**) that combines a pleasant atmosphere, a good neighborhood, reasonable rates, and easy access to the 'L' where I've stayed a number of times. This time I turned west onto an eerily empty stretch of the Kennedy that leads straight to the airport. There's only one exit between the tollway interchange and the airport: Manheim Road. They were totally reconstructing the interchange this summer, and I can't begin to describe the mess we drove through on exiting. We made it, though, and before long we passed the Rosemont Convention Center and turned into the Embassy Suites—O'Hare.

A single parking ramp serves the Embassy Suites and two other nearby hotels. The ramp is bizarre and confusing, because instead of circling cars through the various levels, each level features two-way traffic. I nearly crashed into two other cars, but I eventually managed to find a place with enough room for an inexperienced SUV driver like me to safely park the suburban.

The check-in process was very slow, mostly because everyone in front of me in line seemed to have some unusual problem. Most were schools here for the tournament, and they all seemed to be paying in unusual ways. The woman immediately in front of me in line had apparently pre-paid with a school check, but the amount was apparently wrong by a couple of dollars. The woman and the desk clerk argued and argued over a trivial amount of money on a bill of several hundred dollars. The desk clerk wouldn't credit it, and the woman wouldn't pay it. I felt like just reaching into my wallet and putting a couple bucks on the counter to speed the process along. Eventually, though, a manager came and shuttled the woman away to an office somewhere and it was my turn at the counter.



Outside and lobby area at Embassy Suites—O'Hare

The clerk seemed surprised that I did not have a complicated check-in. We had four rooms (including the family that came along), but they were all being put on the same credit card and would be processed like any other check-in. One of the things I've always liked about Garrigan

is that we don't make a chore out of simple financial transactions. There are schools I know where it takes a mountain of paperwork to write a tiny check. (No doubt the woman in front of me was from such a place.) While we need to account for everything at Garrigan, the process is really quite user-friendly. **[The Diocese of Sioux City has gone for more and more accounting on school accounts (probably because people had abused the freedom), but compared to many public schools our activity finances are still remarkably simple.]**

I had stayed at this hotel once before when Margaret and I were in Chicago to see a play. It's a **very** nice hotel. An older place (especially by suburban standards), the architecture features prairie style accents reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright. Twelve floors of rooms surround a tree-filled covered atrium (which was under renovation when Margaret and I were here, but is now lovely) and have wrap-around windows that look out over either the city or the airport. The rooms are true suites, each with a bedroom and a separate living room that includes convertible couch. Each also has a bath and kitchenette. When Margaret and I stayed here, they also had minibars vending overpriced whiskey and rum. The fixtures are still there, but they now hold the complimentary coffee and toiletries. The kids really liked the hotel; it was clear that for most of them it was the nicest



Atrium at the Embassy Suites—O'Hare – Rosemont, Illinois

place they'd ever stayed, and some who had been at the Des Moines Embassy Suites for state track remarked that this one definitely put the one in Iowa to shame. **[I've not been to the Embassy Suites in Des Moines. I did recently stay at one in the Omaha area, and except for the prairie style architectural touches, the basic layout was identical to this hotel in Rosemont.]**

The \$99 rate was not entirely out of line **[and would be dirt cheap today]**, and we could have gotten by with one fewer room—except for a new diocesan rule that won't allow eighteen-year-old kids to stay in the same room as seventeen-year-olds. I must say I think it's a stupid rule, and it may well keep us from ever doing one of these trips again. **[It didn't, but it has made school travel more expensive.]** We'll let your mind ponder what might be going on in those hotel rooms that the rule's trying to keep from happening—nothing, I'd imagine, that couldn't happen between two "adults" or between two younger people ... and nothing that kids in Catholic school should even think about doing. What's even stupider is the rule would actually have allowed John and me to share a room with the eighteen-year-olds. They don't seem to care what happens to anyone over eighteen, even though the eighteen-year-olds are still students and we're still responsible for them. You can tell the rule was written by lawyers (one of many "cover our behind" rules in the wake of the sins it's been revealed some priests have committed), since it's legal liability they're concerned with, not moral responsibility.

We had only a small amount of time to settle into our rooms before we'd be playing our first game. The game was in a hotel ballroom—I think the same one where Margaret and I had breakfast when we stayed here. We played a school called Bromfeld from Boston. They were more than a little stuck up and definitely felt themselves superior to a group of hicks from Iowa. While we didn't win this game, I was pleased that our kids more than held their own against Bromfeld, giving them their closest game. In fact, we probably should have won this game. We were in it all the way, and we were on a roll when the game ended. They've changed the format to shorten the game in recent years, and if they still had the old format, we might well have won. As it was, we lost by a score of 205 – 160, which is very close in quiz bowl. A bit of consolation was that the other team from Iowa, a team from Boone made up of kids every bit as obnoxious as those from Bromfeld, was not doing at all well. They had already played three games and were 0 – 3 for their efforts.

Embassy Suites sponsors a nightly "manager's reception" in the atrium, and the kids wanted to check out what that was. It certainly wasn't worth going out of our way for. They had a dish of popcorn and a plate of pretzels, and people could ask a bartender for complimentary soft drinks in miniature cups. (Actually beer and mixed drinks were free, too—but not for the kids ... or for me while supervising them.) This is supposedly an "added value bonus" of staying at this particular hotel, but I can't say very much value was added.

Next on our agenda was going out for dinner. There's not much but ultra-expensive places in Rosemont, so I planned to take the kids a couple of miles east to Harlem Avenue, where there's a whole strip of fast food places. In the process they could get acclimated to the 'L' in a relatively non-threatening way. It took quite a while before we started out, though. Most of the students were ready quite quickly, but we had to wait for one of them to iron—of all things—a T-shirt. I must confess that I iron as little as I can get away with, and I don't think I've ever ironed a T-shirt in my life. **[Technically that statement would no longer be true, since on a couple of occasions while traveling I've used the iron to evaporate sweat from shirts. I've certainly never cared about wrinkles in T-shirts, though.]** It wasn't like we were going for a night on the town, either. Had the kid asked, I could have told him that it was unlikely there would be anyone of the opposite sex he'd care to meet anywhere we'd be going. We waited better than ten minutes for him to get gussied up, though. Then we waited some more. The family that had come along (which happened to be the T-shirt boy's relatives) had originally planned to join us for dinner, and we waited for quite some time for them to show. Eventually the boy went up to his parents room to check on them, but they weren't there. It turned out they'd changed their plans, but not bothered to tell anyone else about it.

We walked about half a mile north, past the Sofitel, the Marriott, and the brass tubes of the Hyatt Regency O'Hare **[a really cool-looking hotel where I remember Phil Donahue putting up the guests on his talk show when I was a kid]**—finally coming to the Rosemont 'L' station, which is located underneath the Kennedy Expressway (which is elevated at this point). Rosemont is an ultra-posh suburb full of dressed-up business people, but its transit stop is surprisingly utilitarian. The Cumberland stop just east of here is really much nicer. The kids enjoyed the novelty of riding public transit, though, so the simplicity of the surroundings was irrelevant to them.

A train arrived almost immediately, and we rode it east two stops to Harlem Avenue—an even more utilitarian stop with little more than an ultra-narrow platform exposed to all the elements and lying smack-dab in the median of the Kennedy. We made our way to the end of the platform and up an escalator to the tiny station house that fronts onto the Harlem Avenue overpass. The moment we stepped outside, the kids were amazed at the diverse people who made their way down the sidewalk of this relatively obscure street. Harlem's neighborhood (Norwood Park, which is just inside the city of Chicago) is mostly white, but like all of Chicago it has a lot of Hispanics and a fair share of black people. That there were people at all out on the sidewalk at night made it different from Algona or Wesley or Burt—the places our team hailed from.

We walked a couple blocks south on the west side of Harlem to a Wendy's. Like most fast food places in Chicago, this one has the exact same building and parking lot you'd find anywhere, but when you step inside you know you're not in Kansas anymore. The staff was entirely Hispanic, and the customers in line in front of us were black—which presented a bit of a communications problem.

