

# BACK TO NEW ORLEANS WITH THE QUIZ BOWL TEAM 2002



The quiz bowl team running toward the streetcar stop on the campus of Loyola University in New Orleans  
[This was our “official” photo for this trip, and it still graces a photo plaque at school today.]

[UPDATE: September, 2009—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.]

[It had been a LONG time since I’d looked at this travelogue, and my first reaction when I got it out for editing was that it was extremely short. My big trip in 2002 was to Europe, and I the write-up I gave to New Orleans wasn’t even remotely in the same league. I have a feeling the pictures I insert will take up more space than the text.]

It has been a few years since our quiz bowl team traveled to the National Academic Championships. The first trip we made, back in the mid-’90s, the team had a 3 – 1 win/loss record and ended up #17 in the country. **[That remains our best showing to date.]** We returned for three years after that, but even though those teams had done well in local competition, they failed to win at nationals. This year we had one of the strongest teams we had fielded in years, and it seemed that we might once again have a chance to be competitive. So we made arrangements to travel to the national tournament in New Orleans.

Our team included seniors Bob Brandenburg, Mandy Rahm [**now on the staff at Seton, the elementary school associated with Garrigan**], Chris Kohlhaas, and Rebecca McGuire; juniors Steven Kellner and David Murphy; sophomores John Kohlhaas and Rebecca McGuire; and freshman Matt Courtney. In the interest of their privacy, I'll generally be avoiding their names in the body of this travelogue. In addition to me, my fellow math teacher Daryl Kohlhaas (John's dad and Chris' uncle) and his daughter Angie (a 2001 graduate who used to be our top player, and I wish was able to play at this tournament) accompanied the group on this trip. As we had on other trips, we took the school suburbans—the only way such a trip could possibly be affordable for a school like ours.

[**Last summer, as part of the school's fiftieth anniversary celebration, we had an alumni quiz bowl tournament. Mandy and David were back at Garrigan for that tournament, and their team (which also included Tim Mosbach, a previous national quiz bowl veteran) ended up winning the championship. ...**]

## Wednesday, May 29

### Algona, Iowa to Blytheville, Arkansas

We were scheduled to leave Garrigan at 7:30am. It was not a good omen when I showed up at the gym door around 7:20 and no one was there. People started to trickle in, but well after our scheduled departure time one of the students had still not arrived. He lived in Bancroft, which is nearly a half hour drive from Algona, and he had a bit of a reputation for being late. Had this just been a regular tournament, I would have just left him and set off. However, he (or more properly his father) had paid good money for this trip, and he certainly had a right to get his money's worth.

One of the students had brought a cell phone, and we used that to try to reach our tardy teammate. Unfortunately the line was busy, so we couldn't get through. The student essentially lives alone (like more and more students today, his is a "non-traditional" family situation), so it was unlikely anyone else was on the line. Eventually another of the students was able to contact his grandmother [**who lived down the street**] in Bancroft and persuade her to knock on the missing kid's door. She cooperated and woke him. He rushed down to Algona, and we were finally able to leave at 8:45am.

We stopped briefly in Wesley to pick up one of the girls in the group. Together with her luggage, she brought a television set. I suppose I'm showing my age, but really I'm glad I grew up before the era where people needed a TV to be entertained as they travel. I shouldn't complain, though. The kids certainly kept quiet as they watched movies on videotape, so they were no problem at all. [**These days kids would more likely pack a laptop or perhaps a portable DVD player, either of which would have a screen built into it and therefore be much more compact.**]

We drove east to Mason City and then south on a county road to avoid the construction on the last leg of Avenue of the Saints. It was a cold, late spring this year, and the crops were just starting to push up through the ground. As we drove along I pondered how the entire countryside looked like a giant "Chia pet".

As we drove along I pondered a play I had just seen with Margaret at the Commonweal Theatre in the town of Lanesboro, Minnesota, near where she lives. The play was called *How I Learned to Drive*. The Pulitzer prize-winning play is a dark drama about child abuse, but on the surface it really is about learning to drive. They make transitions in the show by quoting lines from an old driver's manual about the proper way to execute various maneuvers on the road. While I certainly know all the "rules", I don't always strictly follow them. For instance, I rarely drive with both hands locked at specific hours on the clock. I pondered every "mistake" I made as I headed down the road.

I had scheduled a brief toilet break at the Kwik Star convenience store in Parkersburg [**which was destroyed by a tornado a year ago and has since been rebuilt**]. This turned out to be anything but quick. Not only did it take time for the kids to go in and out of the bathroom one at a time, but most of them also spent time selecting and buying various snacks. We ended up spending nearly half an hour in Parkersburg.

We switched drivers, and Angie drove in place of me through eastern Iowa. We made it to Cedar Rapids when Daryl came on the CB radio asking when we would be making another stop. We had been traveling barely an hour, but apparently one of the students in his suburban passed on the bathroom opportunity in Parkersburg. We stopped at the rest area on I-380 south of C.R., killing another fifteen minutes in the process. [**As will become clearer and clearer in the rest of the travelogue, this was just about the slowest group I ever traveled with. I'd learn on future trips to make expectations at stops extremely clear.**]

I took over driving again at the rest area. We passed Iowa City and then continued south on the new four-lane to Mt. Pleasant. They've got Avenue of the Saints open all the way there now, though at the moment they're doing work on the exits, which makes it awkward to reach the strip on what is now **old** 218. We exited onto highway 34 and backtracked up to the strip, where we stopped at a combination KFC/Taco Bell for lunch. This, too, took longer than the forty-five minutes I had tentatively scheduled. All day long we just seemed to get further and further behind schedule.

We continued southward on 218, past massive construction where they're building the southernmost Iowa section of Avenue of the Saints. Having spent most of my life traveling through this area on bad two-lane roads, it's hard to imagine an expressway leading all the way from the Twin Cities to St. Louis. Supposedly the whole thing will be done by 2004, though. [**It wasn't, but we would follow the new route the quiz bowl team once again went to New Orleans in 2009.**]

We stopped for gas in Hannibal and then drove southward to St. Louis. I had hoped to arrive in the city at mid afternoon, but with all the delays it was right at rush hour when we got there. Driving was easy as we headed toward the city through the western

suburbs. Once we got past the beltway, though, things were bumper-to-bumper and barely moving. We fought a combination of heavy traffic and construction all the way through the southern suburbs, and it was after six by the time we were finally out of the metro area. We stopped at the first rest area south of St. Louis to take a bathroom break and calm our nerves a bit.

Whenever I head south it amazes me how abruptly the cropland dies. St. Louis is pretty much the boundary between north and south. You see fields along US 63 north of the city, but south of there on I-55, it's all forest. While there are stretches of crops again (notably in Arkansas), it's mostly forest all the way from here to the Gulf of Mexico. The same thing happens at Chicago heading eastward **[and at Minneapolis heading north]**, where there's an abrupt change from farms to trees as you drive along.

We drove about a hundred miles south to Cape Girardeau, where we stopped at a mall for supper. While there were numerous food choices available, virtually everyone chose to eat at Chick Fil A, a fast food chicken place that is big in the South. This was a problem almost every time we stopped for meals. I tried to pick places where there were a variety of different choices, assuming the kids would split up to eat. They almost always all ended up eating at the same place, and that really slowed things down. **[Even if they do choose to eat together, though, it's still important to pick a stop that has lots of choices, since it's hard to predict exactly what sort of food a group will want.]**

Two members of our group chose to skip dinner and go shopping instead. If we hadn't already been so far behind schedule, I probably wouldn't care, but this just slowed things down more. We all waited by the door for them to finish their shopping spree—checking out the exact same stores they could find in Fort Dodge or Mankato. **[To this day that strikes me as silly, but we've had people wanting to stop at Wal-Mart on other trips.]**

It was dark by the time we left Cape Girardeau. Soon after it started to rain, and the last stretch of the drive was far from pleasant. It went quickly, though, and before long we were at the Arkansas border. We drove about five miles further on to Blytheville, one of those places that has no reason to be important but thrives as the only thing between here and there on the interstate. We spotted our hotel (a Days Inn) from the exit, but it took quite a bit of doing to figure out how to get here. It's one of those places that has no access of its own; we had to enter through a nearby fast food place, and it was really difficult to spot where to go at night.

