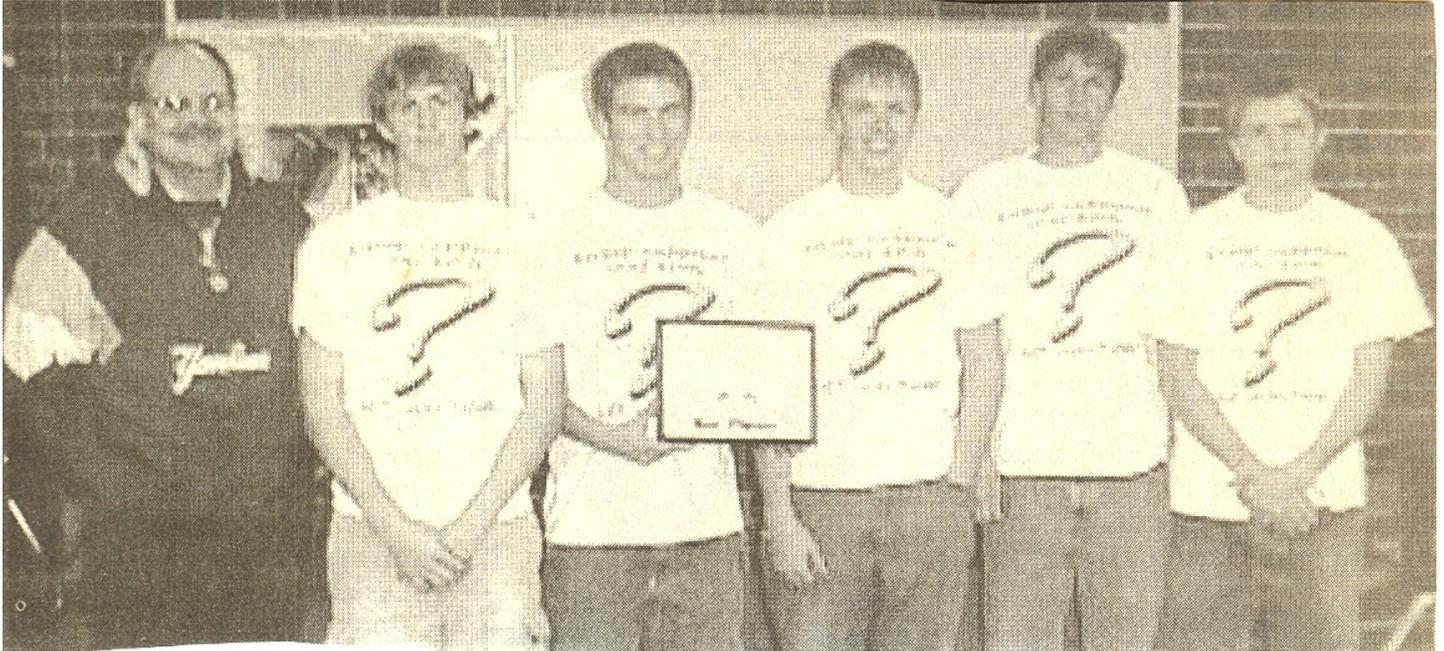


# Washington & Philadelphia ... 2004

[UPDATE: March, 2010—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 with several members of the 2003-2004 BGHS quiz bowl team, most of whom went to nationals  
(photo from the *Algona Upper Des Moines*)

[It's particularly interesting to write this revision in the spring of 2010, because this June we're planning on doing roughly the same trip with this year's quiz bowl team. It will be interesting to see how that trip compares to this one.]

... Another year, another quiz bowl trip. Sometimes it seems like that's how things go. We've been very successful over the years in quiz bowl at Garrigan, and very fortunate to be able to travel repeatedly to nationals. 2004 would mark the school's seventh trip to the National Academic Championships, and we had some of our best players ever this year. We also had **a lot** of alternates, in fact one of the biggest delegations we've ever taken. We'd be going to Washington, D.C., with a side trip to Philadelphia. Plans were finalized shortly after the team won a tournament at North Kossuth last January, and the kids had been looking forward to it ever since. **[The North Kossuth tournament no longer exists, and the overall number of quiz bowl tournaments available is steadily declining. More and more schools these days see quiz bowl as a "luxury" they can't afford to fund.]**

As I usually do in writing up these quiz bowl trips, I'll generally avoid mentioning the specific students by name. Let me begin by introducing the team, though, using the official "biographies" the kids themselves came up with for our entry form:

## **Bishop Garrigan High School – Algona, Iowa**

(Qualified by winning regional tournaments at North Kossuth and Boone [**one of the oldest tournaments around, which apparently ended its run—again due to budget cuts—in 2010.**])

### **Starters:**

#### **Tyler Rolling – Senior**

- State cross-country qualifier
- Enjoys writing poetry in his spare time
- Enjoys hacky-sack, hip-hop, and philosophy

#### **John Kohlhaas (pronounced COLE-house) – Senior – Captain**

- Outgoing student body co-president
- National honors in math and all-state honors in speech and academics
- State qualifier in track and cross-country

#### **Matt Courtney – Junior**

- Recently elected student body president
- Varsity letters in basketball, track, cross-country, band, and math team
- Top area fundraiser in "Trivia Champions" Think-a-thon for St. Jude's Children's Hospital **[This was an event we mostly used as practice for the kids who were going to nationals. They were encouraged to get sponsors based on how many questions they could answer correctly. Matt both got a lot of sponsors and also answered a lot right.]**

**Amber Golwitzer (pronounced GOAL-wit-sir) – Senior**

- All-state speech honoree **[She's since come back to judge at the contest we host each year.]**
- Won honors in band and choir and active in publications, drama, and Christian leadership
- Has two jobs—as a waitress and a lifeguard

**Alternates:**

**Eric Cassmann – Senior**

- Three-time all-state honoree in speech and intramural basketball champion
- Outgoing student body co-president who enjoys cross-country, acting, and music
- Says his biggest accomplishment in school was “resuscitating a girl named ‘Annie’ using CPR”

**Jesse Bode (pronounced BO-dee) – Senior**

- Male cheerleader who has been involved in speech, drama, and intramurals
- Participant in honor choirs
- Enjoys memorizing funny lines from movies

**Josh Broesder (pronounced BREWS-der) – Senior**

- Intramural basketball champion for two straight years
- Active in drama, show choir, and speech—where he won the “Savvy Improv Award”
- Works in a corn field and has saved four people’s lives (seriously)

**Adam Cink (pronounced SINK) – Senior**

- Will major in computer science at Iowa State University
- Four-year participant in intramural basketball
- Enjoys paintball and HALO

**Scott Stence – Senior**

- Letterwinner in football, basketball, and track
- Second place at state math competition
- Voted “Biggest Flirt” and “Best Style” in the Class of 2004

**[While I liked most of these people, it’s not a group I’ve stayed terribly close to. John was back to read at our quiz bowl once, and I periodically get updates on him from his parents. I also went to Eric’s wedding. Beyond that I’ve had very little contact with any of them since they left high school.]**

## Wednesday, June 2, 2004

### Algona, Iowa to Huber Heights, Ohio

I was up at about 5:40 this morning, well before my usual hour. I brewed a pot of the key lime coffee I had picked up when visiting Steve in Florida at Memorial Day. It wasn’t anything special (basically pretty standard flavored coffee), but it had enough caffeine to wake me up. I got my stuff together and headed out to school to get things underway.