I had chili, one of two things I ever order at Wendy's (the other being taco salad), and I also ordered a small frosty. My total bill was under \$3, including tax. The kids, on the other hand, ordered more food than I could imagine anyone could eat. Those lean cross-country runners on our team all had multiple sandwiches, together with jumbo orders of fries and massive drinks. Their bills were closer to \$10 than \$5. One person even went back for a third sandwich after he'd finished two. I gather that's the way they normally

eat when they go to fast food places. No wonder the kids all seem to balloon the second they leave school and stop playing sports. I know I'm not the healthiest eater on earth, but even I could give lessons to these kids.

The only other customers in the place were the black family that was in line in front of us. In addition to us, there were two families in the place: the black people who were in line in front of us and a Hispanic family who came just as we were sitting down to eat. The blacks were not particularly memorable, and three of the four Mexicans—a young couple and their elementary-aged son—were very pleasant. The toddler girl, though, was a holy terror. The little “darling” spent most of supper dashing from table to table screaming at the top of her lungs. Her parents seemed to think it was all “muy preciosa” and refused to reprimand her.

While I finished my dinner in just a few minutes, it took the kids quite some time to down burger after burger after burger. I was not particularly comfortable as they spent much of dinner discussing the alcoholic exploits of some of their fellow students. They'd all now graduated, but it still wasn't really what I cared to hear. I was more comfortable when they parodied some TV comedian who apparently uses the signature line “I'm not gonna lie to you”.



Wendys on Harlem Avenue – Chicago, Illinois

It was around 8:00 when we finally left Wendy's and headed back for the 'L'. The kids wanted to get some pop and snacks, so we went west just one stop to Cumberland, where I knew there was a huge Dominick's supermarket right next to the 'L' station. (The kids were amazed that I knew where all these places were, but after going someplace even a couple of times, you learn that sort of thing. While I know Chicago quite well, I could probably show someone around L.A. these days if I had to, too—and New York wouldn't be that big of a challenge. **[That's true for me, but I know people who have trouble locating places they've gone multiple times in Des Moines or even Mason City.]**) The kids bought enough snacks to more than match their dinner at Wendy's, plus gallons of pop and Gatorade.

It was pouring rain as we checked out at Dominick's, and no one was especially eager to get soaked in even the short distance to the 'L'. The kids noticed a lottery ticket vending machine nearby, and they entertained themselves for a while with it. One of the eighteen-year-olds bought a ticket (18 is the legal gambling age in Illinois), which turned out to be a \$2 winner. He used the profits to buy two more tickets, both of which were winners. He kept buying tickets and winning back what he had spent—taking about fifteen minutes before he finally was back to even. Either the odds are different in Illinois than in Iowa, or they had all the winners on one roll of tickets in that machine. Either way, it was kind of amusing.

The rain let up slightly, but we still got completely soaked as we dashed across the parking lot to the skywalk that led to the 'L' station. I got even more soaked than the rest, because my shoe had become untied, and I tripped on it while making my way up the stairs to the skywalk. We must have been quite a sight going through the turnstiles, but no one even seemed to notice us.

When we checked in the seventeen-year-olds had complained that their room was overly hot, and that they couldn't get the air conditioning to work. I had reported that problem to the desk, and someone was working on it when we left for dinner. Unfortunately the room was still blazing hot when we returned. I again complained to the desk, who said they thought it had been fixed. I then asked if we could switch rooms, but the woman said that was impossible, as there were no more of that type (two doubles and a hide-a-bed) left. All that remained were rooms with a king bed and a hide-a-bed. I suggested we switch with that, knowing that John and I could take that room and have the juniors take the double room we were currently in. It took more than a little keypunching for the woman to make the change, but she did it with reasonable efficiency. Within about half an hour we'd played musical rooms and everyone was happy.

The kids (including John) spent the rest of the evening swimming and then playing cards in the seniors' room. I went to our new room, where I graded some tests for my college stats class and watched the College World Series on TV. Technically this arrangement also violated those new diocesan travel rules, since officially a chaperon can't be alone with students at any time. Anywhere John was, I was supposed to be with him—and vice versa. Those same rules, though, imply that I could have called any of the eighteen-year-olds “chaperons”, so I could safely stretch things and say we had four “adults” together with three “children”. I did suggest that they keep the door ajar so I could stop in if I wanted (which I did once), and that also ensured that anyone passing by could see there was nothing untoward going on in the room.

I had given the kids what you might call a “suggested curfew” of 11:30. John returned to our room around that time and assured me that the kids were in their assigned rooms. I've never done formal bed checks on these quiz bowl trips, and fortunately I've never had to. I was off to sleep fairly quickly, and I got a much better night's sleep than I did last night.

SATURDAY, JUNE 11 → CHICAGOLAND

I'm normally up quite early when I travel, so it was a surprise to “sleep in” until 7:15. I woke up quite refreshed, quickly showered, and made my way down to the lobby. I had told the kids to meet there around 7:45, because our first game was at 8:00. They were there right on time—definitely a positive feature of this group.

Our 8:00 game was versus the Queensbury School, a small prep school from upstate New York [**“upstate” in this sense meaning pretty much anything north of the city**] The mother who came along said our kids looked tired in this game, and she wasn't wrong. (Perhaps I should have made that curfew 10:30.) Our kids were slow on the buzzers, and they made some stupid mistakes. Queensbury really wasn't that good, but they managed to squeak past us. Honestly, this was probably our worst game in the tournament.

After the game we lined up for breakfast. A middle aged Mexican woman appeared to have the job of keeping the breakfast line moving as slowly as possible. (That actually may literally be true. By having her there to slow things down, it kept people from crowding around the actual food.) In addition to taking the breakfast tickets we had been given at check-in, she wiped off plates and carefully arranged a plate, a napkin, and silverware on a tray. Each customer had to wait for her to arrange the tray before proceeding to the food.

While the manager's reception was a joke, breakfast at Embassy Suites really is an “added value bonus”. While most hotels have a spread of stale danish and plastic-covered muffins, Embassy Suites has a wonderful breakfast buffet. We could have all the eggs, ham, sausage, pancakes, hash browns, biscuits, hot and cold cereal, fruit salad, and yogurt we wanted, and we could even get made-to-order omelets or specialty eggs. They also had several types of coffee—each strong and flavorful—plus at least five choices of juice. I must confess that I went about as overboard at the breakfast buffet as the kids had at Wendy's. Part of that is that breakfast food is just about my favorite thing to eat, but I also have my father's sense that anything free should be hoarded.

We had to eat fast, because another game was scheduled at 9:00. This time we played St. Joseph's High School. When I saw the schedule ahead of time, I checked on the whereabouts of most of the schools we played. The majority of school names are unusual enough that I could limit things to one or two schools in the entire country and make a pretty good guess of which school we would be playing. There are literally hundreds of St. Josephs, though. This one turned out to be from South Bend, Indiana, home of Notre Dame University. While South Bend is a bit more urban than Algona, the team came across a lot like us. It was a good game, too. It went back and forth, and we ended up winning by a 100 point margin. I guess breakfast woke the kids up. (Strangely, it turned out that we were the only team St. Joseph's lost to—though I'd never describe them as the best team we played.) **[As I write this revision, I must confess I really don't remember any of the games from this particular quiz bowl tournament. Some of the games we've played at nationals have been memorable, but none of the school names I'm mentioning here rings even a faint bell.]**

The win put everybody in a good mood for the day. It also guaranteed we would not be embarrassed when we went back to Algona. The public school across town had also qualified for nationals this year, and they'd just gotten back from competing at the Washington, D.C. site of the tournament. The paper had made quite a big deal of their trip, noting that they had won one game (while barely mentioning that they'd lost five). **[The Algona paper pretty much prints whatever is sent to them, and there are times we've carefully worded our press releases to sound better than reality, too.]** No matter what happened from here on, we could at least say we'd tied that record. Boone was still winless at this point (they'd eventually win one game, too), so the kids could also feel superior to them.