We finally arrived about 9:45pm, got checked in, and settled into adequate if hardly luxurious motel rooms. I had been feeling horrible all day, fighting a bad sinus infection. I certainly didn't want to take antihistamines while driving, though, so it was good to settle into the motel and take something to dry up all the draining fluid. I don't think we even turned on the TV; we just settled into bed after a long, long day.

## Thursday, May 30

### Blytheville, Arkansas to New Orleans, Louisiana

We were up seven-ish and enjoyed a rather nice breakfast in the motel lobby. Unfortunately, I also spent breakfast listening to one of the girls complain about the hotel. She really didn't have any specific complaints; she just didn't like the fact that it was old, and she imagined all sorts of potential problems it could have. (She didn't want to sleep on the bed, because she imagined the bodily fluids of thousands of motel patrons over the decades—as if they didn't launder the sheets daily.) While I tried to be more polite, my basic reaction was “tough for you”. We were traveling on a budget, and I had spent a great deal of time finding motels that would not price the trip out of reach of many of the students. While this place was hardly the Waldorf Astoria, it was perfectly clean. Then again, she might not have liked the Waldorf Astoria either; it's an old hotel.

**[I've since seen a wide variety of TV exposés showing that most motel rooms are in fact full of germs. While the sheets may be cleaned, the blankets and spreads are often covered with blood and semen stains, and very often the bathroom surfaces are also covered with nasty stuff. Even so, I'd my reaction to this girl would still be “tough”. In most cases even the “millions” of pathogens they found were not enough to be hazardous—and it's not as if anyone's home is exactly sterile.]**

We drove south past the absolutely flat delta region of Arkansas. There was lots of construction on I-55. About every 10 miles we'd get a sign saying there was construction for the next 10 miles. I wondered why they didn't just put a “CONSTRUCTION—NEXT 80 MILES” sign at the border and leave it at that.

We crossed the Mississippi at Memphis. The river was very high, and the bridge there is obsolete. I was a bit worried after hearing about a horrible bridge accident in Oklahoma last week **[A barge hit a bridge over the Arkansas River on I-40 when its tugboat operator had a seizure and blacked out. The bridge collapsed, seven vehicles plunged into the water, and fourteen people were killed.]**, and I was certainly relieved to arrive on the Tennessee side of the river. It was rush hour in Memphis, and they had a lot of construction there too. Fortunately they timed things so that in the morning all the construction was in the outbound lanes of the interstate. I assume they shift things around in the afternoon so there's inbound construction at evening rush. That method certainly worked better than closing up everything like they did in St. Louis.

We stopped at a rest area near Batesville, Mississippi. The kids noticed the forest and had the same reaction I did the first time I came south. Everyone expects to see cotton fields all over the place in Dixie. We did see a few of them in Arkansas, but from Memphis to New Orleans, it's pretty much trees the whole way.

We drove on south to Jackson, past more construction in the rapidly growing suburban area of Madison, Mississippi. **[This trip would have been right at the end of the “Jackson bubble”, the time when the Jackson area was one of the fastest-growing**

and wealthiest regions in the country. A large part of the Jackson economy revolved around the WorldCom, a communications giant on paper with almost nothing to back it up but smoke and mirrors. WorldCom declared bankruptcy in the summer of 2002, just shortly after we took this trip. What few real assets WorldCom had have since been absorbed by Verizon, which has virtually no operations in Mississippi. Jackson is still trying to recover nearly a decade later. It's a sad reflection on our government that they instead of tightening up the corporate fraud laws, they went big for de-regulation. **The result: last year's financial meltdown.**] We went around Jackson on the beltway and then joined a heavy stream of traffic south of the city on I-55. We exited at the far south end of greater Jackson (the town of Byram) where we bought gas and had lunch at a Wendy's.

It's a fairly short drive from Jackson down to the Louisiana border, though one of the duller "forest tunnels" I've seen anywhere in the country. We stopped at the state welcome center just inside Louisiana. The southern states go all out with their rest areas—especially their welcome centers—and the kids were certainly impressed with this one. Among other things, the rest area had its own little lake, with a fish cleaning station. While we just used the restroom, the kids were certainly intrigued by the idea of fishing at a rest area.

We drove about half an hour southward to Ponchatula. The world's longest bridge runs through the Manchac Swamp for thirty-eight miles from here to New Orleans. The kids didn't really believe me when I told them we would be crossing the world's longest bridge, but as we made our way along it for over half an hour, they were definitely impressed. I'm always amazed at what a work of engineering it is—especially when I go through the massive interchange of I-55 and I-10, right in the middle of the swamp.

The interstate hits ground level right at the edge of suburban New Orleans. **[The suburbs have since crept northward about the I-55/I-10 interchange.]** That's also where we hit some of the heaviest traffic I've ever seen. I've not normally found New Orleans a particularly difficult city to drive in. Traffic is never light, but it usually moves right along. Today, though, it reminded me of St. Louis. Eventually, though, we made it to the Carrollton Avenue exit and drove past the streetcar line to Loyola University.



**BGHS suburbans at Loyola University – New Orleans**

with a lovely view of a parking ramp that was probably five feet from our building. All of our group were on one side of the same floor, and things were set up so two rooms (four people) shared a common bath. I really don't care much for that set-up; I prefer the big common bath down the hall. **[The "semi-private" bath really strikes me as having LESS privacy than a public bathroom; you never know if you're going to walk in on someone from the other room, or vice versa.]** I also didn't care for the fact that all the furniture at Loyola was built in. I can't imagine spending a year here, though it was certainly no problem to be in for a couple of days.

Our first game was at 5:30 in the Claiborne Room. All the competition rooms were in a student union building at the center of Loyola's compact campus. There were lots of signs for the Claiborne Room, but try as we might, we couldn't find the actual room. It turned out that the room was a private dining room, hidden inside the main cafeteria. Having not ordered a meal plan, we had to coax our way past the clerk at the entrance, but we got into the room with no real problem.

I was amazed at how easy it was to park at Loyola. When we had been here about five years ago, parking spaces were definitely at a premium. This time we were able to pull into a lot right next to the dorm where we would be staying. We checked in (a very inefficient, time-consuming process, where each kid got individually lectured about the various fines that would be imposed for damaging property or losing their key) and made our way up to our rooms. **[On our more recent trips, we've stayed at hotels, which has made for a more pleasant experience overall—with little if any additional expense.]**

The dorms at Loyola all look like big city housing projects, cheaply built skyscrapers surrounding a trampled grass courtyard. We were on an upper floor,



**Budding Hall at Loyola University – New Orleans**

The match was against Kinkaid High School [I believe it's technically "The Kinkaid School"], an enormous private school from Houston, Texas. While I don't know, it wouldn't surprise me if this was where the Bush girls went to school. Texas is probably the most competitive state there is in quiz bowl, and the overdressed boys from Kinkaid had won their state championship. It was no surprise that we lost a lopsided game. I was at least able to use the game to do some actual coaching. I was able to point out things Kinkaid had done right and things we had done wrong, that we should adjust in future games. I also pointed out that the kids had held their own in the first round of the game (they actually led at one point), and there was no reason they should feel bad about things.

[I inserted a picture of one of the sets at nationals here. I should mention two things about it. First, they don't use these sets these days. In recent years the tournament has been held in hotel banquet rooms or equivalent venues, and they've just used the standard tablecloths and bunting those rooms provide. Secondly, you'll notice our kids had put "cute" and similar nicknames on their name plates. This was a fairly minor thing they chose to do after seeing students from other schools using nicknames. Unfortunately over time the nicknames some kids used (not ours, fortunately) evolved from cute to suggestive and even offensive. In 2009 the tournament finally banned nicknames all together.]