Several of the students were already here when I arrived at school, a pretty good sign that we might actually be on time starting off the trip. The Kohlhaas family, which included my captain and the other two drivers (my colleague Daryl and his daughter Angie, who is one of our top quiz bowl alumni **[she went on to get a doctorate in mathematics from Notre Dame]**) were the last to arrive. They were there right on time, though, and we set off with no delays.

About half of the group was at Garrigan when we left. We would be picking up the other half in the little town of Wesley, about 15 miles east of Algona. One of the Wesley delegation was a student who was notorious for being late. The students suggested that someone should get on a cell phone and call this person to make sure he was there on time. One of the students did call him, and (as I deduced from hearing half of the conversation) he was apparently already at the convenience store where we had arranged to meet. The caller decided to have a bit of fun, though. He managed to convince the kid he was calling that we had actually arranged to meet somewhere else and that, in fact, we were already there and the kid was late. At this time we were in fact in Sexton, about halfway between Algona and Wesley. A couple minutes later, just as we were turning off to go into Wesley, the kid who made the call heard his cell phone ring. The “tardy” boy was now asking where we were; he had gone to the alternate destination, but no one was there. He figured out from the bursts of laughter in the background that it had all been a joke, and he was back at the convenience store by the time we got there.

Absolutely no one other than the kids who were making the trip was at Garrigan when we left, but it seemed as if half the town of Wesley was at that convenience store. Not only did we see four kids and many of their parents, but also lots of their parents’ friends and people who were just buying gas or picking up groceries. Everyone wished us good luck, most in a way that seemed genuinely hopeful that we’d do well.

We had a long, dull drive to Cedar Rapids. Completing Avenue of the Saints has shortened that trip by nearly an hour, but there’s still not much way to describe it other than long and dull. We stopped at the Quik Trip on Blair’s Ferry Road for a bathroom break. Since our delegation included nine people who required the men’s room and two who needed to visit the ladies’ room, we were in the unusual position of having a line on the men’s side. To save some time I ran to the Burger King next door and used their facilities. Before long we were back in the suburban and headed out again.

We went down to Iowa City, then over to Davenport, and then made our way south to Galesburg—following the exact same roads we took when we went to St. Louis last year. We stopped for lunch at the same place, too: Fazoli’s in Galesburg. The

grandmotherly Italian woman who had served us endless breadsticks a year ago was still working there, but she was behind the counter now, rather than in the dining room. Most of the group got their food quickly, but two of the boys had ordered a pizza that would take about fifteen minutes to prepare. While they waited, those two ran to Wal-Mart to get an adaptor they could use to hook electronic equipment up to the cigarette lighter in the suburban. They made it back just as the waiter came with one of the biggest pizzas I have ever seen. They ate about four slices of it and took the rest with them, saying this way they'd have something to eat tonight. They ended up stinking up the suburban with a garlic smell, and I'm pretty sure they threw out more than half of it once we got to the hotel.

Our afternoon drive took us along I-74 from Galesburg to Peoria (which we skirted on the beltway) and on into Indiana. Every couple of hours we would stop for some sort of a break. Since we had three drivers, we'd alternate in the two suburbans so someone was always able to rest. Daryl pretty much exclusively drove the white suburban, Angie drove the blue suburban, and I alternated between the two.

... [The kids in the white suburban had] brought along a DVD player (I sometimes wonder how people my age managed to grow up without such things as watching movies in cars) and a video game console, plus enough snacks to feed a small country for a month. ... One of the videos the white suburban group watched was something I'd never heard of before that I've encountered countless times since, a collection of stand-up comedians entitled *Blue Collar Comedy*. The one part of this I had heard of before (though in print, rather than on audio or video) was some guy who strings together a bunch of jokes that all begin with the phrase "You might be a redneck if ...". The rest of the acts followed the same theme, but each was slightly cruder than the one before. Some of the jokes really didn't seem appropriate for a school trip, though neither Daryl nor I said anything at the time (and, fortunately, we only had to listen to it once). One of the comedians ended each of his jokes with the phrase "Git 'er dun" (sic). I'd never heard that phrase before, but obviously the kids had. Throughout this trip we'd be hearing it endlessly. Strangely, I kept on hearing it almost everywhere I went throughout the summer. **[It was the catchphrase of the year in 2004. Fortunately it died quickly soon after that.]** Obviously *Blue Collar Comedy* is relatively popular, though this was the only time I ever personally encountered it. **[I think such things appeal to the same people who like pro wrestling, NASCAR, and Sarah Palin. I'm most definitely NOT one of those people.]**

We stopped for gas in LeRoy, Illinois, at a very strange little truck stop out in the middle of nowhere. The place had a game room that included a pool table, and a couple of the kids played a quick game. There was also a back room full of what looked to be a bunch of slot machines. That can't possibly be legal, but then again this is Illinois; having been born here it wouldn't surprise me at all if someone bribed someone to make it happen. **[It is sort of amazing that in all the effort the Republicans went through to dig up "dirt" when Barack Obama ran for President that they really couldn't find anything that resembled actual corruption. They were absolutely correct when they implied that such is the norm in Illinois politics—for both Democrats and Republicans.]**

We stopped for dinner just west of Indianapolis. It was early (just before 5:00), but stopping would let us avoid going right through the city at rush hour. Most of the group ate at Arby's, but I went to a White Castle next door. The same two boys who had bought electronics in Galesburg again ran to a Wal-Mart, this time to pick up batteries.

Traffic was heavy as we joined the Indianapolis beltway, but it moved right along. I could almost imagine myself in the Indianapolis 500 as I maneuvered the beltway. Like some racetracks, the beltway is basically one big long curve—I don't think there's a straight stretch the whole way around it. I planted myself in the middle lane, and keeping up with the rest of the traffic (which was doing well above the 65mph speed limit) while making a constant, gentle turn to the left really did make me feel like a race driver.

East of Indianapolis there was almost no car traffic. What we saw instead was **trucks**. The truck traffic was heavy in Indiana, but it was absolutely horrible in Ohio. The whole state seems to be one big line of double- and triple-bottom trucks, all going about 62 miles per hour (the car speed limit is 65, but the truck limit is 60). I was thankful that we were only going to Exit 36; I think I'd have gone insane if I had gone any further.

Our destination tonight was the Holiday Inn Express in Huber Heights, Ohio. Huber Heights is a suburb northeast of Dayton, and Exit 36 could be any suburban strip anywhere in America. (Actually the fact that there are sidewalks here betrays the fact that this is an established Midwestern suburb.) The hotel was very nice, frankly one of the nicest places I've ever stayed. **[Holiday Inn Express is almost always one of the nicest hotels wherever they do business.]** The kids liked the fact that there was a nice pool, as well as a computer with free internet access in the lobby. The rooms were also large and pleasant, with good lighting, powerful showers, and comfortable beds. The rooms had cards guests were supposed to fill out to evaluate the cleanliness of the rooms; for each card turned in, the maid would receive a dollar. I can't imagine anyone marking anything less than "excellent" (actually a big smiley face) in any of the categories, because the place was absolutely immaculate.

\* \* \* \* \*

... I read through papers from the places we had passed through today and watched the local news on television. Daryl called home to talk with his wife and daughter. His daughter played softball this summer, and tonight—like most of the summer—they had lost a heartbreaker where everyone played well, but things just didn't go the Bears' way.

... I settled into bed and got a fairly good night's sleep.