The moderators for our winning game this morning were Chip Beall, organizer of the tournament, and Brad Rutter. You may know Rutter's name, since shortly before the tournament he beat Ken Jennings to win \$2 million in *Jeopardy's* “Ultimate Tournament of Champions”. That brought Rutter's total *Jeopardy* winnings to over \$3.5 million. Rutter had read for us at previous tournaments in New Orleans and Washington, and both times I wrote in these travelogues that he seemed very conceited and seemed to talk down to the kids. This year I had a much more positive opinion of him. Perhaps now that he has so much money he no longer has to put on airs to prove he's better than everyone else. At any rate, he was witty and quite down-to-earth this year—a most pleasant change. **[I think that statement about no longer having anything to prove is entirely true. Rutter—who recently got trounced in a *Jeopardy* match by an IBM computer—has read for us several times since this trip, and we've had generally positive interactions with him.]**

The kids changed (I require them to wear dressy clothes for competition **[though “dressy” was about as casual on this trip as it ever has been]**), and we then made our way to the parking ramp to fetch the suburban. That was easier said than done. I thought I had parked on the uppermost level of the ramp, so we took the elevator to the uppermost level. The door opened to reveal a completely empty cement floor. I went down a level to find another empty floor. It turned out that what I thought had been the top was actually three levels below that. It was in fact the top level where anyone staying at Embassy Suites could park, but Sofitel parking extended to the roof. There's cement blockades keeping one hotel's cars from mixing with the others, so I couldn't have gotten to the very top if I'd tried. We did eventually find the car, flashed our parking pass at the exit, and made our way to the Rosemont station park-and-ride. (We drove today because we'd be continuing on after we returned in the afternoon.)

It's about forty-five minutes from Rosemont to the Loop. I sat back and watched the scenery, but the kids spent the whole trip playing cards. Fortunately the train was relatively empty on a Saturday, so they didn't disturb much of anyone.

We got off at Washington and took the pedway about four blocks east to the Randolph Street Metra station. The pedway is basically the same thing as the skywalk network they have in Des Moines or Minneapolis, but entirely underground and not nearly so extensive. While it really isn't all that extensive, the kids were amazed that we were able to walk so far without coming to the surface. They were even more shocked when I told them there were single subway stations in both Europe and New York that were every bit as large as the distance we had just walked.

The last time I had been at Randolph Street station was several years ago. At the time it was probably the dumpiest downtown terminal in the city. The place is entirely underground, and at that point it looked like it hadn't changed much in fifty years—except for accumulating layers and layers of grime. Fortunately, the place has been entirely redone quite recently (I'd bet as part of the

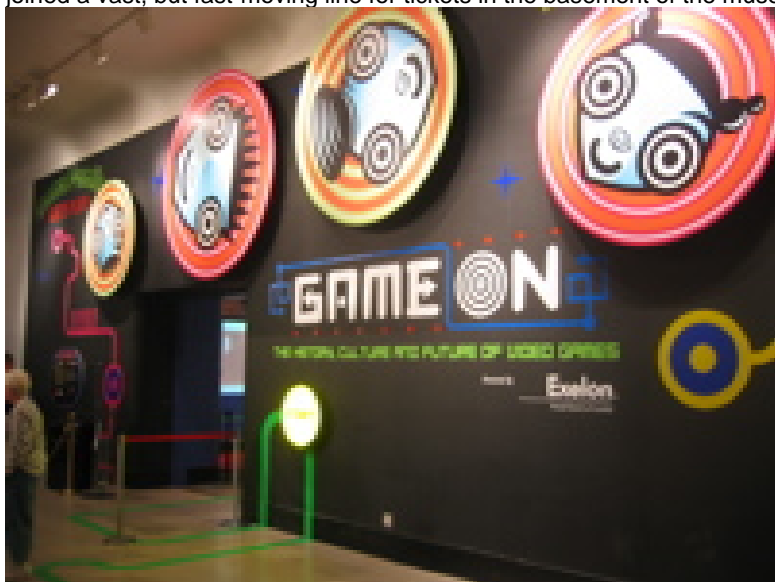
Millennium Park project that is directly above the station). It now looks very modern, though also somewhat odd. The fixtures are all stainless steel and glass, but the floor is covered in blue, with white stripes along it that make it look like the famous track at Drake.

To ride Metra (Chicago's suburban commuter trains) you need to buy a ticket from an incredibly complex machine. They had eight such machines in the station, but only one of them worked. To save time I bought all the tickets for the group—a ten ride and six singletons that would be good for the eight round-trips we would need. In theory the machine would accept \$1, \$5, \$10, and \$20 bills, as well as change. In practice it accepted only the very crispest bills and change that was inserted at just the right speed. Eventually we managed to get the tickets, though—just moments before our train was scheduled to leave.

Like at all downtown terminals, we had to figure out which platform we needed to go to. If I'd thought about it, I should have realized that whichever said "next train" would work for us, because we were only going a short distance south. Fortunately a Metra employee in front of us asked another worker about the "Blue Island train" (which was the one we wanted), and was directed to the appropriate platform. We followed, and we soon boarded the double-decker Metra coach.

The kids wanted to ride upstairs, though I assured them there really wasn't anything to see along the way (and I noticed on the return journey they didn't rush for a repeat view of the glorified gravel pit through which the train passes). We crawled southward (all Metra trains seem to crawl), eventually making our way to the station called 55-56-57. This station has also been recently renovated, with a new concrete platform to replace the rickety wood one I remembered. The platform exits into the same dreary vestibules at 55th and 57th Streets (there is no exit to 56th) that have been there for over a century, though. We made our way down grimy stairs to the bottom of the embankment on which Metra runs on the South side.

Our destination this morning was the Museum of Science and Industry, which is just a couple blocks east of the Metra line on 57th Street in Jackson Park. The grand steps at the front of the museum are still there, but you can't use them to enter these days. Instead pedestrians have to make a rather awkward entrance via the underground parking ramp. We eventually figured this out and joined a vast, but fast-moving line for tickets in the basement of the museum.



ABOVE: Website photo of the entrance to "Game On"

Museum of Science & Industry – Chicago, Illinois

BELOW: Xbox game controllers with unlabeled alien buttons



getting things to start up.]

Before the trip I had made a list of Chicago's many attractions and checked what special events and exhibitions would be in town when we were here. Out of the dozens of things on that list, one stood out to these high school boys—a special exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry called "Game On" that detailed the complete history of video games. This is one of numerous efforts by the museum to modernize and make themselves more interesting to today's youth (people for whom rockets and submarines are history, not science). Having seen the older exhibits several times, I figured I might as well see what was new, so I joined the kids in heading toward "Game On". While I can't say this was exactly my cup of tea, for high school boys it was heaven. The display covered several rooms and featured more than 100 games using original technology spanning the last thirty-five years—all set up so patrons could play each one. While I just browsed from one to another, the boys could literally have spent days exploring the intricacies of every game.