"Game show set" at the National Academic Championships

By contrast the coach from Kinkaid seemed disappointed with his team. He was criticizing them and pointing out every little thing that he felt was wrong with the game. (Again, they won—and won big.) I've seen a lot of quiz bowl coaches that over-react to things, but that's certainly not my philosophy. I've always had the attitude that it's a good thing quiz bowl is a "minor" activity. If we do well, we brag about things; if we lose, no one really cares. It's not like a quiz bowl coach has parents second-guessing him like sports coaches do ... and even in "major" activities like football, it's not like anyone really cares about the outcome two weeks after the season's over.

One of our students had an uncle who lived on the Mississippi coast. He had contacted his uncle, who had said he would be showing up to see our match against Kinkaid. Unfortunately he never showed. I wondered if perhaps he had even more trouble finding the road than we did, but he never contacted the kid or left a message to explain his absence.



On the St. Charles streetcar

After the game we took the St. Charles streetcar downtown (about a 35-minute trip) to have dinner. While there are numerous fast food places on Canal Street at the end of the streetcar line, this time virtually everybody chose to go to Popeye's, a Cajun chicken place based in New Orleans that caters mostly to black people. (Aside from the Gulf Coast, the only other place I've seen them is in inner-city areas of Chicago and Los Angeles.) [They've since expanded all over the country, including Minneapolis and Des Moines. They're still almost entirely in urban locations, though.] I had never eaten dinner at a Popeye's before. I had breakfast there once and was disgusted by it, so I was pleasantly surprised that the dinner was really quite tasty.

On our streetcar ride back to Loyola we were "entertained"—and I use that term very loosely—by a black man of questionable sobriety who was crooning love songs from the '70s to no one in particular. Periodically he would forget the words and have to look at a lyric sheet in his lap. On those occasions he bellowed the music even louder. At one point the driver stopped the car and came back to tell the man to shut up. He scolded the man in no uncertain terms, and the man did quiet down for a couple of minutes.

Before long he started in again, though, and he continued his concert for most of the journey.

It was not exactly a surprise to find that the kid who had hurried down from Bancroft had forgotten to bring some things with him. One other student had also forgotten to bring shampoo, and I agreed to take the two of them to a Rite Aid drugstore (like a small Walgreen's) I knew was a few stops down from Loyola. We waited and waited and waited for an inbound car. Eventually we started walking, and we had made it about two stops by the time one finally showed. The kids found their stuff and got checked out quickly, and fortunately we almost immediately caught a car for a quick ride back to Loyola. Everybody settled in, and before long we were off to sleep.

## Friday, May 31 New Orleans, Louisiana

I was up fairly early and went for a long morning walk. I crossed campus and walked along St. Charles Avenue, following the streetcar line out to Carrollton. Just around the corner at St. Charles and Carrollton is a Burger King, and I paused there to catch a bite of breakfast. I wandered back on side streets, past "shotgun" bungalows with jungle-like yards. **[Almost every travel guide will say the side streets in uptown New Orleans are unsafe, but I've never been one to pay a lot of attention to such warnings—and nothing of interest happened on my walk.]**

Our second game was at 10:45 this morning. We played Holland High Upper School, an elite private school from Tulsa, Oklahoma that is vaguely affiliated with the Episcopal Church. I know people (mostly members of my church) who think that Garrigan is an elite school, simply because it is private. They've obviously never been acquainted with private schools in the South. Holland Hall charges about \$12,000 a year in tuition. Garrigan charges about a tenth of that amount, and many of our families receive special assistance and essentially pay what they can afford. We never turn people away from Garrigan; indeed many times we have been the school of last resort when students were kicked out of area public schools. **[That's become less true since an alternative school opened up.]** I don't picture that happening at Holland Hall. While I'm sure it's a good school, I don't think I'd be very comfortable working there.

It was surprising that the team from Holland Hall really wasn't that good. Three of their four members answered almost no questions, and the fourth (who could only be described as a classic nerd) had glaring areas of weakness in his knowledge. We were really the better team, and we led through the first two-thirds of the game. At one point, in fact, we were ahead by over 100 points.

That was when the Holland Hall nerd complained that he didn't think his buzzer was working correctly. My personal bet is that he wasn't pressing it correctly, but the moderator immediately stopped the game until things could be fixed. A repair woman came in, tore apart the game show set, installed a new buzzer system, and then re-constructed the set.

The whole process took over half an hour, and that break was all it took to shift the momentum of the game. Our team proceeded to buzz in too quickly on a couple of questions. The opponents got those questions, together with their associated bonuses, and they quickly came within striking distance. It all came down to the lightning round, where teams answer ten questions on related topics. The "easy" category would have been "Christmas Anagrams", but apparently no one from Garrigan knew that "anagram" meant scrambled letters. Our team instead chose the "Mystery Category", which proved next to impossible. Holland Hall went with the anagrams, and they got eight of ten—enough to win the game. Our captain, who had buzzed in early and chosen the lightning round, blamed himself for the loss. Really, though, I feel it was the delay that broke the momentum and shifted the outcome of the game.

I had planned to treat the group to lunch at the Royal Café, a historic restaurant in the French Quarter where I had enjoyed many pleasant meals. We took the streetcar downtown and made our way past Jackson Square and to the restaurant. Unlike my previous experiences, though, this meal was really rather disappointing. We had asked to be seated on their balcony, but even though space was available there we ended up at a crowded indoor table next to the bathrooms. It was set with paper napkins, unlike the cloth I had seen before at the Royal Café. The service was indifferent, and the food didn't seem up to their usual standards. I don't know if they've changed management or what, but I was less than impressed with the place this time.

We had the afternoon off, so the kids divided into small groups and spent the free time sightseeing. Two of the boys joined Daryl and me. We walked through Jackson Square. I remember that when I was first here they had locked the place up because of a series of dangerous crimes. It's open again, now, and it really is quite a lovely little park. We then had coffee and beignets (fried dough with powdered sugar—like the Indian fry bread they serve at Old Threshers) at the Café du Monde and strolled down the Moon Walk next to the Mississippi. The boys wanted to go to the Aquarium of the Americas, but thought better of it when they saw the double-digit entrance fee. In front of the aquarium there was a display set up by the Louisiana dairy industry. They passed out free milk (most of it in unusual flavors), together with dairy-related souvenirs. The boys picked up headgear similar to those crowns they give away at Burger King, but in the design of cow ears. They were designed for small children, but the woman in charge of the place was delighted to see people of "role model" age wearing them.



Loyola University Chapel



**"Cow ears" at Aquarium of the Americas**

playing for tips in the plaza. They were really quite good, and people left lots of money in their guitar case. I'd imagine people could earn an actual living as street performers, though I prefer the security of a fixed salary **[and paid insurance]** myself.

We made our way up to Bourbon Street and then back down to the French Market. We had dinner at a Subway sandwich shop. I pondered getting a cone from the TCBY yogurt stand that was in the same building, but they wanted \$3.69 for their smallest size. We then met the group back by the cathedral and took the streetcar back to Loyola.

## **Saturday, June 1**

### **New Orleans, Louisiana**

I had another long morning walk, taking a different set of streets to that same Burger King on Carrollton. I'm not really much of a fan of Burger King's breakfasts, but it was what was available in the neighborhood—and beggars can't be choosers.

Our first game today brought controversy. In the end it also brought us a win, but it took two weeks for that to happen. We were playing Waverly High School, a public school from a small town near Elmira in upstate New York. Waverly was 0 – 3 coming into this game, and it appeared they had fared worse in their three games than we had done in the two games we played. I was pretty confident we could win this game, and I encouraged the kids to do their best. This was a close game from beginning to end. We led all the way to the lightning round, but the final scoreboard showed Waverly winning by a five-point margin.