# Thursday, June 3, 2004

## Huber Heights, Ohio to Arlington, Virginia

We had an excellent breakfast at the hotel this morning but were still on our way early, leaving the Dayton area at 7:10am. The interstate through western Ohio was absolutely packed. We passed countless cities I'd never heard of (New Carlisle, Fairborn, Springfield, South Vienna, London, Lafayette, and West Jefferson), which together just seemed like one big endless suburb stretching all the way from Dayton to Columbus. I-70 is just four lanes wide through most of Ohio, and it needs to be a minimum of six. Because the trucks were clogging the right lane, we pretty much drove in the left lane all the way to Columbus. I hate driving in the left lane, but when they have that stupid dual speed limit, there aren't a lot of other options.

We turned off onto the Columbus beltway, another road which doesn't seem to have a straight stretch anywhere. It has some curves both directions, but again most of them are to the left. It was right at rush hour, so there was plenty of traffic; but even with some construction at the south end of the city, things moved along without incident. Before long we were headed eastward on I-70 again.

We stopped for gas in Zanesville, where it was immediately clear that Ohio is a state the middle of things. Western Ohio looks a lot like Indiana and has a Midwestern feel to it, and northern Ohio borders Pennsylvania and feels like the East. The state closest to Zanesville is West Virginia, and the feeling you get here is Southern. The old wood frame Chevron station where we stopped looked like it belonged in Hooterville or Petticoat Junction. **[This was one of the strangest places I've ever bought gas—definitely something out of another era. While I needed to use the restroom, when I went into the one at this service station, it was truly disgusting. ... Let's just say I still needed to use the restroom when we left.]**

Zanesville is right at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains, and quite suddenly we had mountain driving—a bit of the challenge even on the interstate. Fortunately traffic thinned out quite a bit, so we could enjoy the scenery as we made our way through the passes. We drove east for about another hour and made it to Wheeling, the old steel mill town where Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia meet. We crossed the Ohio River and went right straight through Wheeling (or in some cases under it, as we tunneled beneath the mountains) and then continued east for sixteen miles of the West Virginia panhandle. Then we entered Pennsylvania and felt like we were really in the East.

We were in Pennsylvania for less than an hour. We drove east to the city of Washington (which is essentially a suburb or Pittsburgh), and then drove south on I-79 for about 30 miles until we re-entered West Virginia. The whole area is serious mountain country, and it's really beautiful. I've driven through here three or four times now, but each time I've been in a hurry to get somewhere. I'd like to come back and explore the area at my leisure. **[I never have been back with time to spare, and I don't suppose I will be this summer either. I'd imagine it's quite a lot like the area in upstate New York I spent a week traversing a couple years back, though.]** There's no big-name tourist attraction in the area, but it's all spectacular scenery.

We had lunch in Morgantown, the home of West Virginia University. There were lots of fast food logos on the blue sign at the exit, but once we got off we found that most of them were actually several miles off the road. The only thing anywhere nearby was a McDonalds, so that's where we ended up having lunch. I had one of the fiesta salads they're pushing this summer—a "low carb" taco salad with just a handful of air-baked tortilla strips for crunchiness. It may be low-carb, but there's nothing low fat about it **[something that's often true of such "diet" foods]**. It comes with a big scoop of greasy taco-flavored meat, plus lots of cheese and sour cream. I didn't really choose it for health reasons, though. I almost always like Mexican food—as well as its American facsimiles—and this was very good.

**[If I do go ever make it back to this region on my own, I'll likely use Morgantown as a base. While it looks like a dumpy mountain town, it's well located. It also has a fascinating little feature that happens to appeal to my own interests. Morgantown (which is about the size of Mason City—and mostly college students) is the smallest city on earth with a rail transit system. It's not exactly the New York subway or the London underground, but it is a fascinating project—one of those things that was "futuristic" in the not too distant past. The elevated system connects two separate campus districts of WVU with downtown Morgantown. It's called "personal rapid transit", because it consists of individual electric "pods" that carry no more than eight people at a time. Supposedly customers enter their destination through a push-button system (which would have been state-of-the-art when the system was built in 1970), and the computer-driven pods whisk them directly to where they're going without stopping at the intermediate stations. Transportation nerd that I am, it would be fascinating to see the thing in action.]**



**Website view of Morgantown PRT**

the white suburban the white suburban was not normally at dead center, but it was always just slightly to the left. Today it was far to the left—still not in the orange area that indicated a serious problem, but appearing to edge ever closer to it. The white suburban was the one where some of the kids had plugged electronic devices into the cigarette lighter. After noticing the problem, I quickly told the kids their videos and games were done for the day and unplugged the adapter. The needle moved slightly closer to the center, but never did go back to where it should have been. However, the suburban still seemed to run okay, and from here on it was mostly downhill all the way to Washington. **[The white suburban has since been retired, replaced by a red Dodge van.]**

We re-joined I-70 at Hancock (at a place where the Maryland panhandle stretches less than a mile between Pennsylvania and West Virginia) and took a bathroom break just east of there. It's fascinating that in a state I think of as Eastern, rural Maryland came across as the kind of redneck country they portrayed on *Blue Collar Comedy*. I was about 70 miles from the nations capitol and not far from Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York; but at this gas station I felt like I was in Alabama. **[The bathroom here was nearly as "colorful" as the one in Zanesville. We all really had no choice but to use it, though.]**

At the gas station we saw for the first time some companions that would be with us through much of the trip, cicadas. These insects emerge from underground burrows every seventeen years, and 2004 was apparently 17 years after the last emergence. They are big insects, the size of the Southern roaches that plagued Hattiesburg when I was in grad school, and their brown skeleton and wings doesn't make them terribly attractive. They only exist in a narrow band with an ideal temperate climate. The deep South is too hot, and most of the East and Midwest are too cold. Apparently western Maryland and northern Virginia are ideal for cicadas, though, because they were absolutely everywhere. I looked up an article on cicadas while writing this and found that their population is usually 50 to 100 per square yard. That's believable given what we saw both here and in suburban Washington.

We followed I-70 east to Frederick, the town I know mostly as the home of Barbara Fritchie, the heroine who refused to surrender the Stars and Stripes in a famous Civil War battle. As I drove past here, in my mind I kept reciting the old John Greenleaf Whittier poem **[though I certainly wouldn't have known it was Whittier before writing this]:**

Up from the meadows rich with corn,  
Clear on the cool September morn,  
The clustered spires of Frederick stand  
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland. ...

... "Shoot if you must this old gray head,  
But spare your country's flag," she said. ...

... The nobler nature within him stirred  
To life at that woman's deed and word;  
"Who touches a hair of you gray head  
Dies like a dog! March on!" he said. ...

At Morgantown we picked up interstate 68, one of the most rugged expressways anywhere in the country. We soon entered Maryland, a state I think of as coastal, but we could just as easily have been in Colorado or Idaho. I've driven this stretch before, too, but it never fails to surprise me just how mountainous much of Maryland is. The mountains aren't high (I don't think anything is over 2,000 feet), but the elevation varies constantly. It's beautiful, but with all the curves and the constant up and down, it's not easy driving. **[Much of the East is amazingly mountainous, something even those who live there don't seem to realize.]**

The suburbans we use at school are well maintained, but they're getting pretty old. As we headed through the mountains we got the first indication that the white suburban might have been getting just a bit too old. The engine groaned a bit as we went up each hill, and as we passed Cumberland it became obvious that the air conditioning was not working. The fan blew air, but it was hot air. Moreover, the voltmeter that shows the battery charge was not showing what it should. In the blue suburban the needle on that meter always stayed exactly in the middle of the meter. On

... Barbara Fritchie's work is o'er,  
And the Rebel rides on his raids no more.  
Honor to her! And let a tear  
Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall's bier.  
Over Barbara Fritchie's grave,  
Let Flag of Freedom and Union wave! ...