I must confess that I literally couldn't have played most of these games if I wanted to. Being just a couple years older than the game-addicted generation, the supposedly "user-friendly" controllers were completely alien to me. I actually tried a couple of them, but I couldn't even get them to start up. A few minutes later, I saw some of the kids deeply engrossed in those same games. The kids seem to master all these strangely shaped buttons and dials instinctively, but they sure make no sense to me. About the only games I actually managed to work had the clunkiest, most old-fashioned interface in gaming: a basic typewriter keyboard. **[I might do SLIGHTLY better on the games I see kids playing these days, most of which use a flat touch-screen interface on I-Pods or Android phones. A lot of the icons on those screens don't make much sense to me, though, so I still might have trouble**

One of those was "Pong", the world's first video game, where a dot is batted back and forth on a computer screen. I remember playing Pong on one of the earliest personal computers; I thought it was boring and stupid then, and I must say it hasn't changed. What's amazing is that kids still play this game—though today they use the tiny screens and tinier keys of their calculators and cell phones, which make for even cruder graphics and harder play (at least for a big-fingered guy like me). **[It does amaze me how dexterous some kids are with the tiny buttons and touch screens they have to deal with. I personally would prefer BIGGER technology, rather than smaller.]**

Much more interesting was one of those interactive text adventures that was popular in the '80s—where giving different responses changes the outcome of a story. I also tried out a fascinating three-dimensional electronic musical instrument that I “played” by moving my body into different positions and stepping around on a floor. Where my feet were determined what notes were played, while lasers scanned my body and changed the pitch and quality of the notes depending on how I was positioned. Another music-oriented game was played by pounding on bongo drums that had electronic sensors in them. Different animated animal characters appeared on a screen, and the player was supposed to drum with either the left hand, the right hand, or both—depending on what appeared on the screen, while trying to keep the beat with various songs that played through headphones. I have no idea how they scored that one, but apparently I did quite well; I guess I know left from right and have at least a bit of rhythm. **[Such “kinetic” games were the big craze last Christmas—that is, in 2010—though I have the feeling that now that it’s April most of them are gathering dust. I really can’t imagine them being entertaining over and over again.]**

It was interesting to see a variety of other games—like pachinko, the Japanese electronic pinball machines—and some of the popular games I hear the kids talking about. I could see what they were, even if I couldn’t figure out how to get them to work. They also had a large display on rating video games, something that was much in the news this summer when it was revealed that a game that was very popular among teenagers [**Grand Theft Auto**] had hidden obscene content that could be “unlocked” with codes that kids could easily get from the internet. All in all, Game On was a fascinating exhibit, though it did little to change my basic opinion on video games. To me they seem like little more than a waste of time, and I’m certainly glad to have grown up right before the craze hit. I’m sure if I were just a bit younger, I’d be wasting far too much of my time with the things.

Most of the kids took a couple of hours to tour Game On. I could easily have finished in less than half that time, but I managed to entertain myself for about an hour and a half. As the kids finished, they emptied out into one of the older (and to my mind more interesting) exhibits: an enormous model train set that is also a miniature model of the entire United States. We had to wait quite a while before the last of the boys was finished, but the train provided sufficient entertainment while we waited.

After Game On, it was time for lunch. There are several choices for food in the Museum of Science and Industry, but all of them are extremely expensive. We went to a sort of food court in the basement, that’s set up like some college cafeterias, with different “stations” for various kinds of food, all dumping into the same pay station/exit. I had a bowl of soup and a packaged tossed salad, which together cost about \$10. I don’t think any of the kids (who had full meals, and also bought drinks) got much change back from a \$20.

Nearby was a bank of vending machines, which we should have patronized instead. While pricier than most (about the same prices you’d find in airport vending machines), they were far cheaper than the sit-down fare. They also were exhibits in their own right, each a masterpiece of technology that took an easy task like selling a soft drink and made it impossibly complicated. I spent \$2 more for dessert. I bought an ice cream bar from one of those machines. This one had the coin and bill mechanism encased in clear plastic, so we could see what happened to your money once it went into the slot. The main part of the machine was a chest freezer like you’d see in many homes, sitting beneath a clear plastic dome. When a customer made a selection, a mechanical arm opened the lid of the freezer. Then the arm grabbed a hose and positioned it precisely on top of a stack of the selected product. With a loud whoosh a vacuum sucked an ice cream bar onto the end of the hose, and the hand moved the hose above the dispensing slot. The vacuum turned off, and the bar dropped out. It really made for quite a show. **[These “Rube Goldberg” vending machine have become fairly standard throughout America in the 21st Century. Supposedly the entertainment factor helps to increase sales.]**

Different kids were interested in seeing different things, so we split up in the afternoon. The group I was with saw a submarine that’s been one of the big attractions at the Museum of Science and Industry for decades, as well as a rather dull presentation on how petroleum is refined. The most interesting thing we saw was “Toymaker”, a working robotic factory located right in the museum. The factory makes rather complicated plastic tops called “gravitrons”. For \$3 you can buy one and have it engraved with your name or message. After deciding whether or not to purchase a gravitron, patrons walk past a long series of windows and peer in as the robots assemble the gadgets. The whole thing takes about fifteen minutes, and the process is about as complicated as those vending machines. That’s because each robot can only do a single small task at a time, so the assembly has to be broken down into an extremely lengthy series of tasks that are completed one at a time. Also, in addition to assembling all the tops, they also have to **dis-**assemble the 75% or so they don’t sell so they can repeat the process over and over again. My father would have loved this exhibit, and I was certainly far more fascinated by it than by the video games.

We whizzed through a number of other exhibits, but most we left unseen. I could easily spend days at the Museum of Science and Industry, and I was pleased the kids also found it fascinating. Several wished they had more time here.

We walked back to the 55-56-57 Metra station, arriving a few minutes before a northbound train was scheduled to show up. Unfortunately there was some delay, and it turned out two southbound trains passed before our train arrived—about fifteen minutes late. We ran express all the way downtown, but we still showed up about ten minutes behind schedule. The pedway was closed now, so we walked above ground back to the subway. That gave me a chance to point out several points of interest in the Loop, such as the Picasso sculpture in Daley Plaza.

We had entered the subway and I heard a train about to arrive when one of the kids announced he had to use the restroom. It’s about 45 minutes from the Loop to Rosemont, and there aren’t a lot of good choices for a “potty break” between the two. So we went back upstairs, and I marched the kids over to the elegant Marshall Field’s store. Most of the kids gawked at the gilding and the ornate Tiffany ceiling while the boy in need did his duty on century-old porcelain.

Our ‘L’ passes would not allow us to enter the same station twice within a half hour period, so we had to walk to a different station to enter the subway. This time we just missed a train, so we had about a ten-minute wait for another one. All together just going to the restroom killed better than half an hour. The kids played cards again as we had an uneventful ride back to Rosemont.

We have often gone to sports events on these quiz bowl trips, and the boys were interested in doing something along that line on this one. Once the dates were set, I checked around for what was on. The hot ticket in town was the Cubs vs. the Boston Red Sox, who last year had won the World Series for the first time in a century. (This year the hometown White Sox would break their own similar curse.) Tickets to the entire Cubs/Red Sox series were sold out within four hours of when they went on sale. Both available and affordable were tickets to the Schaumburg Flyers, a minor league (actually independent league, which is sort of below minor league) baseball team in the northwest suburbs. I had gotten tickets for tonight's game, and the kids were as excited by the fact that it was supposed to be "Dollar Dog Night" (hot dogs at about a third the normal price) as by the prospect of going to the game itself.

Most baseball games start around 7:00, and if this one had been at that time, things would have been good. Instead, the start time was 6:15pm **[which, for some reason, is a fairly common time on Saturdays—I'd think they'd do later on the weekend rather than earlier]**. We'd have probably made that, too, if it weren't for the detour to Marshall Field's restroom. As it was, it was about 5:30 when we got back to Rosemont. As the crow flies, the ballpark was just a few miles west of the park-and-ride, but between us and it was O'Hare Airport. I might have tried the Northwest Tollway to get there, but I knew that the street we wanted did not have a westbound exit off of the tollway. (Most of the tollway entrances and exits are one-way, designed to move commuters easily, but not to get from here to there.) Before leaving I had looked up directions to the ballpark on the online Yahoo maps service. The directions included fourteen different turns and a traffic circle, and said it should take about 47 minutes to go a distance of 13.4 miles. Yahoo maps usually overestimates the time it takes to get somewhere. On rural two-lane highways, for instance, they seem to travel at about 45 miles per hour, while 55 is legal and traffic usually goes over 60. In this particular case, though, it took even longer than Yahoo predicted. We left Rosemont at 5:30, but it was close to 6:45 by the time we got to the border of Schaumburg and Hoffman Estates, where Alexian Field is located. There may well be some quicker way, but I didn't have a good enough map of the northwest suburbs to figure it out. (I actually have a Cook County atlas that details every single street, but I had lent it to the family that came along with us, who spent the day visiting relatives in the south suburbs.)