That was not the end of things, though. Throughout the game the Waverly coach, a woman I can only describe as "bitchy" complained about the wording of various questions and answers, and points were reversed based on her protests that led to Waverly's win. After returning home I sent a lengthy, but polite e-mail to Chip Beall, the tournament director, explaining the situation to him. It's probably most efficient to just use that letter to explain what happened in this game:

Dear Mr. Beall:

While for the most part our trip to New Orleans for the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual National Academic Championships was pleasant, my students have asked that I make you aware of one major complaint that they have with your tournament. That complaint involves your procedure for protesting questions. While we are not in any way asking that the outcome of any of our games be changed, we want you to be aware that protests lodged by the opposing coach which we were later able to prove were unfounded cost us a win. Given that we finished 0 – 4 with three close games, this was very frustrating to the students.

Our complaints involve a game we played Saturday morning versus Waverly High School from New York. The coach for Waverly protested four different questions in the game, and as a result of her protests points were shifted that were many times the margin of victory in the game.

We made our way back to Jackson Square, where we went to the Louisiana State Museum. I remember going here when I was a student in Mississippi. My friend Sandra and I were amused to see a banner advertising "The Social Life of the American Alligator", so we succumbed and went in. It was one of the worst museums I had ever seen. Indeed Sandra and I spent most of that afternoon laughing at how awful the place was. Well, it hasn't changed much in a decade. They've gotten rid of the alligators, but they still have hallway after hallway full of badly painted portraits of people you've never heard of.

The most interesting part of the museum was its second floor balcony. We relaxed there and spent quite a bit of time just watching the people in Jackson Square below us. Most interesting was a woman who told fortunes in front of the cathedral. I don't know if her hair was her own or a wig, but it was teased and then covered with a silver metallic spray that made her head look like a giant Brillo pad. Almost no one stopped by her to have their fortune told, so she spent most of her time smoking. I kept wondering if there was anything flammable in the silver hairspray that the cigarette could ignite.

There was also a gospel band that was

My objection is not that she protested—which is her right—but that the judge seemed to assume that because she protested, she was correct and the questions were wrong. He did no research to confirm things, but simply took the coach at her word. I have since researched two of her complaints, and it turns out she was wrong in both cases.

The correct answer to one question was the “Law of Conservation of Matter”. The Waverly team responded “Law of Conservation of Mass” and was ruled incorrect. My team then gave the correct answer. At the end of the quarter the Waverly coach argued that the two answers were different terms for the same thing. Almost immediately the judge overturned the initial result, took away our points and awarded a correct answer to Waverly. He did not look up an answer or consult with an expert in science. He merely believed that what the coach said was true. In fact, after consulting four different science books and websites, it is clear to me that these are two related but in fact different laws. The answer stated on the moderator’s script was correct, and original result should have stood.

Another question involved the arts and asked what artistic method made use of “hydrogen hydroxide”. The Waverly team passed on this question, and on the rebound my team correctly answered “water color”. The Waverly coach protested that the question was worded incorrectly. She said the correct chemical name for water was “dihydrogen monoxide” and further she argued that if the question had been worded correctly her team would have answered it correctly. Again the judge simply accepted her argument as correct. Again I researched this on returning home, and it turns out that these chemical terms are synonyms. While dihydrogen monoxide is the more common term, hydrogen hydroxide is also a correct name for water. So again, she was wrong and points that affected the outcome of the game were changed. Even if she were correct, however, it seems quite a stretch to also assume that her students would have answered the question correctly with a different wording. While it might have been fair to cancel our rebound points, it does not seem at all fair to give them an opportunity to gain additional points on the very tenuous assumption that they might have not passed if the question were worded differently.

In fairness, I should point out that the judge also believed me without comment when I argued that “desert” should be as acceptable an answer as “wilderness” for the completion of the Biblical phrase “a voice cries out in the ...” My argument was that the question did not state which version of the Bible was being quoted and that popular Catholic versions use “desert”. While it turns out this is true, the judge’s acceptance of this only reinforces my point. I am not Catholic, and at the time I really didn’t know what wording the *New American Bible* or other Catholic versions used. In my mind, I was basing my argument on a large banner I had seen at a Hispanic church in South Central Los Angeles that proclaimed “una voz que clama en el desierto” and the fact that Catholic versions of the Bible tend to derive from the Latin Vulgate. I offered to verify this by getting a Bible from the Chapel at Loyola, but the judge just took my word for it—as if I were an expert.

Here in Iowa protests in quiz bowl are extremely rare. That is most likely because in most tournaments the coaches are not in the room with their students. Instead they are serving as the moderators and judges for tournament centers. Beyond that, though, it is always assumed that the people who wrote the questions did appropriate research and proofreading. While the specific rules vary from tournament to tournament, the basic assumption is always that the question and answer written on the script are right unless it can be proven that they are wrong. If there is a protest, the common method for dealing with it is to record the whole situation in writing. No points are changed until the end of the game. If the potential change in points would not affect the outcome of the game, the teams simply work out among themselves what the final score should be. If the change might affect the outcome, the judge and/or tournament moderator check in reference works to find the correct answer. Only if it can be PROVEN that there was a problem are any points changed. If references show the original question and answer were correct or if it is impossible to verify either way, the original score stands.

Most of our tournaments are held in schools, so there is always easy access to reference works. Some are held at colleges, but then the sponsors usually have on-line references available. Honestly, the National Academic Championships is the only tournament I have ever been to where reference works were not readily available. Just taking the coaches’ or players’ word for things in a protest is quite the opposite of anything we do up here.

**[The basic facts recorded in the letter were entirely correct, but I definitely stretched the truth on what happens with protests at local tournaments. Because “the show must go on”, there isn’t time to really research protests. Unless they would affect the outcome of a game (which is VERY rare), protests are never given more than the common courtesy of an ear. The common response of the judge is “If it’s close at the end of the game, we’ll worry about it then.” If it does affect the outcome, it becomes the tournament director’s problem. Having been a tournament director for two decades, I can “professionally” report it’s still not very likely the protested question will be researched. The next step is to see if it affects advancement to playoffs. If it does (which is even more unlikely than affecting the outcome of a game), what will most likely happen is that the disputed question will be thrown out rather than overturned. A new “neutral” question will be substituted in its place. ...]**

I expected to get a polite response from Mr. Beall with that politician response “thank-you for the benefit of your views”. To my surprise, that’s not at all what happened. To explain what did, let me use the press release I put out:

*National Academic Association Reverses Decision, Awards Garrigan Win*

Persistence paid off for the Bishop Garrigan quiz bowl team. They learned Sunday that the head of the National Academic Association had made the unprecedented move of overturning the outcome of a match and awarding a win to the Golden Bears.

After the tournament was over, Garrigan students researched questions that were protested by the opposing team in a game the Bears had officially lost by a five-point margin. They found that the protests were unfounded and the answers originally given by BGHS were correct. The research was e-mailed to the tournament director. While Garrigan did not request any change in the official outcome, the tournament director noted that the Bears were correct in all their arguments and he felt he had no choice but to rule the game a win for Bishop Garrigan.

"We simply will not allow a team to lose any game unjustly," wrote tournament founder and director Chip Beall in his e-mail response to the Golden Bear quiz bowl team. "I'm going to do something unprecedented and, even though you did not ask for it, award you a win in that Waverly game. ... We don't want a single team to go home with the idea that they've lost a game unjustly."