... And ever the stars above look down  
On the stars below in Frederick town!

(You'll pardon my editing out about three-fourths of the famous ballad.) From the interstate today the name is really all that's historic about Frederick. The town is basically the start of metro Washington. While it's thirty miles outside the Capitol Beltway, it's pretty much solid development all the way. You see "big box" businesses, strips of fast food and motels, condo developments, and lots and lots of office parks. Some of the exits are for streets that have historic-sounding names, but you know that the big Civil War battles weren't for control of Target or Taco Bell and when "George Washington slept here", it wasn't at the Hampton Inn.

We joined I-270 at Frederick. This interstate starts out busy and just gets busier and busier as it approaches Washington. It's four lanes at Frederick, but it soon becomes six, then eight, and by the time it reaches the beltway as many as fourteen. As I usually do in urban areas, I found a lane slightly to the right of center and just drove with traffic (about 12 miles above the 55 mph speed limit) the whole way.

We reached I-495 (the Capitol Beltway) around 3:00, but it already appeared to be rush hour. The beltway is mostly eight lanes, and there's not much way it could be expanded beyond that. The road was packed, and it was pretty much forced our way on—with at least one driver flipping us off in the process. (One good thing about a suburban—it's bigger than almost anything else in commuter traffic.)

The signs on the beltway all read "Northern Virginia", as if that were the name of a city. It might as well be, because there really isn't any difference between the dozens of suburbs that make up this endless sprawl. We made our way across the Potomac and noticed from signs that ours would be a left exit. So, to the consternation of other traffic, we pushed our way into the left lane. We exited onto the un-numbered Dulles Airport access road, but went the opposite direction from the airport—following signs that said "To I-66". This highway was absolutely empty, a pleasant change from the beltway. I-66 was also pleasant, at least for us. The outbound lanes of the four-lane road were jam-packed, but inbound traffic was fairly light.

We went east about two miles and exited right on the border between Falls Church and Arlington. Our destination was right at that exit: the Econolodge—Metro, which would be our home for the next three nights. Parking in their lot was rather awkward for suburbans **[there was sufficient parking, but inadequate room in the lot for maneuvering]**, but we managed to make it work, and before long we checked in.

When I planned things ahead of time, I didn't really know what to expect from this motel. I booked it because it was in a convenient location and it was just about the only affordable place we could book. "Affordable" in Washington means about \$100 per room per night **[up to \$135 in 2010]**, but when that cost is divided among four kids it becomes more reasonable. It was actually cheaper for us to stay here than it would have been to stay in the dorms on campus. ... Because it was affordable, I really didn't expect much of the place. I was just hoping it wouldn't be too unpleasant.

In fact it was a very nice motel. It's located on one of the busiest streets in Arlington (U.S. 29, or Lee Highway), but the nearby area is mostly residential and the motel itself was very quiet. The cement block construction was sturdy, and they had painted things so it even looked attractive. The rooms were pleasantly decorated and small, but adequate for space. The lighting was good, and the bathrooms were clean and functional. They even served a nice breakfast with muffins and a variety of juices. It was certainly not as nice as the Holiday Inn Express in Dayton, but it was definitely better than I expected.

Something different about this year's quiz bowl trip was that my superintendent and his wife were coming to watch the kids play. Gene Meister noted that the tradition when other activities make similar accomplishments (like going to state in sports or all-state in speech) was to treat the kids to a nice meal, and he said he wanted to do that for our quiz bowl team. **[I think he also wanted a little get-away for him and his wife.]** Gene and his wife Mary Ann had flown into National Airport **[which even then was technically called Reagan Airport]** this morning. They did some sightseeing today, and they were planning to treat the kids to dinner tonight. They'd watch two games tomorrow morning and then fly out in the afternoon. The whirlwind trip had to cost a fortune (I'm betting over \$1,000 total), and both the kids and I were amazed that Mr. Meister (who is also our head baseball coach) missed a baseball game to come and see the quiz bowl team. **[That was about the start of his deferring the coaching duties to his son Rob, who was officially the "co-coach" at the time. Their titles remain the same today, but now Rob truly is the head coach.]**

Gene had given me his cell phone number and told me to contact him when we got to Washington. He and Mary Ann were staying at the same motel, and we found out from the desk that they had checked in earlier in the day. I called Gene and heard a very distorted voice on the other end of the line. It turned out that he was in the subway part of the Washington metro, entering Foggy Bottom station as I called him. They have some sort of antenna in the subway that allows cell phones to work, but honestly they don't work very well. We did manage to communicate well enough to set a time for the group to get together later in the afternoon. I passed the information on to the students, and then our captain and I went to check in at the tournament.

The Econolodge was probably the nearest hotel to Marymount University, the site of the tournament. (If another hotel was closer, it would be no more convenient and would certainly cost more. **[There's actually a Comfort Inn just a few blocks from campus, but it costs close to \$200 a night.]**) The campus was almost exactly three miles from the motel. One of the hardest parts was just getting onto Lee Highway to begin with. All we had to do was make a right turn, but the road is busy enough that even that was a challenge. We then drove two miles east and turned north on either Glebe or Old Dominion Roads. The last tricky part was crossing a busy street to the campus parking area. While it was three miles, the trip took a minimum of ten minutes, and a good fifteen at rush hour.

The parking lot is at the corner of campus, which is spread over several hills in northern Arlington. There was no easy way to get from the parking lot to the student center, and the way we took had to be about the least convenient. We walked about a block downhill and then walked through a parking ramp, going up two levels in the process. The top of the parking ramp let out at a group of stairs that led upward for the equivalent of about another block to a sidewalk at the side of the student center. We had to walk all the way around the student center before we found the one door that was actually open. It wasn't exactly the most direct route, but we made it.

Registration consisted of almost nothing **[and they've since eliminated it entirely]**. I had taken the captain along, because sometimes there are questions the kids need to answer or rule interpretations they want to make them aware of. This year about all we did was say our school name and take an envelope with the schedule in it. There had been some schedule changes from what they had posted online, but none of those affected the times when we played. The secretary at the check-in desk noted that they also had T-shirts for sale. They were attractive (unlike the truly hideous one I bought the first year we went to nationals, down in Dallas), and both the captain and I bought one. **[They must have lost money on these, because I don't think they've had them for sale since.]**

We went back to the Econolodge, and I had a nice visit with Meisters in the lobby. Then everybody got ready for dinner, and we assembled in a mirror-filled lower lobby that was conveniently out of the way.

I had chosen to have dinner at Applebee's, the nationwide chain that describes itself as "a neighborhood bar and grill". I remembered that a year ago Meisters had taken the kids who performed at all-state speech (including several of the ones who were here today) to Applebee's in Ames, and everyone had enjoyed it. There was an Applebee's about a mile west of the hotel, on Broad Street in Falls Church. We had purposely planned on an early dinner, so that they could accommodate our group without a wait. We arrived around 5:30 and were almost immediately seated.