The stadium is surrounded by an enormous lot that on weekdays serves as a park-and-ride for one of the Metra lines. (We could have taken Metra to the game, but the train ride would have cost more than our baseball tickets. **[Actually, that's false. Then and now Metra had a weekend pass that allowed unlimited rides for \$5. It probably would have been awkward getting to the correct station to head out to Schaumburg at the appropriate time, but it wouldn't have been expensive.]**) The lot was entirely full. I found a place of questionable legality on the end of one of the aisles, taking the space on the theory that someone would have to really work to tow a suburban. One of the boys picked up a foul ball that had landed in the parking lot as we rushed past a sea of other SUVs to the ballpark entrance. It was the bottom of the third inning when we arrived.

The kids were greeted by bad news: they had changed their promotion schedule and tonight would **not** be dollar dog night. Instead they were honoring area Little League kids—giving them free tickets, but more than making their money back by charging full prices for the concessions. All those Little Leaguers meant it was **CROWDED** at the ballpark. (In fact, it was their second largest crowd ever.) The kids were also rather annoying. Among other things, the seats our tickets were for were full of Little Leaguers when we got there, and they acted like it was some great imposition when we asked them to move to their assigned seats.

This was a boring game—not much else that can be said about it. Players nobody cares about went through the motions without doing anything spectacular. The ballpark was beautiful, but not especially memorable. I had a very tasty hotdog, while most of the kids boycotted the food on principal. The second the last out was made we made a dash for the parking lot. The kids were not disappointed to have come to the game (and there wasn't a lot else they'd have been doing tonight otherwise), but it was hardly a highlight of the trip. **[The Schaumburg Flyers, by the way, were formerly the Thunder Bay Whiskey Jacks. I saw the team play in their dilapidated old stadium years ago when I made a trip around Lake Superior. Honestly I found the fame in Thunder Bay more entertaining than this one. There's a trend toward suburban ballparks these days, but they all look the same and the games in such parks seem rather boring.]**

We got out of the parking lot quickly and uneventfully and started re-tracing our tracks back to Rosemont (even more complicated, since many of the roads we had come in on had been one way). Since most of the kids hadn't eaten since lunch, they all wanted to stop somewhere for a bite. We ended up at an Arby's right next to Woodfield Mall. Their sign was turned off, but the place was lit up inside like a Christmas tree. Opening the door confirmed they were indeed open, so we all went inside.



Arby's is rarely a place I'd choose to eat, but the kids were delighted. They had a promotion that allowed customers to "mix and match" five items for \$5.95. **[That's become a perennial promotion, though the price at many locations is now \$6.95.]** Everything on Arby's menu costs at least \$1.50 normally, and many of the things in the promotion were over \$2, so the savings was substantial. The sale included all of their small sandwiches, as well as fries, onion rings, shakes, and desserts. **[Now that the value menu has become permanent, the choices are more limited.]** Again the kids all over-ate. A couple of the kids shared things, but most got five items a piece. One actually ordered ten different items, eating seven now and saving just three for later.

There were only two employees at the Woodfield Arby's tonight, an Asian teenager who spoke English with a thick accent and a middle-aged Hispanic woman with the most questionable of English skills. It was quite an undertaking to first get the Asian kid to understand what our guys wanted to order and then for him to get the Mexican woman to understand what she had to cook. Somehow the kids eventually got their food.

We drove back to Rosemont and parked the suburban back at the top of the Embassy Suites section of the ramp. It was about 11:00 when we got back, and I told the kids they should be in bed around midnight. They spent the hour playing cards in the seniors' room while I listened to the news on WBBM radio back in my room. Eventually it was time to call this day to a close.

SUNDAY, JUNE 12 → CHICAGOLAND

We were up a little bit later today and had a more leisurely breakfast. Then we played another game, this time versus Blue Valley High School, a large suburban school from the Kansas City area. This was a back and forth game, a lot like the St. Joseph's game yesterday, but this time we ended up on the short side—losing by the equivalent of a single question.

I always see to it when I travel with students over a weekend that we find a church and go to mass. Most of the nearby churches didn't fit well into our schedule, with masses either very early or very late. I knew that Holy Name Cathedral ran virtually continuous masses on Sunday, so all of us (including the accompanying family) hopped on the 'L' and headed downtown.

Whenever I travel with students I also make a point of using public transportation. Partially that's because I generally prefer taking the train to driving, but it's also because I think it's a good learning experience for the kids. Fortunately almost all the kids I've traveled with have also seen it as a bit of an adventure and found it rather fun. That was certainly how the kids on this trip saw taking the 'L'. It was obviously **not** how the accompanying mother saw things, though. She complained about the small bit of litter, looked at the other passengers (heavy on Blacks and Hispanics, but almost without exception just families heading to church) suspiciously, went on and on about how grimy residential Chicago looked and how unsafe it must be (the area we were going through is rapidly gentrifying and is one of the safest parts of the city), and went out of her way to make us see that she was feeling every little jolt in the ride. She gave more than a few glances toward her son, and I think she was surprised that he wasn't mugged or accosted on the trip. In fact nothing remotely dangerous happened on this trip. (It's interesting, though, that the day before I wrote this her son played in the state football tournament at the UNI-Dome, and he had money stolen out of his wallet in the locker room while he was playing the big game. I don't wish bad things on anyone, but I hope "mom" learns something from the fact that those "scary" people of color in the big city didn't harm her son a bit; he had his money stolen in a "safe" suburban college town full of "normal" white people.)

We took the blue line to the Washington stop in the Loop, where we took an underground passageway that even I find a bit creepy to transfer to the red line. **[The transfer tunnel has since been cleaned up a lot.]** Time was a factor, though, and that was by far the quickest way to make the transfer. The red line platform at Washington was **HOT**. None of the downtown stations is air conditioned, but this one seemed unusually warm. We sweltered for about ten minutes as we waited for a train to come. Once one did we had a short hop north to the recently renovated Chicago Avenue station, which is just off the Magnificent Mile of North Michigan Avenue and literally underneath Holy Name Cathedral.

I wasn't positive when mass would start, but I knew it would be either 10:45, 11:00, 11:15, or 11:30 were good bets for the main morning service. I told the kids to wait at a McDonalds around the corner from the cathedral entrance, while I ran to see what the mass schedule was. IT turned out we were just in time for 11:00 mass (the next one was at 12:15), so we rushed and got in right at the end of the prelude.

The church was quite crowded, and we ended up sitting in three different groups, all toward the back right corner of the cavernous church. We were barely in time for the service, but we were not even remotely close to being the latest there. People continued entering until well after the homily. As they always do in Catholic churches, the latecomers got the good seats on the aisle, while everyone else scrunched together in the middle of the pews.

Surprisingly for the main mass at the cathedral, this was not a very musical mass. We only sang two hymns (neither in any way memorable), and almost all the responses were spoken. That made it move much quicker than a late morning mass often does. Communion also went surprisingly quickly, even though there were only a handful of distributors to serve the enormous throng.

The homily had little to do with any of the readings. It was mostly about what makes a good bishop—the topic appropriate because the National Council of Bishops was meeting in Chicago this coming week. That stood out to all of us from Garrigan because for the past year and a half we haven't had a bishop in the Diocese of Sioux City. (Just this week the new Pope finally appointed a bishop who is expected to take over in 2006.) As a Protestant whose livelihood depends on the Catholic hierarchy functioning properly, I can tell you that all those things today's priest told us were a bishop's duties seem to have been done as well or better by the lay people and "peon" priests and nuns who stepped up when our old bishop was promoted to head the Houston Archdiocese. (About the only thing that can't be done without a bishop is ordination, but I don't think we've had a new priest in the diocese since one of my former students became "Father Nick" back at the turn of the millennium.) Symbolism is extremely important in Catholicism, though,

and not having a bishop to symbolically lead the diocese—particularly when it dragged on for almost two years—made the people in northwest Iowa feel more than a bit forgotten.