The controversial game pitted Garrigan against Waverly High School of Elmira, New York. Both questions that were protested involved terms from chemistry. In one the Waverly coach argued that the Law of Conservation of Mass was the same as the Law of Conservation of Matter. The Bears were able to show that while these laws were related, they were in fact different. Another question used "hydrogen hydroxide" as a complicated name for water. The Waverly coach argued that "dihydrogen monoxide" was the correct chemical name for H<sub>2</sub>O and that her students would have gotten the question correct if that term had been used. Garrigan, who did answer the question correctly, was able to prove that both terms are commonly used in chemistry to mean water and that the term was incidental to the question. Overturning the judge's initial decision in these two questions would change each team's score by 30 points, meaning that the official result of the game is that Garrigan beat Waverly by a score of 245 to 190.

Normally at national quiz bowl when the outcome of a game is in question, teams can file a counter-protest (called an "appeal to the supreme court") immediately following the game. The Bears discussed this option while they were in New Orleans but decided that since their team was not likely to make the play-offs, there was no reason to waste the tournament director's time. They chose instead to e-mail the director after the tournament to make him aware of what had occurred. No one on the team expected that the outcome of the game would be overturned, since this was the first time in the twenty-year history of the tournament that such a decision had been made.

The change adjusts Garrigan's record at nationals to 1 win and 3 losses. Two of their losses were in other close games, and the third was against one the top-seeded team in the tournament.

Bob Brandenburg was captain for the Golden Bear quiz bowl team at nationals. Other team members included Chris Kohlhaas, Rebecca McGuire, Mandy Rahm, Steven Kellner, David Murphy, John Kohlhaas, Rachel McGuire, and Matt Courtney.

Not only was I surprised by the reversal of the game's outcome, I was surprised at just how much treatment the story got in our local media. That press release was run verbatim in the local paper **[which will pretty much print verbatim anything that is sent to them]** and in a newsletter sent out by the Sioux City Diocese. **[The diocesan *Globe* pretty much ignores the Algona area completely; it's noteworthy that they would even mention this story, let alone printing a lengthy release about it.]** Shorter versions appeared in the Mason City and Fort Dodge newspapers, and the local radio station carried it on each newscast for two days. They had apparently even contacted Mr. Beall to verify the facts of the story—more than that station does for most of the local news.

**[I'd be interested to know whether Waverly was ever informed of their loss. I think this was before the National Academic Association had a website, so there was no permanent record of the outcome of individual games at the tournament. It would be very easy for Mr. Beall to just tell people in Iowa that we won and never tell anyone in New York they lost. I don't know that he did that, but I might have myself if I were put in the situation. ...]**

Since we didn't know the final outcome, we were all very disappointed after the "loss" to Waverly. The kids basically retired to their rooms and sulked. I set out on a very long midday walk. I followed the streetcar line down St. Charles, first stopping briefly at the same Rite Aid I had taken the kids to before and then at a McDonalds built to resemble a church that I have mentioned in previous travelogues. I wasn't particularly tired, and there was still plenty of time until our final game, so I just kept walking. I ended up making it past the hotel Margaret and I had stayed at when we were in New Orleans at Christmas a couple of years ago. That's almost at Lee Circle (near the Superdome), and about seven miles from Loyola. **[It's actually closer to five miles—though still quite a walk.]** I caught the streetcar back after a fascinating little walk.

It was into the afternoon when I got back to the dorm room. Daryl and I went around to rouse the other kids and get them ready for our afternoon match. As we did the coach from the team across the hall yelled at us, saying we were too noisy and that she and her team were trying to sleep. Neither Daryl and I nor the kids were being especially loud, and while the dorm had quiet hours, they ended at 7:30 in the morning. I felt like telling her where to go, but of course I was too polite to actually do so.

Our final game was against Madison Central High School. I had e-mailed Mr. Beall before the tournament asking where all the teams were from. He correctly identified the other three and told me Madison Central was from Madison, Wisconsin. There is indeed a

Central High School in the Badger State's capital (I would drive right past it later this summer on the way to a baseball game in Appleton), but that wasn't where this team was from. Instead of being Midwesterners, they were from Madison County, Mississippi, the wealthy suburbs north of Jackson. They were a pleasant enough group, and I don't know that I'd describe them as especially good or bad. After the problems this morning, though, our kids didn't really have their minds in this game. There was no controversy this time, but it was not really a surprise when we lost. The surprise was that it was actually quite a close game.

We again had the afternoon free. We let the kids divide up and go their separate ways again, though many of them couldn't seem to decide what they wanted to do. In the end most seemed to just lounge around on campus all afternoon. Daryl and I went to the Audubon Zoo, which remains one of the nicest wildlife parks I've seen anywhere. I've described that before, so I'll spare the details here.

We had arranged for everyone to meet at the Cathedral, where we would go to mass as a group. Daryl and I spent enough time at the zoo that we had to literally run across the mile-wide park to catch the streetcar downtown. We made it, though we were the last in the group to show. Fortunately Angie had stepped up and made sure everyone else was accounted for and was prepared to lead them into church if necessary.

I've always rather liked St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. On the outside it looks like the Disneyland castle, and inside they have beautifully painted ceilings and elaborate marble work. The kids didn't care much for the building, though, and nobody cared for what had to be the dulllest mass I've ever been to. The chief celebrant was a middle-aged Asian priest who had just been ordained today and was presiding over his first "official" liturgy. It was difficult to understand him, and he just droned on and on, not only in his homily but also in explaining the symbolism of every part of the service. The "good old boy" deacon who assisted him was better, as were a couple of lectors who read scripture as if it were dramatic interpretation. Even so, every part of the service dragged badly.



**The Garrigan group in a dorm room at Loyola University – New Orleans**

surprised me that he and his children wouldn't have packed clothes for the whole trip—we were only gone a week). **[I don't think I've ever done laundry while traveling. I'll mix and match and re-wear things, but I'm more likely to throw things out on vacation than wash them.]** They had a nice laundry room in the dorm, and the information we had gotten ahead of time said that detergent would be available for purchase. Unfortunately they didn't have any vending machines, and there was no detergent at the desk. Having already walked an incredible distance today, I agreed to accompany Daryl to that same Rite-Aid I had taken the kids to earlier, so he could get some laundry soap. We got to the drugstore quickly, and he made his purchase. Unfortunately, there seemed to be a long wait for an outbound car to take us back to campus. Several inbound cars passed us, but none was headed our direction. We decided to start walking back and let the car catch up to us whenever it came along. At each stop we looked back to see if a car was coming, but none ever did. We ended up walking all the way back to campus, probably about a mile and a half, and only then did the first outbound car come by.

Back at the dorm we found that the uncle of our student once again didn't show up. The kid was understandably annoyed, particularly since once again there was no explanation. I never did find out what the problem was.

I visited with the kids to plan our activities for the next day while Daryl did laundry. When I got ready for bed I looked at the pedometer I wore since today was the first day of our summer fitness program at Garrigan. Even I was surprised to see that over the course of the day I had logged 18.6 miles. **[That was probably a bit on the high side, but even fifteen miles would be a lot.]**

Daryl and most of the kids stayed downtown after church. The kid whose uncle lived in Mississippi thought his uncle would be coming to visit him at the dorm tonight, so I escorted him back to Loyola on the streetcar. I had not eaten since breakfast, so after leaving him there I went back to the streetcar to find a place to have supper. I went down to Louisiana Avenue and walked up to a drive-through burger place called Rally's. The immediate neighborhood was far from inviting (with teenagers standing outside a drugstore on the corner, yelling at passersby), so I walked a couple of blocks down St. Charles to have my supper and wait for the streetcar. I was still eating when the first car passed, so I just kept walking another block or two. Apparently most of the group was on that first car, and they saw me and wondered why I was out walking so late.

When I got back to Loyola, Daryl was in the lobby of the dorm. He wanted to do some laundry (though I must say it

# Sunday, June 2

## New Orleans, Louisiana to Tuscaloosa, Alabama

While they were quiet, most of the kids didn't really sleep last night. They played cards and chatted with each other in their rooms. They were, however, better than the people across the hall—the ones who were trying to sleep at noon. They were loud and obnoxious at night, when quiet hours were supposed to be enforced.