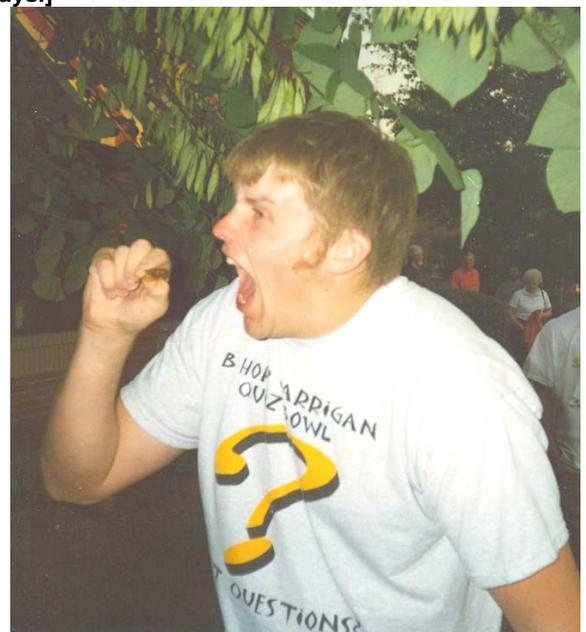
Everyone enjoyed dinner. Meisters were cordial and generous. They suggested we order appetizers, and we had a couple of plates for the table. The kids were aware they were being treated, though, and they made relatively modest choices from the menu. Even the mid-range selections at Applebees offer more food than most people can eat, though. Their hamburger, for instance, features a full pound of meat. One of our boys was a very large young man who is well known for eating large portions. He managed to finish the hamburger, but it was a challenge for him.

When we were done with dinner, Meisters insisted that we have dessert. They wouldn't hear of it when we said we were full (which was absolutely true), but they did accept the idea of buying a handful of desserts that could be shared among everyone at the table. The best of the desserts was a "dulce de leche" cheesecake. Dulce de leche is a caramel sauce made with condensed milk, and it mixes very well with cheesecake. It was exceedingly rich (more than I really wanted after a plateful of fajitas), but truly excellent. **[It's kind of strange to think of defining dulce de leche, which has since become a part of the dessert menu pretty much everywhere. They serve dulce de leche cheesecake at Burger King these days.]**

While the kids' selections were moderate, Applebee's is not a cheap place to eat. Some of the kids saw the credit card receipt that Mr. Meister signed. Without directly saying the total, let's just say that appetizers, dinner, pop, dessert, tax, and an very generous tip averaged \$19.93 for each of the fourteen of us **[and twenty bucks a head really is about the best you can do for a full meal at Applebees]**. Do the math, and you'll see that the Meisters were **extremely** generous.

Applebee's parking lot was absolutely full of cicadas. As we were getting ready to leave I got a cute picture of one of the boys holding a cicada in his hand like a pet and another of the boy who had eaten the full-pound hamburger posing as if he were about to eat a cicada.

We drove back to the hotel and then almost immediately went into the city. Besides being convenient to the college, the big advantage to the Econolodge was that it was just a short walk from the East Falls Church metro station. On the map it looked like we'd follow city streets for about three blocks to get from the motel to the station. In fact, it was quite a bit easier than that. There's a jogging and bike trail that runs all the way across the city of Arlington, and that trail led directly from the motel to the station. The distance was still equivalent to three blocks, but the tree-lined trail was far more pleasant than busy streets.



**"Eating" a cicada**

The trail was also full of cicadas, and sunset seemed to be the time when they really came out. We made our way along

quickly, though, and before long we entered the station. I had purchased day passes of the metro online long before we left. I had already given Meisters passes; now I passed them out to the kids, and everybody scanned them and made their way through the turnstiles.

The metro ride into the city was uneventful. It surprised me a bit that there was no special security in the Washington metro. I had heard that security had gone up since the bombing in Madrid (and figured it was sort of permanently on high since the 2001 terrorist attacks), but everything seemed pretty much the same as it had been when I was here years ago. There were no officers in the trains or stations, nor anything else (other than a few posters advising people to watch for items left in trains or on platforms) that indicated increased security. That really did surprise me. I've ridden the Chicago 'L' during those orange alerts that we seem to have for no good reason every few months. On those occasions they take all the wastebaskets off the platforms and station extra police officers throughout the system. At one point I was on a train that was delayed for about ten minutes while they investigated "a suspicious white powder" that turned out to be sugar from a doughnut. **[At the time anthrax was the "scare du jour", and every white powder was treated as if it were poison.]**

Having expressed my surprise, I must say that there is a very good chance that there are changes in the metro that aren't visible to passengers. ... [For instance,] Washington's metro has always had security cameras, and it may well be that since the attacks they are now continuously monitoring them.

**[Not long after this, we'd enter a continual orange alert, which we're still in today. Over time transit systems realized it was impractical and unaffordable to be on extreme guard at all times, so things gradually eased back to normal. Things certainly aren't as lax as they were in the 1990s, but neither are they so strict and paranoid as they were in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.]**

Our main destination tonight was the brand new World War II Memorial, which is just west of the Washington Monument on the National Mall. The memorial is a long walk from any metro station. (Oddly for a tourist-oriented city with a comparatively new public transit system, most of Washington's tourist attractions are a long walk from the subway. **[I've read that this was intentional, a security feature designed into the system so people wouldn't bomb the metro stations in hopes of destroying monuments above them.]**) It took about fifteen minutes to get there from Smithsonian station, but it was worth the walk.



**World War II Memorial, with Washington Monument behind – Washington, D.C.**

The World War II Memorial has gotten mixed reviews, but I very much liked it. Unlike the starkly simple memorials for Vietnam and Korea, the World War II Memorial looks like the sort of grand old monument you'd expect to see in Paris or Moscow. That's fitting. A colossal war warrants a colossal monument; anything less really wouldn't do it justice. Basically the memorial is a circle of arched pillars surrounding an enormous fountain. Each pillar represents one of the states, and they are joined in two separate arches to represent the two main fronts of the war. I, of course, made a point of finding the Iowa pillar, where others had laid flowers. I also made a point of circling the arch for the Pacific theater, where my father served.

It was strange to think that to the kids World War II really is history, rather than something to which anyone they know can personally relate. Some of these kids have grandparents who served in Vietnam; to them World War II is many generations in the past. They were, however, properly respectful—which is more than I can say for some of the other visitors to the site. The place was overrun with middle school kids from Ohio, all of whom seemed to be shouting at the top of their lungs and none of whom seemed to care in the least what they were seeing.

Most of the kids also wanted to see the nearby reflecting pool. They know this landmark primarily from the movie *Forrest Gump*, where the central character apparently sits in it. I've never seen that movie. What comes to my mind here is Martin Luther King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial and the hundreds of thousands of people who lined the mall to hear it. I was too young to know what was happening when King actually said "I have a dream", but I've seen those images so many times they are burned into my brain. **[Happily, the 1960s image is now married with the image of President Obama's inaugural address, with an equally large mass of humanity facing the opposite direction. In many ways the election of President Obama is the fulfillment of King's dream.]**



**Garrigan quiz bowl team posing by the Washington Monument at sunset (Note the security fence behind them, at about head level.)**

On the metro ride back, a guy on the train was very obviously hitting on Angie Kohlhaas. Angie always came across as plain in high school, but she has grown into a truly stunning college girl; she could certainly do better than chubby young man who was courting her. ...

We saw more wildlife as we walked the trail back to the Econolodge. In addition to the cicadas, we saw a raccoon sitting on top of the wall that separated the trail from interstate 66. I don't think of seeing raccoons in urban areas, and it made an interesting sight. **[While Arlington is very dense, it's also quite heavily forested. It's not really a surprise that wildlife would live there.]**

The kids were surprisingly tired by the time we got back to the motel. Everyone settled into bed fairly quickly, and we had a very pleasant and restful night.

## Friday, June 4, 2004 Arlington, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Daryl (who shared my room) and Angie Kohlhaas went out jogging early this morning. While Daryl was out I showered, enjoyed the motel's breakfast muffins, and wrote some notes for this journal. I then double-checked to make sure the kids were up and that everybody would be ready to go before long.