The family that had accompanied us left the group after church. They wanted to visit the Hard Rock Café, something most of the boys had little interest in doing (assuming correctly that it was pretty much the same as Hard Rock Cafes they had seen on music or sports trips in the past.) I gave them directions to Chicago's Hard Rock (which is just a few blocks south of the Cathedral) and directions for how to take the 'L' back to Rosemont. (They asked about other alternatives, but agreed the 'L' was probably the best bet when I noted a cab would likely run \$50.)

They set off to the south, and the boys and I headed east to Michigan Avenue. We passed a brand new building that is one of the tallest in the city. Apparently it's mainly a hotel, but it houses extremely ritzy shops (like clothing stores with bouncers at the door) at street level. We walked past the famous old Chicago watertower and on north to the John Hancock Center. Several of the kids wanted to go up in a tall building, and I knew Hancock was cheaper than the Sears Tower, had a better view, and would have less of a line than its taller brother to the south.

In fact there was no line at all. We paid our money, quickly made our way through security, and proceeded up the elevators to the observation deck. It was a bit foggy over the lake, but the view was decent. The kids also enjoyed walking out on the open-air passageway they have. When we entered, they snapped a group picture, which I knew they'd try to sell us in the gift shop. The picture (with our group digitally placed in front of a skyline that includes the Hancock building itself) turned out to be quite nice, and the price wasn't exorbitant, so I bought a set that included one large print (that ended up on our tournament participation trophy) and a wallet size copy for each of the kids as my gift to them. It's the first time I've ever bought one of those stupid tourist photos, but this one did make a nice memento.

The kids said they wanted to buy hotdogs from a vendor cart. There are almost no pushcart vendors in Chicago, so they had to settle instead for one of the ubiquitous hole-in-the-wall hotdog stands that are scattered around the city. **[It turns out Chicago health regulations forbid vendor carts. They've also made the food trucks that have become ubiquitous in other cities almost unheard of in Chicago. Potential food vendors have appealed several times to have the regulations relaxed, but if anything they have been strengthened.]** We ate at a place called Downtown Dogs that said it had "the best classic Chicago-style hot dogs". Having eaten more than my fair share of them, I knew a classic Chicago dog is a boiled jumbo frankfurter with neon green relish (it looks like radioactive waste), a pickle spear, chopped onion, tomato, "sport peppers" (little spicy pickled peppers), yellow mustard, and celery salt on a poppy seed bun. I've described it elsewhere as "spicy salad on a bun". A hot dog "with everything" is assumed to have those, and only those, accoutrements. Anything else—more or less—needs to be specifically specified. I told the kids this before we entered, and they ordered like pros—though every one of them gave himself away as a tourist by committing the anti-Chicago sin of ordering his hot dog with ketchup.



Sign illustrating the classic Chicago style hot dog

I did have the classic Chicago dog, and while it would be stretching it to say this was “the best”, it was quite good. (I’d actually say the best Chicago dogs I’ve had were at the Metrodome in Minneapolis and—later this summer—at Bricktown Ballpark in Oklahoma City, where they did the Chicago condiments, but grilled instead of boiling the franks. **[The Wiener’s Circle on Clark Street in Chicago also grills their dogs, and probably has what I’d call the best hot dogs in the city.]**) Downtown Dogs actually departed from another strict Chicago dog rule, in that they didn’t serve their dogs in a bed of fries, whose price was included in that of the dog. Instead the \$2.89 dogs included a bag of your choice of potato chips. I chose Vitner’s (the Chicago brand) salt and vinegar chips.

We made our way back to the Chicago Avenue red line station and had a long wait for a southbound train. We then had an even longer wait for a northbound blue line train. CTA had just recently revised their Sunday schedule as a cost-saving measure, offering a bare minimum of service. Red line trains used to come every 8 minutes on Sundays and as often as every 3 minutes at rush hour. The wait for a blue line train was rarely more than 10 minutes, and they were about every 5 at rush hour. The rush hour trains are still frequent, but Sunday service is now every 15 minutes on the red line and every 18 minutes for blue. Other lines have similarly reduced service. The Sunday change is apparently permanent, but during the summer they’re temporarily going to temporarily institute similar changes on all but the rush hour service on weekdays. The weekday changes don’t really save any significant amount of money; they’re basically using them to call attention to their financial problems. They want people to realize that if the ‘L’ is to provide efficient service at an affordable fare, it has to be subsidized. As I write this in the fall, they’ve just approved a budget for 2006 which includes both a fare increase (to a base fare of \$2, which matches the East Coast cities) and a return to normal frequencies of service. How large their subsidy should be is still a hot potato for the Illinois legislature. **[Pretty much every year at budget time there’s a “crisis plan” for minimal CTA service. Sometimes, as in 2005, they actually enact that schedule (only to remove it later), while other times it’s just a threat. It always bothers me that people seem to think public transit is a luxury, while they spend tax money freely on things that to my mind are far less essential.]**

The reduced ‘L’ service meant it was 3:00 when we got back to the Embassy Suites, which left the kids barely enough time to get cleaned up for a 3:30 game. They all made it downstairs on time, but I could tell everyone had rushed. Our game was against Socorro High School. When we’d gotten the schedule ahead of time, I had assumed the school was from a college town of that name in New Mexico. That was not the case, though. In fact they were from El Paso, Texas. Socorro was a very atypical team for the National Academic Championships. Most of the schools here are wealthy suburban schools (probably 50% of the teams), prep schools (often boarding schools, about 25%), or parochial schools (the other 25%). While Garrigan is smaller than and not nearly so rich as most of our competitors, we do at least fit one of the stereotypes. Our opponents today were from a public high school (strange because the name “Socorro” refers to Our Lady of Perpetual Help) from an obviously poor inner city neighborhood. The team had five Hispanic people (probably the only Hispanic students competing on any team in the tournament) and one black kid. Four of the six were female, making them the only team in the tournament that had more than a “token girl” on the team. The team was winless coming into this match, and they had all but assumed they’d be losing this one too. In fact they’d written the names of *Star Wars* characters on their nameplates as a joke, showing their frustration with how they’d done in the tournament. If Socorro had been playing anyone but us, I’d have been rooting for them

As it was, though, I was annoyed that Socorro’s only win was over us—by the narrowest of margins and for shakiest of reasons. First, one of our team members answered a question correctly but hadn’t been properly recognized when he answered it. Not only did we not get those points, but Socorro got them and points from an accompanying bonus. That bonus turned out to be about Spanish vocabulary, a topic that—needless to say—this Mexican team did extremely well in. Later in the game another of our players buzzed in just slightly too early and missed an easy question that Socorro got. The corresponding bonus was about Texas history, and again our opponents swept the category. There were two other questions in this game—one about the Mexican flag and another about Mexican food—that were easy for our Hispanic opponents. I’m not complaining about the questions (which really are luck of the draw) and nothing wrong happened in this game that I could have complained about, but it was really frustrating to know that if even one of those questions had gone the other way, we would have won this game.

It was not really a surprise that the family who had traveled with us was not back for the Socorro game, but I was a bit worried when they had still not showed up for our final game at 5:30. We couldn’t wait for them to show, though, so we went to play our game. This time our opponent was Byram Hills High School. Byram Hills is located in Armonk, New York, the headquarters town for IBM. It’s the sort of place you’d expect to educate the spoiled brat sons and daughters of engineers and corporate executives. They had dominated every team they’d played so far, and when they walked in the room, they came across as the most arrogant people you could imagine. We were certainly the underdog in this game, but if there was any team our guys wanted to beat it was this one.

... And we almost pulled it off. In fact, you could tell we gave Byram Hills the scare of their lives. Our kids got on a roll for the first several questions, and before long we leading 60 – 0. From there things went back and forth, but we continued to hang on to a narrow lead throughout the toss-up and bonus rounds. I could see on our opponents’ faces that this wasn’t the kind of game they were used to. They ended up lucking out in the lightning round—they picked an easy category, and we picked a hard one—and that’s what made the difference. They increased the lead in the “Stump the Experts” round, but the lightning round is what changed the momentum. If our kids had picked a different category, we might well have come away with the upset. When the game ended the kids from Byram Hills just left the room. They didn’t shake hands or let us offer them congratulations; they just left. They went on to win the Chicago phase of the tournament, and I’m pretty sure we gave them the closest game they had all weekend.