We checked out and left Loyola around 9am. We made it quickly across the city and crossed the six-mile bridge that separates Lake Ponchartrain from the Gulf of Mexico. On the east side of the bridge we stopped at a McDonalds in the suburb of Slidell. We then drove on to the Mississippi Welcome Center, on Interstate 10 about an hour from New Orleans.

The welcome center offered free soft drinks, and the kids downed more than their share of them. We were mostly there, though, to check in for a tour of the NASA Stennis Space Center. I had been to Stennis several times before. On those occasions, I just drove up to the gate and then proceeded to the visitors' center. Apparently since September 11<sup>th</sup> all the NASA facilities have been under heightened security, though. Now you can only visit Stennis as part of a guided tour. You have to check in (showing full photo ID and going through a brief security check) at the welcome center and then catch a bus to the grounds of the facility. The bus ride was eerie. The road through the Stennis facility is a four-lane highway. Normally the combination of workers and tourists keeps it very busy. Today was Sunday, though, so there were few employees. Coupling that with no tourist cars, the road was absolutely empty.

The space center is another of those places I've described at length elsewhere, so I'll not go into detail here. The kids had specifically asked to go here, but most of them didn't really care much for it. I'm not sure what they thought it would be, but obviously it didn't live up to their expectations.

We had a bit of a shock when we got back to the welcome center and found that one of the suburbans had a seriously flat tire. The good news was that it happened here, rather than as we were speeding down the interstate at 75 mph. The bad news was that the temperature was nearly 100°, and the spare that was in the disabled suburban was almost bald itself.



**ABOVE: [One of our boys clowns for the camera, sitting in a wooden rocking chair at the welcome center, wearing his NASA visitor pass, and holding a complimentary soft drink cup.]**

**LEFT: Flat tire on the white suburban**

I assumed the tires on both suburbans would be interchangeable. Daryl wasn't quite so sure of that, but fortunately I was right. The other suburban had a good spare. To get things changed, though, we had to clear out the luggage areas of both suburbans, work a strange screw mechanism that mounted the spares to the wall, jack up the disabled vehicle and remove the bad tire, replace it, try to get the flat tire mounted to the wall with the screw mechanism, and then load everything up again. It was an annoying and time-consuming process, and I was definitely thankful that Daryl was more mechanically inclined than I am.

**[Shortly after this (the following New Year's Day, I think) I had a flat tire on my Metro while in Chicago, and I'd find that things that seem as if they should be interchangeable often aren't. I'd gotten a full-size spare rather than the doughnut tire that came with the car, so I figured I'd use that to replace the bad tire. I found the wheel on the spare (which had come from a Metro of a different model year) was not compatible with the front of my car. Eventually a mechanic was able to get the spare to fit on the rear and trade one of the rear tires for the flat one up front. It was a round-about fix, but it worked.]**

After getting the tire fixed we drove along the beautiful Mississippi coast. We stopped twice, once along the relatively empty beach at Pass Christian and again at Biloxi, right in the heart of the tourist district. All but one of the kids thoroughly enjoyed their time on the beach. The exception was the same girl who had complained about the Days Inn in Arkansas. She also complained (with some justification) of the filth in the French Quarter, and here she felt the beach was too dirty to set foot on. I'd love to know what she thought a beach should look like. We saw a little bit of litter (though noticeably less than was here back when I was in college), but mostly it's spotless white sand. Sand is, of course, "dirt"—so maybe that's what grossed her out. I'd had quite enough of her at this point, and I just let her stay in the suburban and pout while everyone else enjoyed an afternoon in the sun.

We did have one injury on the beach. One of the kids stepped on a sharp rock and cut a gash on his foot. We quickly got things cleaned up and treated, but he walked with a bit of a limp for the rest of the trip.

We had a late afternoon lunch/dinner at a Wendy's on the Coast that used to be owned by that uncle who didn't bother seeing his nephew in New Orleans. We then drove north to Hattiesburg, which was little changed since I went to school there. We joined I-59 and drove northward to Laurel.

The interstate makes some tight curves as it winds through Laurel. As we came around one of these I hit the brakes hard and switched lanes when I saw a police officer ahead directing traffic around a truck that had gone off the road and overturned. He was holding both arms together and kept gesturing up and down, as if he were landing a plane. Hand signals were most definitely **not** part of the curriculum when I went through driver's ed, and I had no clue what he wanted. I pulled far over and slowed down a bit, but apparently not enough to satisfy the cop. As I passed he shook his fist at me and bellowed "SLOW DOWN!" I guess that must be what those plane landing gestures were supposed to mean, but their meaning was certainly lost on me.

We made it through Laurel in one piece and then drove on past Meridian and on to the Alabama border. We stopped briefly at a rest area that was under construction and then, as the sun was setting behind us drove on into Tuscaloosa. We had reservations at a Fairfield Inn. I had printed out directions from their website that explained how to find the place, but they were obviously incomplete. We took the suggested exit, and their map implied it would be just off the interstate. While we saw lots of businesses, Fairfield Inn was not among them. I turned onto the first cross street, which I thought was four lanes wide. It turned out to be eight lanes, with an extra-wide median. I had turned into oncoming traffic, and I was rather embarrassed as I weaved my way back to the correct lanes. (Perhaps I should have paid closer attention to that *How I Learned to Drive* play.) We drove all the way down to the next exit and then about halfway back. Just as we were going to stop at a gas station to ask directions, one of the kids spotted a tiny unlighted sign leading to an access road. We followed the road back next to the interstate and found the motel. It was exactly in the location their map had shown, just not quite so easy to get to.

We checked in, and then Daryl and I went out to buy gas. We had credit cards from the school to pay for gas, and I planned to just put the card through the scanner at the pumps. Unfortunately, the message "SEE ATTENDANT" came up. I asked the attendant to reset the pumps so we could pay inside. We filled the tanks (to the tune of \$77.50), and I presented the school credit card to pay. The card didn't go through, but the clerk assumed it was just a problem with the magnetic strip. He typed in the numbers manually, but this time it came up "DECLINED". I wasn't sure why the school card should be over its limit, but I ended up putting everything on my American Express card—figuring I could settle things up later.

In retrospect, I'm betting the problem had to do with the CYO baseball tournament which was also this weekend. The baseball team usually gets hotel rooms for CYO [**something they no longer do**], and it's quite possible with a group of kids that the hotel could have put up a large deposit on the credit card, which would have effectively maxed it out. We were able to use the card without problems later in the trip, and I was quickly reimbursed for the charge on my personal card.

By this point it was nearly 10pm, but many of the kids still wanted to have something more for supper. A few of them had also gotten sunburned on the beach, and they wanted some pain relief spray to put on that. We stopped briefly at a K-Mart (just before closing time) to get some sunburn treatment and then headed to a nearby Waffle House for supper. Part of the group was served quickly at the Waffle House. Unfortunately the part I was in had snail-paced service from a clueless young waiter named Blake. The food was good, though, and the kids continued to remark about the unique Waffle House experience.

I had been tired when we first got to the motel, but by the time we had eaten and returned I was wide awake. The Fairfield Inn was really quite a nice place, but I mostly tossed and turned all night long.

## **Monday, June 3**

### **Tuscaloosa, Alabama to Dayton, Ohio**

Again this was one of those "Murphy's Law" days. We were supposed to leave promptly at 6:30, but by the time everyone actually was up and packed, it was really more like 7:00.

We spent much of the morning driving through northern Alabama, which is a surprisingly mountainous area **[much more so than I'd imagined prior to this trip]**. It's really quite pretty, and totally different from most of the rest of the state. We stopped at the first exit inside Georgia and had a bathroom break at a really sleazy little convenience store out in the middle of nowhere. We then switched drivers and headed north past Chattanooga and on to Lenoir City, Tennessee.