We drove to campus right at rush hour, but we got there with no problem. We had two games this morning, both of which were in a new building that was a sort of student union named after some woman who was obviously a wealthy donor. We parked in the same lot I had parked in yesterday, and we made sort of a big "U", walking uphill and down to get to the building.

When we checked in, the woman apologized that because of construction they were using different facilities than they normally use at this location. We found out during our first game that the apology was definitely in order. The game was in what was probably a seminar room, the sort of place that is designed to comfortably fit eight or ten chairs around a long table. It was far smaller than a standard classroom or the lecture halls they normally use for competition. They had crammed two tables for the teams competing in an "L" shape in the corner of the room. The moderators sat in two small chairs at the side, with a tiny portable table (the sort of thing you might put a projector on) holding a laptop computer between them. At the other end of the room they had about twelve chairs set in three very cramped rows facing the tables. We were thankful our delegation got here early. We occupied ten of those

We walked back past the Washington Monument to the metro station. I mentioned that there didn't seem to be any special security in the metro. That's definitely **not** the case with the Washington Monument. The place looks like a really ugly construction zone. Instead of the green mall surrounding it, you see a gray fence about seven feet tall; it looks like the kind of thing that should surround an empty lot where they're building a skyscraper. I don't think you can visit the Washington Monument at all these days, and with the ugly fence surrounding it, you really can't even get a decent view of the place. I could understand having the monument surrounded by cops, but blocking it off so you can't even see it seems ridiculous.

We took the metro west about two stations to McPherson Square, a little park just north of the White House. We surfaced, and several people snapped pictures of the back side of the White House all lit up at night. I know from experience that such pictures **never** come out **[they do stand a better chance in the digital era]**, so I just wandered around the park a bit. We discovered soon that Washington suffers from a problem common to a lot of Eastern cities, rats. We saw at least three rats scurrying around the park at night. I can't say it exactly made us eager to go back to the subway, but we didn't have a lot of other choices.

chairs between our alternates, coach, and “fans”. By the time the other team arrived, it was standing room only, with about seven people lining the walls.

Our captain and I gave a sarcastic look at each other when we walked in this room, both knowing when we saw the moderator that luck would not be with us. Our moderator was “the Jeopardy guy” **[Brad Rutter]** I wrote about in my St. Louis travelogue a year ago. This gentleman won a million dollars on *Jeopardy*, at that time the most anyone had ever won (although the record has since been surpassed, since they changed the rules of the show). He is an annoying and condescending S.O.B., who made it very clear a year ago that he found it hard to believe that hicks from Iowa could have any intelligence. He was slightly less annoying this year, but he’ll never be on a list of people I’ll look up to. **[We’d see him again the following year, and by that point I really didn’t dislike him.]**



“Larry Bird”

occasionally going to Urbandale or Dowling. We’ve played all of those schools on various occasions, and Bellaire was a lot like them. The kids found out quickly that they were very good (better than us), but they really weren’t super-human. While they knew some categories we didn’t (like classical music and European literature), there were glaring gaps in their knowledge, too. The Bellaire kids, for example, seemed to know very little about history—a topic “Larry Bird” did very well at. I knew going into this match that we probably wouldn’t win, but I was pleased that we made a respectable showing. We ended up losing by about 200 points; that sounds like a lot, but the way quiz bowl works a turn of about four questions **[really more like five or six]** would make up that difference.

I spent some time after the game being a real coach. That’s something I don’t get to do much during the actual competition season. At most quiz bowl tournaments the coaches are busy reading questions or working as judges. At most tournaments we enter, Garrigan sends between two and four teams, and since I’m busy in a center, I almost never get a chance to see the kids—let alone offer any suggestions. At nationals I could offer observations and advice and hope that the team might learn from it and improve in later games. Probably the #1 piece of advice for success in quiz bowl is to not leave any question unanswered; a wrong answer is always better than no answer. There were several questions in our first game that neither team made a stab at or that Bellaire answered wrong, but then no one from Garrigan answered. On a couple of them the kids hit themselves after the moderator read the answer; they had known it, but they were afraid to buzz in, because they thought they might be wrong. I gave a couple of other pieces of advice, too, and I could tell in our later games that the kids had learned from it.

I got a kick seeing Gene Meister look at me as I gave this advice. He nodded and smiled at almost everything I said. Gene, of course, is a **real** coach, and I wondered just what he might tell a batter after he struck or a team after a loss. Actually, I knew the answer to that from what I had heard from current and former baseball players. Like a lot of coaches, Gene Meister tends to quietly encourage after something bad happens; the time he yells is when you win, but only because you did something wrong and lucked out. I think I was trying to do the quiz bowl equivalent of the sort of post-game speech Gene might give after a team played well, but just lost to better competition.

We had about an hour to kill between games. We headed down to the basement, where there was a very simple game room. Some of the kids played foosball or ping pong, but mostly we just sat around and killed time.

The main thing I remember from this game was that when our team sat down, the Jeopardy guy looked at the junior on our team and went on and on about how much he looked like basketball player Larry Bird. He asked repeatedly if people told this kid that he looked like Bird. The kid, who ended up without question being the best player on our team this year, said (probably honestly) that no one had ever said that to him. Having had the resemblance pointed out, though, I can verify that it is for real. Probably no one told the kid he looked like Larry Bird, because Bird is older than me and has been retired from sports for years. I’m not sure I’ve heard Bird’s name since Michael Jordan came on the scene, and Jordan’s been retired for quite a while now, too. This wavy-haired blond boy does, however, resemble the pictures you see of a much younger Larry Bird—about the time he entered the N.B.A.

The two games we were playing this morning were against two different teams from the same school. That happens all the time in local tournaments, but we’ve never had that happen before at nationals. Even for a big high school, it would seem pretty pretentious to think that you have enough talented kids to make two national-level starting line-ups. The school we were facing, though, was both big and pretentious. The Bellaire School is a large private school from Houston. It is vaguely Christian, but not affiliated with any specific church **[I could add the sarcastic comment that that’s not unlike Texas as a whole]**. While I don’t think it actually is the girls’ alma mater, Bellaire came across as the kind of place President Bush would send his daughters.

Bellaire’s “A” team, which we were playing first, had won the Texas state academic championship. There is no state quiz bowl championship in Iowa, but if there were the crown would be passed from year to year between Ankeny and Ames, perhaps

Our second game was in a big cafeteria inside this student union. There was a little stage at one end of the place, where I'd bet musicians occasionally perform in a "coffee house" setting. They set up tables for the teams there, with the moderators seated at a round table facing them. Any spectators just found empty tables somewhere in the cafeteria. The room was very noisy. In particular an espresso machine kept gurgling and hissing. They had both the moderators and the students miked, though, so it wasn't all that big of a problem.

This time we were playing Bellaire's "B" team. When we go to regional tournaments, there is no way you can tell in advance which team is a given school's "good" team. Most schools either just distribute the teams randomly or check the schedule and give their best team the easiest opponents. (When possible, I almost always use that second strategy myself—and it's not at all uncommon for "Garrigan 3" to be the "good" team.) At nationals, though, "B" did in fact mean "second best", a team that was good, but notably less gifted than the "A" team.