The kids, who seemed obsessed with food, wanted to try Chicago-style pizza. I looked through the city guide in the hotel room for possibilities and decided a good bet would be Giordano’s, a chain with locations throughout Chicagoland. They even had a location in Rosemont, but the boys wanted to go back into the city again rather than just somewhere near the hotel. So we hopped back on the ‘L’ and headed downtown. We got off at Jackson, which is the not the best part of the Loop during business hours and more than a bit seedy on a Sunday night. We made our way past a number of panhandlers, homeless people, and guys offering us directions we didn’t want. Giordano’s was supposed to be located on Wabash (the eastern edge of the Loop), just north of Jackson. We found the address quickly enough, but that building no longer housed a pizza place, but rather wholesale office supplies. So much for plan “A”.

Fortunately, just up the street in the Palmer House Hilton building there was a pleasant place called the Exchequer that advertised that they served Chicago-style pizza. Though more a bar than a restaurant, it was still a place that welcomed high school kids. It was, however, a place that catered heavily to tourists. Their walls were decorated with autographed caricatures of the many famous people who had eaten there. Most were people neither I nor the kids recognized, but a few names did stand out. The kids noticed Hulk Hogan, one of the first of the new era of professional wrestlers, while I was impressed by Clark Gable. I was betting a place frequented by famous people wouldn't be cheap, and this certainly wasn't. Particularly overpriced were the appetizers, though I'm glad we splurged to get a sampler tray—given that we had to wait a full hour for the pizza to cook. **[This is apparently a standard wait for Chicago deep dish pizza.]** The sampler tray I ordered included sixteen items: four chicken wings, four cheese planks, four barbecued ribs, and four individual onion rings. The cost—\$17.95, or more than a dollar per item. The pizza was also overpriced, but not quite so ridiculous.

The kids played cards while we waited for our food. I mostly watched the other customers in the place. There was an amusing couple in direct view of me. The woman ate nothing but a small salad, but the man finished an entire Chicago-style pizza (small, but still around \$20 and probably about 2,500 calories **[actually likely more than that]**) himself. Surprisingly, the guy was not at all fat. He contrasted with the many police officers in the place, most of whom furthered the old stereotype of the fat Irish cop.



Website photo of Chicago deep dish pizza

Apparently it really does take an hour to cook Chicago-style pizza, which is unique and different from any other pizza. It's deeper than most deep dish pizzas, made in a three-inch high cast iron vessel that resembles a skillet more than a pizza pan. Apparently the cooking dish is filled with a generous amount of vegetable oil, and then dough is pressed along the bottom and up the sides. The dough is lined with slice after slice of mozzarella and provolone cheese. On top of that is a layer of spicy tomato sauce, followed by meat, followed by more cheese, more sauce, more meat, and still more sauce. The very top is sprinkled lightly with Parmesan cheese. It's weird to have most of the cheese at the bottom rather than the top of the pizza, but apparently that keeps the cheese from burning while the thick crust bakes. The final product is served in relatively small pieces, each of which is practically a meal in itself. (Apparently a single slice has between 500 and 1,000 calories.) We each got two slices, and with the appetizers and pop that made a very substantial meal.

I personally didn't think the pizza was anything special, but then I'm normally a thin crust guy. **[I'm actually not a very big pizza eater in any case.]** If I wanted bread, I'd order bread; to me pizza is about toppings and broiled cheese. The kids liked it, and they didn't seem to think the cost of the meal (which worked out to be about \$12 each, including tax and tip) was particularly out of line. The bill could easily have been **much** higher. At the end of the meal, the waitress gave me the wrong check by mistake. I got the bill for a table of five, who had eaten steaks and seafood. Their food alone was \$170; with drinks and tax it approached \$250, and with a tip it would be in the \$300 range. It took awhile to get the correct bill, but I'm certainly glad I didn't have to pay that one.

I knew that sunset would only make Jackson Avenue seedier, so instead of heading back to the subway, I ushered the kids to the Adams elevated station, which was less than half a block away and well lighted. A brown line train arrived quickly, and we took it around the Loop to the big mixmaster at Clark & Lake. This huge transfer station is located in two office buildings, two long series of escalators connect the elevated lines with the subway. The kids had a bit more fun on the escalators than they probably should have, but they weren't out of line, nor did they hold up anybody.

We had another long wait for the blue line and, once a train came, another uneventful ride back to Rosemont. The 'L' passes we had were three-day passes, which would expire tomorrow. I had also purchased one-day passes for the kids who would still be here tomorrow, but I lent those to the family so they could go to church with us this morning. There is a tourist pass vending machine at Rosemont, but it was broken, so I sent the kids back to the hotel with John and went onward to O'Hare to try to pick up some additional passes myself. Unfortunately the pass machine at O'Hare was also broken, so I ended up just buying a regular transit card for the additional fare we would need. It was quite late when I made it back to the hotel, and before long everyone was asleep.

MONDAY, JUNE 13 → CHICAGOLAND

The two baseball players in our group were scheduled to play in a game back in Iowa tonight, so they were leaving this morning with the family who had accompanied us. They wanted to leave before rush hour, so I was up around 6:15 to see them off. (As it turned out, the game tonight was rained out, so they ended up going home early for nothing.)

I didn't really want to disturb John, so I set off exploring for a while on my own. I walked over to the Rosemont 'L' station and bought some coffee and doughnut holes ("Munchkins") at a Dunkin' Donuts in the lobby there. I then took a train a few stops inbound to Irving Park. This stop has two entrances, one at the boulevard for which it is named and the other on Pulaski Road, about four blocks southeast of the main entrance. An enormously long **[nearly half a mile]** and very narrow platform runs between the two halves of the elevated Kennedy Expressway between the two entrances. The trains stop near the Irving Park end, and whenever I'd been here before, that's where I'd gotten off. Irving Park is a colorful neighborhood, though not a place I'd probably take the high school

students. Formerly east European, it's now a mostly Hispanic neighborhood, and it's never been especially wealthy. It's a very gritty, inner-city looking neighborhood, and while it's not particularly dangerous, there's also nothing "touristy" to see here. When I've gone here before it was generally to eat at a neighborhood pancake house or to shop at a nearby Sears store. In the process I enjoyed a bit of urban flavor.

Today, mostly on a whim, I decided to get off at the Pulaski end of the Irving Park station. After a long walk down the platform, I emerged in a very different neighborhood from Irving Park. The Pulaski exit leads to a truly lovely residential area. The homes are the same brick rowhouses and duplexes you see all over Chicago, but these have been kept in immaculate condition. While none had a real side yard, the front yards were nicely mowed and shaded by grand trees. The owners appeared to be upper middle-class people of all races whose children were headed to school as I walked around. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the neighborhood, but it made for a very pleasant walk.

I walked in the outline of a triangle, eventually making my way back to the Irving Park entrance to the station. Then I then caught a train back to Rosemont and got back to join the kids for a late breakfast (around 10:00) at the hotel.

We didn't have any specific plans for today, so I asked the kids for input on what they wanted to do. A couple of them had noticed a Tower Records near the Exchequer and wanted to go there. We took the blue line downtown. On a weekday the train was far too crowded for the kids to play cards, but they didn't complain. I browsed through Tower Records quickly, but most of the kids seemed to dawdle over every CD, every video, and every poster. The store covered three floors of a long, narrow building, and I think some of the boys could have spent two hours on each floor. As it was it was well after noon when we finally left.

When we had eaten at the hot dog stand yesterday, I had described Demon Dogs (a hot dog place near DePaul University that was owned by the rock group Chicago and decorated with their memorabilia) to the kids. They thought that might be an interesting place to have lunch, so we took the red line north to Fullerton and got off there. The kids were amazed at how cheap the place was—for \$2.50 you can get a filling meal of hot dog, fries, and a drink. The place is just about the cheapest restaurant in Chicago. That's partially because its wealthy owners sell the food virtually at cost and partially because it is housed in a ratty building owned by the Chicago Transit Authority and situated directly underneath the 'L' tracks.