We had lunch in Lenoir City at a Krystal restaurant. Again there were numerous other restaurants nearby, but everyone chose to eat at Krystal. I like Krystal, which is pretty much the same as the White Castle chain you see in the north—tiny square steamed burgers, flavored with mustard and onion. A lot of the kids didn't really know what to expect, and they generally didn't care for the place **[which they'd chosen mostly because they'd advertised on billboard after billboard along our route]**. Some of them ordered too little—assuming that the burgers were the same size as those at Hardees or McDonalds. Others didn't care for the flavor of steamed meat. To those who complained, I pointed out all the other restaurants in the neighborhood and noted that no one had told them where they had to eat.

There was a really bad entrance ramp to I-75 at Lenoir City. It was short and steep, with almost no visibility. I barely made it on, and Daryl all but crashed. Somehow, though, we did get on the freeway and continued our journey north. We went through heavy traffic at Knoxville, and then a combination of traffic and nasty construction throughout northern Tennessee. I was delighted to finally stop at the welcome center just inside Kentucky. All across Kentucky the roads were excellent. Often they had six lanes through essentially rural areas. Traffic was heavy, but with sufficient lanes everything moved along efficiently.

Through Kentucky and Tennessee we drove along the edge of the Appalachian Mountains. It was a pretty drive, and sometime I'd like to go back and drive through there when I wasn't in a hurry. I couldn't help but notice exit after exit to roads that were named after hollows (Singing Hollow, Hungry Hollow, Bear Hollow, etc.) That backwoods word for "valley" reminded me of an old hymn we often sing at my church that uses the same word. Its lilting Welsh melody (Ash Grove) kept going through my mind all afternoon:

The Master has come, and he calls us to follow  
The tracks of the footprints he leaves on our way;  
Far over the mountain and through the deep **hollow**  
The path leads us on to the mansions of day;  
The master has called us, the children who fear him,  
Who march 'neath Christ's banner, his own little band;  
We love him and seek him; we long to be near him,  
And rest in the light of that beautiful land.

The Master has called us; the road may be dreary,  
And sorrows and dangers be strewn on the track;  
But God's Holy Spirit shall comfort the weary;  
We follow the Master and cannot turn back;  
The Master has called us, though doubt and temptation  
May compass our journey, we cheerfully sing:  
Press onward! Look upward, through much tribulation;  
The children of Zion must follow their King!

The Master has called us, through life's early morning  
With visions as fresh as the dew on the sod;  
We turn from the world with its smiles and its scorning  
To cast in our lot with the people of God;  
The Master has called us, His sons and His daughters;  
We plead for His blessing and trust in His love;  
And through the green pastures, beside the still waters,  
He'll lead us at last to His kingdom above.

**[We haven't sung that song at church in years, and I really wish we would again. I also notice that it's a while since I've incorporated music or poetry in my travelogues.]** That song accompanied me north to Lexington and then on through the horse country plains to a rest area about an hour south of Cincinnati. I had pretty much been driving on auto-pilot all day, and the kids in my suburban were all asleep. I was dead tired, having not really slept much last night, and without some one to talk to I wasn't sure I could stay awake the rest of the way. I asked Daryl if we could switch who was driving which suburban. He agreed (though I found out later he was probably as tired as I was), and we made our way north for the last leg of the trip. The kids in the white suburban (notably Daryl's own children) did a much better job of keeping me awake. We made it north to the Ohio River and caught a gorgeous view of the Cincinnati skyline as we crossed the bridge into Ohio. It was rush hour, but traffic moved along pretty well, never slowing much below 45 all the way across the city. We continued north and exited just south of Dayton, where we easily found the Super 8 Motel.

Two of the girls had arranged to meet their parents in Dayton and continue on a family vacation from there. One of the girls (the same one who seemed to be allergic to dirt) had said that her father was always late, so she purposely had told him we would be there an hour before our itinerary stated. Needless to say he was right on time, but construction and other delays kept him waiting a full two hours before we showed up.

I registered and got the room keys, but I told the kids to just leave their things in the suburban. We had tickets to see Garrigan graduate Brad Nelson play in a baseball game tonight in downtown Dayton, and with the delays we had no time to spare. We made our

way a couple miles further northward on an awkward stretch of interstate (I-75 is six lanes in the suburbs, but only four in central Dayton). We then found spaces in a parking ramp and walked from there to the ball park. We reached the turnstiles of Fifth Third Field just as they were singing the National Anthem.



View from the outfield at Fifth-Third Field in Dayton

(This is from the *Sports Illustrated* website, but it's fairly similar to the view from the "Lawn Cheer".)

Brad spent most of the summer playing for the Midwest League's Beloit Snappers, a Milwaukee Brewers farm team. (Just before I wrote this travelogue, he was called up to the High Desert Mavericks in California.) About half the Midwest Leagues are similar to Beloit; they're located in small industrial cities and play in parks that could be described as "historic" or "run-down", depending on your point of view. The other half, including most teams in the Eastern Division, play small-town ball in big cities. Dayton is bigger than Des Moines, yet its team is in the same A-ball league that includes places like Burlington and Clinton. They have a brand new stadium, complete with skyboxes, and they fill the place every night. Beloit is lucky to attract 1,000 fans to a game (I've been there when there were less than 100 in the stands); Dayton regularly has crowds of around 7,000. **[In fact, there are some dates in 2002 when they drew more than the nearby Cincinnati Reds.]** While we had tickets, we didn't have seats. We were told that the entire seating bowl is sold on a season ticket basis. Our \$5 general admission tickets simply rented space on the grass embankment (the "lawn cheer") overlooking right field. Fortunately even the new A-ball parks are not that large, so we had a good view from the grass.

Everything about Fifth Third Field is done with big league professionalism. While the Snappers don't even include biographies of their own players in their \$2 newsprint program, the Dayton Dragons provide a free magazine unique to each game with biographies and updated statistics on both their own team and the visitors. Beloit's simple scoreboard is much smaller than Garrigan's (which, admittedly, is probably the best high school scoreboard anywhere **[except that it lacks a video screen, it IS the same board most minor league teams use]**). The Dragons, by contrast, have Jumbotron video screen and a huge digital message board towering above left field. Beloit serves their drinks in wax Pepsi cups and beer straight out of the bottle, while in Dayton both beverages are served in souvenir plastic cups with the team logo. **[Actually, Beloit and Burlington are the only two teams I'm aware of anywhere that don't have team logo cups. It's a cheap and easy promotion anyone can do. These days even a lot of high schools serve beverages in custom cups.]** The Snappers sell team souvenirs in a dumpy little shack erected under the aluminum stands, while the Dragons have a huge brightly-lit team store that can be entered from the street and looks like it belongs in a shopping mall. I could go on and on, but you get the idea. **[Almost every new minor league park is similar. At the time, though, I hadn't been to a lot of minor league parks.]**



**Brad Nelson card**  
From the Beloit Snappers 2002 team set

At the time of this game, I had been to one other minor league park that would compare to Dayton. That was when I saw the Kane County Cougars in Geneva, Illinois—basically on a whim when I happened to be in Chicagoland. That was probably the most annoying baseball game I've ever been to. No one in the stadium seemed to pay any attention to the game. They were loud, drunk, and obnoxious, and they made me feel like an outsider who wasn't welcome. By contrast, I'd really enjoyed watching Brad in Beloit (where the crowd is really laid back and friendly, and very few people drink the overpriced beer), and in the past I had enjoyed minor league games at old parks in Clinton, Davenport, and Burlington. I was expecting Dayton to be a lot like Kane County. Fortunately, I was pleasantly surprised. The crowd was friendly, even when I wore my Snappers cap and cheered for Brad and his teammates. Everyone seemed pleased that people would come from Iowa to see a game in their city, and they almost went out of their way to make us welcome. There didn't seem to be any problems with drunk people, and pretty much everybody was just watching the game and having a good time.