Quiz bowl starters at nationals

We've played teams like this a lot of times, too, and over the years we've enjoyed quite a bit of success against them. The second-best teams from Ankeny and Urbandale are usually fairly equivalent to the top teams from Boone or Spirit Lake ... or Garrigan. That was true here, too; we were pretty well matched against Bellaire B. We got off to a good start, answering the first three questions. That gave the kids some confidence. It was back and forth after that. They'd be up by 10 or 15, then we'd take over the lead. That continued through the toss-up, bonus, and "60 second" rounds. At nationals there's a fourth round to each game called "Stump the Experts". These are high-value toss-up questions that are supposed to be harder than any of the other questions. Sometimes they are, but today they happened to have a bunch of questions (in fields like science, popular music, and sports) that played right into our areas of strength. We were trailing after the "60 second round", but we soon re-took the lead and kept increasing our score until we had about a 50-point lead. Then there was a whole series of questions (probably five or six, for a value of well over 100 points) that nobody on either team knew the answers to. I kept wondering how many more questions there were, because if the other team had gotten on a roll they could easily have beaten us. Fortunately the game ended with us still in the lead; we had our first victory.

I was delighted that Meisters got to see us win. While it's a fact that most games at nationals for schools our size are losses, it would have been embarrassing to have them travel so far just to see us lose. I had also made a point in these two games of making sure everyone got to play, at least for one round of one game. I figured that even the alternates deserved the chance to play in front of "fans".

We left campus and drove back to the motel. Gene asked at the desk where he might find a bank and then left while the kids changed into casual clothes. (I insist at nationals that the kids dress for competition like they would on a dress-up day at school, and this year's group was very good about complying.) We assembled in the lobby, and when Gene got back he said he wanted to give the kids "something for lunch". What he did was to give all nine kids, plus Daryl, Angie, and me \$10 each to spend as they wished. While Gene and Mary Ann probably tend to eat mostly at nicer places, to a kid \$10 is more than just "something for lunch". No one was expecting this, particularly after they had been so nice in treating everyone to dinner last night. We were all shocked at the Meisters' generosity, and truly grateful.

Behavior-wise this was one of the nicest groups I've traveled with, but in some ways it was also one of the most frustrating. Most years when we've gone to nationals, I've let the kids divide into small groups and go out on their own sight-seeing. That's as much for my enjoyment as theirs. All of them can see the things they want, and I can see the things I want. The perfect example of that was the year we went to New York, when my sister Margaret and I were entirely separated from the kids all day long. They divided into two groups (basically the boys and the girls) and saw the sorts of things kids would be interested in, while Margaret and I saw things like the Cloisters Museum. We chose a meeting place (sad to talk about in retrospect, the mall in the basement of the World Trade Center), and everyone came back there at an appointed time and shared their stories. We all had a wonderful time, and dividing up worked beautifully.

Unfortunately, this year everybody seemed to want to do everything as a **big** group. The idea of dividing into small groups just seemed alien to these kids; everything was all or nothing. What's more, they really didn't want to go anywhere on their own. While some of them are really quite well-traveled, they seemed honestly scared of trying to find points of interest without me there to guide them. There are certainly parts of Washington that they should be scared of, but there's no reason a tourist needs to encounter those

places. If I agreed to guide the whole group around, the next problem was that no one could agree on where we should go. I think they wanted me to plan a minute-by-minute itinerary, so that they could just follow without thinking. I wanted this trip to be theirs, not mine, but it was hard to do that when they weren't willing to give input into the decisions. This all seemed especially strange because this was overall the oldest group I'd ever traveled with (eight seniors and a junior), yet they really seemed the most insecure and least mature.

**[This has continued to be true in the other trips we've made since this one. I think this group was the start of a long line of kids who had been severely overprotected while growing up. That's meant they haven't learned what it means to be independent—which seems very sad to me.]**

At this particular time no one could decide where they wanted to go for lunch. I had offered several possible choices, assuming different groups would choose different ones. After giving them about five minutes and finding no one would make a decision, I announced we were taking the metro to Rosslyn. I knew there a number of fast food places and also some "real" restaurants near that station, and I also knew Freedom Park—which houses a section of the Berlin Wall and other symbols of the fight for freedom—was nearby.

We got to Rosslyn and made our way up to street level, but then no one could decide which of the many places they wanted to eat. All the choices the kids considered were fast food (basically McDonalds, Burger King, or Subway), and none would approach the \$10 that Meisters had given them. The three restaurants were literally side by side, and I can't imagine why the kids wouldn't just split up and each go into their favorite. If they wanted to eat together as a group, there was a little park nearby where they could all get together once they had their food. But no—they all had to go to the same place, and they spent another five or ten minutes arguing about what that place would be.

I really couldn't have cared less where we ate, so when once again no one would make a decision, I just walked to the closest one: Burger King. The kids followed me like I was the pied piper, and no one complained about Burger King once we were there. (Had I chosen myself, I'd have more likely picked Subway, but I just wanted to get the arguing over with.) Ordering was a bit of an experience, since the all-Hispanic staff refused to speak Spanish (one of the kids tried) but didn't really communicate well in English. We all got our food, though, and everyone seemed to enjoy lunch.

Daryl and Angie set off on their own after lunch to find the Iwo Jima monument. None of the other kids could decide if they wanted to see that or not, so I made the decision for them that they wouldn't. Instead I told them they would see Freedom Park. (Actually I said they would see "the Berlin Wall", which sounds a lot more interesting.) I kept offering the opportunity for people to split up and see other things, but absolutely everyone tagged along toward the park.

I had brought along a baseball cap from the Huntsville Stars (Garrigan graduate Brad Nelson's AA team), and I realized shortly after we set out that I didn't have it on. I had paid \$20 for the cap, and I really didn't want to lose it, so I left Gene and Mary Ann with the kids and literally ran back to Burger King. Fortunately it was still there, sitting under the bench in the booth where I had eaten. I grabbed it and ran back. The kids (many of whom run track) were impressed at how quickly I had gotten to Burger King and back, but I was definitely winded. I may walk a lot, but I'm no runner.

We followed an assortment of signs to Freedom Park. We could see it (it's on an overpass that used to be a freeway off-ramp), but we couldn't figure out how we were supposed to enter. When I was here before, you entered through the "Newseum", a museum of journalism sponsored by the publishers of *USA Today* (which is Arlington's local paper). The Newseum has moved to new quarters in the city of Washington, and there was no indication of how you were supposed to get to the park now. Eventually I asked a woman on the street. She thought for a minute and then said she thought you entered from the Gannett Building (the place where *USA Today* is published), which was across the street from where we were standing. We made our way there and asked in the lobby, where they confirmed that we just needed to take the elevator up to the second level and then take the skywalk to the park.

**[The Gannett Building presumably no longer has that name. *USA Today* and its publisher have moved further out to the suburbs. "McPaper" is now published in McLean, a place on the beltway near Dulles Airport. I gather downtown Arlington has been struggling a bit since they departed.]**

There was a bank of four elevators in the lobby of the Gannett Building. Gene Meister and one of the boys got in one elevator, while everyone else in our group crowded into another (together with three people who worked in the building). We pressed "2" (as well as whatever higher floors the workers needed), and the doors closed. There was a small jerk, but then the elevator stopped. We hadn't gone anywhere, but the elevator was stuck and the doors would not open.

I'd never been stuck in an elevator before, but I found out quickly that the main part of the experience is that it's very hot. All those bodies confined in a very small space generate a lot of heat. "Larry Bird" was standing next to the control panel, and he got out the emergency phone. He talked quite a bit, but he seemed unsure if anyone had actually answered him or not. Two of the seniors couldn't seem to shut their mouths; the longer we were stuck, the more annoying they became. (Now you know why I never give specific names in these journals.) One of the workers (with whom they were trying to flirt) was clearly annoyed with them, but she tried to make the best of things and humor them. Her colleagues ignored the boys, but they added to the noise level when they each got on separate cell phones and called people upstairs to explain why they were late for work.