Demon Dogs sign on Fullerton Avenue – Chicago, Illinois

as of July 1, the place is no more. While neighborhood residents wanted the place declared a historic landmark (a status the main entrance to Fullerton station across the street has), it's probably correct that the judge denied that request. The Demon Dogs building was old and dumpy, but not really historic, and a quirky hot dog stand—even if it is owned by famous people—probably shouldn't stand in the way of progress. Even so, I must say I'll miss Demon Dogs. **[The renovation is now done, and I must say the new Fullerton station is much more pleasant than it was before. Without Demon Dogs there, though, there's not a lot of reason for me to exit at Fullerton.]**



Wrigley Field from Addison 'L' station

I was disappointed to find that, after several years of litigation, Demon Dogs would finally be closing its doors just a couple weeks after our visit here. The CTA is in the process of renovating all the stations on the brown line (which shares Fullerton with the red line), modernizing them and extending their platforms so they can serve longer trains. The Demon Dogs building will be replaced with a new elevator that will make the Fullerton station accessible to the handicapped. While the Chicago musicians could probably afford to lease space in any of the ritzy buildings in this highly gentrified neighborhood, it's one of those things that just wouldn't be the same in a different location. The seediness of that shack under the Fullerton 'L' was part of the charm of Demon Dogs, but

Several of the boys wanted to say they'd been to Wrigley Field, even if they couldn't see a game there, so we next took the 'L' up to Addison, which is just east of the famous ballpark. We walked all around the old stadium, and the kids peaked in through all the gates. I've really never cared much for the place (it is historic, but it's not really that nice of a ballpark), but the boys were obviously pleased to say they'd seen it. While we were there, we called the Algona radio station to let them know how we'd done. While it wasn't the best report, at least we could say we'd won one game and had several other close matches.

Some of the kids wanted to go shopping, while others wanted to do a bit more sightseeing. We took the 'L' back to Chicago Avenue, and I led the kids over to Water Tower Place, the big vertical mall that was the prototype for downtown urban renewal in other cities. The kids split up, and we agreed to meet back in the lobby of the mall at 4:30pm. I had no interest whatsoever in Water Tower Place (which features precisely the same stores you'd find in any major mall in America), so I went back to the Loop and picked up a few things at the Marshall Field's (which is apparently soon to become a Macy's, abandoning a name that's been on Chicago's great cathedral of commerce for a century and a quarter). I also bought some pants at the new Sears store on State Street and picked up a host of free papers from the newsboxes along the way. I walked all the way back to Water Tower Place (about two miles north of the Loop), took a seat on a marble slab in the lobby, and waited for the group to re-assemble.

One of the boys quickly joined me, and he informed me that the others were across the street at an enormous Borders bookstore. (Actually they'd made their way down much of Michigan Avenue, realizing—as I'd told them in advance—that there really wasn't much to see or do at Water Tower.) There was still about forty-five minutes before we'd agreed to meet back, so we had a long wait. We spent most of the time watching people go up and down the grand escalator that leads from the lobby to the actual stores. Between the "up" and "down" escalators is an artificial waterfall that also acts as a fountain, randomly spraying squirts of water upward. Almost everyone who takes that escalator feels compelled to put their hand in the middle and get sprayed by the fountain. At one point I counted a hundred people going up the escalator, and eighty-seven of them put their hands out to get sprayed. (By the way, it doesn't take very long for a hundred people to go up the escalator. This is a very busy mall, with about twenty people heading up each minute.)

There was an Oriental restaurant tucked into a corner of the lobby with the name "Wow Bao". This is apparently a chain (something I know from the fact that they're part of the "scrip" program we have at Garrigan), but I'd never seen one before. A sign by the place advertised "HOMEMADE GINGER ALE", and I thought it might be interesting to try some. To make the stuff they put a scoop of sugar and a dollop of thick syrup in a cup and sprayed seltzer water on top of it. They shook the thing up, added a few ice cubes, and served it. It wasn't bad, though it was certainly like no ginger ale I'd ever had. The spice was definitely hotter and more peppery than commercial ginger ales, and it was almost too sweet. I'd never order one again, but nursing this one filled the time nicely.

The rest of the boys arrived right at 4:30, and we made our way back to the 'L'. It was right at rush hour, so it was standing room only all the way back to Rosemont. The kids had been saving all the change they acquired throughout the trip. Tonight they ordered pizza and used those coins to pay for the feast. I wasn't there when the delivery boy showed up, but apparently he did carefully count everything—and he ended up with about a 50% tip for his troubles. **[Our captain was a pizza delivery boy himself, and I gather from him paying with coins was a fairly common occurrence.]** I joined the kids in the seniors' room for dinner.

One of the kids had brought along a handful of DVDs, and they watched one of them as they ate. The movie they chose was *Bowling for Columbine*, the film about school shootings that first brought attention to liberal director Michael Moore. Our captain is a big Michael Moore fan, and while not all of the group agreed with the film's politics, everybody was able to enjoy the movie. I personally agree with most of Moore's politics, but I thought his more famous film *Fahrenheit 9/11* was rather blatant propaganda. *Bowling for Columbine* is much more subtle, and because of that I think it's a much better movie. While some think it's an argument for gun control (and in the process of making it, Moore and victims of the Columbine High School shooting convinced K-Mart to stop selling guns and ammunition), Moore's real argument is against needless fear. He compares the U.S. with Canada and notes that Canada has the same ethnic minorities as the States, has more people in poverty, and has just as many guns per capita, but our neighbor to the north has almost no violent crime. The difference, Moore argues, is fear. Canadians aren't afraid of each other. In contrast the American media and government are constantly trying to scare Americans (quite a change from "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"). The background argument of the film is that it's that fear that leads to much of the violence in our country. I don't know if that's true or not, but I definitely agree that the President and the TV networks seem to want us to live in fear—and I definitely don't think that's healthy. While I don't encourage anyone to go around inviting problems, I think it's silly to always be afraid. I try to use common sense myself and trust in the basic good of people. For the most part that's worked out okay.

The kids watched another video after *Bowling for Columbine*. I went back to my room, read through all the papers I had collected, and listened to the news as it tried to scare me into thinking the world was a truly horrible place.

TUESDAY, JUNE 14 → ROSEMONT, ILLINOIS TO ALGONA, IOWA

I was up comparatively late this morning, around 7:30. Neither John nor the kids were up yet, so again I set out exploring. This time I caught a southbound train and got off at Logan Square, a subway station in a poor Hispanic neighborhood on the northwest side. I walked down Milwaukee Avenue, the main drag in Chicago's "Little Mexico" past the "Discount Megamall" where virtually everything is for sale and all the way to the next station, California. En route I picked up all the Hispanic papers, which I had fun thumbing through this evening. It was an interesting walk, and it woke me up for the day.

Back at the hotel, the kids packed up slowly. That was okay, since I wanted to wait until after the rush hour traffic was over to set off for the day. We checked out and were on our way around 10:30am.



Discount Megamall on Milwaukee Avenue – Chicago, Illinois

We had a fairly easy ride up the tollway. Even in Wisconsin traffic was lighter than on the way down. We stopped for lunch at a truckstop in Sun Prairie, just north of Madison, that featured a combination Subway and Taco Bell. John drove after that, traveling through on-and-off rain showers all the way to the Minnesota border. The kids were all either asleep or lost in their headphones as we drove.

We stopped for a break at a rest area just inside Minnesota. Beyond there it rained heavily, to the point that it was sometimes hard to see things on the highway. We sped westward, though, and before long we turned south again into the construction zone of I-35. We stopped one last time at McDonalds in Clear Lake, mostly because one of the kids needed to use the restroom. Then, since I was dead tired, John drove the rest of the way back to Algona. It was early evening when we got there, and we quickly got dispersed for the end of our latest quiz bowl adventure.