**[The atmosphere may well have been different on another night of the week. Having been to MANY more minor league games since this was written, I know Monday is typically the most "family-oriented" night at any ballpark. If you don't like rowdy crowds, you want to avoid weekends and "Thirsty Thursday" (a discount drink promotion almost every park has).]**

The Snappers lost the game, which was hardly a surprise given that they had about the same season as their parent team down the road in Milwaukee. Brad didn't hit any homers, but he had a decent game—going 2 for 4, with a double and an RBI. (He would go on to set the Beloit team record for doubles and to lead all of baseball in RBIs.) It was an interesting game, though not one anyone's likely to remember forever.

One thing I was worried about in the new park was whether we would be able to actually see Brad after the game. In Beloit you can't help but see the players; they have to go out on the concourse to get from the dugout to the clubhouse. Fifth/Third is set up like a Major League park, though, and players go through tunnels under the stands, so they can completely avoid the fans if they want. As the Snappers came to bat in the ninth inning, we all made our way to a section near the visiting dugout that had been mostly vacated by that time. We were able to catch Brad's attention after the game, and he came up into the stands and had a long visit with everyone. I had told him we would be coming (though I hadn't said which specific game we'd be at), but even so he seemed almost overwhelmed that so many people would come so far to see him. He politely signed programs and cards that some of the kids had brought and made everyone feel like he genuinely appreciated our being there. Whether he did or whether he's a good actor, I don't know, but at least he made all of us feel good.

**[Brad has gone out of his way to make me feel welcome whenever I've seen him, which is part of the reason I've gone out of my way to continue to see him as he's advanced through the ranks of baseball. From various things I've read online, I gather it's not just me he's been nice to. When he was released by the Milwaukee Brewers last spring a lot of people were really quite upset. They'd gotten to know him for the nice guy he is and were genuinely rooting for him to make it. Several bloggers commented that they will truly miss him and wished him well in his new role with the Seattle Mariners.]**

We drove back to the motel on that same awful stretch of freeway. Traffic was still horrible, and I almost hit someone trying to merge in front of a fast-moving truck. Somehow we made it back to the Super 8, though. We got settled, and then Daryl took a few of the kids out for supper. I had eaten more than I needed at the ballpark, so I watched Headline News while he went out with the kids. Eventually everyone got settled in for the night, and we were off to sleep.

## Tuesday, June 4 Dayton, Ohio to Algona, Iowa

After staying up late for the game we planned a late departure this morning. I gassed up both suburbans and was pleased to see the school credit card worked again. We breakfasted on the rather minimal selection in the Super 8 lobby and were on our way around 9:30. Traffic was heavy in Dayton, but at least we had missed rush hour.

The biggest traffic problem we had involved trucks. Ohio is one of those states that has a slower speed limit for trucks than for cars. (Illinois does that, too.) That set-up seems ridiculous to me. All it does is force cars to constantly have to pass slow-moving trucks. On densely packed highways, it's often difficult to get into the left lane, so cars are forever slamming on their brakes. **[I recently read that Ohio just did away with that differentiated speed limit. They found it caused more accidents than it prevented.]**

Going the other direction, I had mentioned that St. Louis was the border between north and south. Here that border was Dayton. This morning we left the forest behind for good, and no longer did we have a Waffle House at every exit. I think that pretty much all the way across the country I-70 determines the north/south border. Further east that interstate pretty much follows the Mason-Dixon Line, and it extends the meaning of that line all the way to the Rockies.

Traffic lightened noticeably in Indiana, and before long we were in Indianapolis. There was construction on the Indy beltway, so we took I-70 right through downtown. While there were a couple of odd exits, that route really went very smoothly. Traffic was remarkably light, and I'm definitely filing away the downtown route for future trips east (like when Brad gets promoted to AAA ball.) **[At the time Milwaukee's AAA team was in Indianapolis. The following year they moved to Nashville, which is where Brad played when he was at that level with the Brewers. Throughout his years in Nashville, I'd mostly see him when the Sounds visited Omaha or Des Moines, the two "local" AAA teams. He's now in Tacoma, the Mariners' AAA affiliate, and I haven't been able to see him play all season.]**

We stopped at a rest area west of Indianapolis. There were signs everywhere saying that the water was undrinkable, which made me wonder whether there had been a flood or a farm accident or what. I passed on the unsafe drinking fountain and bought a diet Coke instead from their vending machine. Then we set out west again.

We stopped for lunch at an expensive Arby's (my ham sandwich was \$5.49) at the last exit in Indiana, just east of Danville, Illinois. Some of the kids also purchased illegal fireworks here, a tradition Father Feierfeil had started on our first quiz bowl trip to Dallas **[and one that thankfully has since been forgotten]**. It's a tradition I'd rather abandon (I like living in a state that has sensible laws on such things), but the kids had already bought out the store before I could stop them.

We made our way across Illinois on I-74. Black clouds started to threaten as we went around the Peoria beltway, and Daryl got on the CB to say that he had heard severe thunderstorm and tornado warnings on the radio. It was good that the warnings were for places we were neither in nor going to (areas east of the Quad Cities, mostly), but I did wonder just what we were supposed to do if a similar warning was issued for our area. There's not really much you can do out on a highway in the middle of nowhere, and the exits between Peoria and Galesburg are few and far between. **[Even if we exited, it's not as if we could do much of anything.]**

It poured and poured as we drove west of Peoria. Water built up on the highway, and we had to slow to 35 mph at times to keep going. Even so, visibility was all but nothing. It reminded me of the storms we used to get in Mt. Pleasant around Easter every year, with rain that literally came in sheets. They don't get that kind of rain in western Iowa, and while this brought back memories, it's the sort of thing that's probably best forgotten.

We stopped in Galesburg, officially to buy gas, but mostly to get out of the rain. Things let up a bit as we headed northward to Moline, though we could see there was serious flooding all around the Quad Cities (odd to think of, when drought was on everyone's minds later in the summer). We fought traffic westward to Iowa City (one of the busiest stretches of interstate anywhere in the country **[it still is; they really should six-lane it]**), turned north, and then stopped at the rest area on I-380 just across from where we had stopped on our trip southward.

Angie took over driving for me after our toilet break. She drove northward up Avenue of the Saints to Clear Lake, where we stopped for dinner. This time, for the first time on the trip, people split up and ate at different places. Part of the group went to Burger King, while others went to the brand new Wendy's at that exit. **[Interestingly, the Burger King no longer exists. The building now houses an Arby's.]** After dinner we headed back westward to Wesley and on to Algona.

## Conclusion

It was good to once again have a quiz bowl group that was good enough to qualify for nationals and even better to get back on a winning track—even if it was a controversial victory. The kids were basically good, and while there was some whining now and then, there were no real problems with anyone.

I enjoyed seeing a part of the country I'd never been to before, the Appalachian foothills in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. I really would like to go back there for a more leisurely trip one day. **[I'd go back a couple of times in the coming years when Brad played AA ball in Huntsville, which is right at the base of the foothills in Alabama.]**

I also enjoyed seeing Brad play in one of about twenty games I'd catch this summer. (I'd later see him in Peoria, Davenport, Burlington, Appleton, and South Bend—not to mention several more games in Beloit.) At one time or another someone from Algona saw Brad play in every single park in the Midwest League ... and I was proud that the quiz bowl team was those "someones" for Dayton.

As I write this school is about to start up again, and before long it will be time to host our quiz bowl tournament at Garrigan. I'm hoping this year's team continues to do well. I'm not really planning to go back to nationals next year, but I hope that sometime before too long we will make the trip again. **[Matt Courtney, who was a freshman on this trip, would end up going to nationals four straight years. Right now we've got another couple of students—Jake Rosenmeyer and Anna Kollasch—who just might do the same thing. Time will tell.]**