A couple of the kids had done the calculations and figured out that even if we weighed an average of 200 pounds each (which was certainly a very high estimate given all the fit runners in this elevator), we would still be under the rated capacity that was listed above the controls. Even so, I gathered from comments the workers made that these elevators get stuck all the time.



**Posing by the Berlin Wall section – Freedom Park**

We were stuck for about half an hour—long enough that I started to wonder about things, if not really panic. Finally we could hear some clunking outside the door, and after a few minutes of that the door opened to reveal a tiny Asian man on a ladder holding a crowbar. We thanked him, and the three workers proceeded to go into another elevator. Our group sensibly took the nearby stairs up to the second floor. When we got to the top the two who had been waiting there broke out laughing, and we all joined in. It was certainly one of those experiences you don't have every day.

After all the excitement leading up to it, Freedom Park itself was nothing special. I've described it in earlier travelogues, and there's only one major change. Where they used to have just one meter-wide panel of the Berlin Wall, they now have a section of about half a dozen such concrete panels. The kids posed for pictures by the Wall. The kids seem to view the fall of the Berlin Wall the way I view landing on the moon; it was obviously the most important event of their childhood. For most of them, though, it's less of an actual memory than a legend (the same sort of memory I have of "I have a dream"). It's weird to think how long ago it happened, but most of these kids were in pre-school when the Cold War ended.

We made our way back to the park next to Burger King and waited around there for Daryl and Angie to return from the Iwo Jima monument. While we waited I had our captain call the Algona radio station. They did a fairly lengthy interview with him, both asking about the games and inquiring as to what we had done. Little did we know that our adventure in the elevator at the Gannett Building would be played up as the top story on KLGa today. I'd be hearing about that elevator for weeks after I got back to Algona.

We all went back to Rosslyn station and said goodbye to the Meisters. They got on a train for the airport, and shortly after it left we headed back to the motel. The kids were really touched by the Meisters' generosity and surprised that anyone would make such a trip just to see them. While it's not boring to watch, quiz bowl almost never draws much of any spectators. Even parents who seem to spend their lives tramping to all their kids' activities rarely make it to quiz bowl tournaments. Gene and Mary Ann were certainly the first school employees who had been to a tournament without being there to work, and the kids were delighted someone had taken interest in them.

**[There's been a definite increase in parents (and especially grandparents) attending quiz bowl tournaments in recent years. It's still not something any school employees go to, though.]**

The kids changed back into nicer clothes **[actually, as you can see from the Berlin Wall photo, most of them were in nice clothes to begin with]**, and we soon made our way back to campus. Our schedule this year was set up so we played three games all in one day, so we'd know in an hour or so just what our chances of advancing to play-offs would be. Our third game was against Horace Greeley High School from Chappaqua, New York. Before this tournament I knew Chappaqua mostly as the residence of convenience where the Clintons bought a home to allow Hillary (born in Illinois and most recently from Little Rock) to claim she was a New York resident and thus represent that state in the Senate (the exact same thing Fred Grandy—"Gopher" from *The Love Boat*—did when the Californian claimed he "lived" in Sioux City as my Congressman; it's not like politicians of both parties don't do that). **[I'm not sure either of the Clintons actually "lives" in Chappaqua. By most reports the former President spends most of this time at an apartment in Harlem—and today, of course, Hillary is in D.C. when she's not abroad.]** Chappaqua was apparently the birthplace of the journalist best known for the phrase, "Go west, young man", and a large high school in New York City's northern suburbs is named after him.

Horace Greeley won the championship in last year's national tournament, and the kids had expressed just a bit of fright at having to play them. The good news was that we weren't really playing the national champions; that team had graduated, and we were playing the younger people who took their place. The 2004 Horace Greeley team was good, but not really national championship caliber, and we could definitely compete with them. The game was back-and-forth going into the "60 second" round. Our kids made an unfortunate choice of categories for that round, and when "Stump the Experts" was also went back and forth, the few points we missed out on in that third round made the difference in a very close game. We lost, but the kids felt they'd really played one of their best games—and they were right.

After the game several of the kids bought tournament T-shirts. Then we went to a little minimall on Lee Highway. I went into a Safeway supermarket to pick up a thank-you card that the kids could sign for Meisters. Meanwhile the kids went into a Hollywood Video store next door, where a couple of them actually bought things. I kept wondering why you'd buy videos on a trip; it's not like they couldn't find those exact same movies within an easy drive from their home. These were the same kids who wanted to watch movies in the suburban on the trip out, though; I guess they're just addicted to entertainment.

When we got back to the motel, once again no one could figure out what they wanted to do. Eventually I made the decision that we'd take the metro back downtown and go to the National Archives. I remembered that when we were out here for quiz bowl before, the Archives was surprisingly uncrowded at night. I just hoped it was still open, since I could picture it being restricted in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

There's a metro stop called "Archives/Navy Memorial" that's about three blocks away from the tourist entrance to the National Archives. It was raining when we left the station, and we got a little wet as we made our way down the street. Getting to the archives also required us to cross a major street (Constitution Avenue, I think). There was almost no traffic, and in the interest of time I jay-walked—crossing against a "Don't Walk" light. The kids all followed right along, crossing on red immediately after me. Daryl and Angie Kohlhaas are more law-abiding, though **[or perhaps more rural]**. They waited on the corner a good minute and a half before the light finally switched to "Walk". The rest of us had to wait for them, of course, and we all got thoroughly soaked.

The walk/don't walk lights in Washington are kind of interesting. In addition to the stylized drawings of a walking person and a hand raised to signal "stop", the "walk" part of the cycle has a timer that counts down how many seconds are left before the signal changes. That's good to know. We've all seen lights that allow almost no time for walk, even though the traffic signal stays green much longer. These seemed fairly well coordinated with the traffic signals, and the timers showed anywhere from about 15 seconds for walking (on minor cross streets) to over two minutes (on a major thoroughfare). **[They've since put in counters like this in most major cities.]**

The National Archives was still open, and we entered and dried off a bit. It surprised me that security was not unusually tight at the home of our nation's most important documents. They X-rayed bags, and everyone had to walk through a metal detector like you would in an airport. That's exactly what they had here years ago, though. What's more, the security wasn't set particularly high. Several of the kids were wearing various metal objects (belt buckles, necklaces, watches, etc.), but none of them tripped the machine.

I suppose the security is not more tight because it is, after all, just paper that's stored here. While it would be sad if a terrorist destroyed the original copy of the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, it's not like the country would cease to exist if that happened. Still, with all the emphasis some people put on the flag as a symbol of our freedom, it surprised me they didn't protect historic parchment a bit more than modern cloth. **[Of course, a lot of those flag-wavers would prefer that the Constitution didn't even exist—or at any rate everything except the Second Amendment.]**

In the holding room after security, a guard told us that photos were allowed at the National Archives, but flash photography was forbidden. I'm sure she gave that same speech to everyone, but not very many people seemed to pay any attention to it. I was appalled at how many flashes went off as we filed past centuries-old documents. Each time someone took a flash photo, the guards glared at them—but that was it. I've seen museum guards in Mexico and Europe who confiscated cameras or opened them up and exposed the film when tourists took flash photos; here, though, all the violators got was "the look".

They really should just ban all photos here. They could have postcards of the documents for sale in the gift shop (which, oddly, they didn't), and that would take care of it. A lot of modern cameras are set up so you can't control whether it flashes or not, and I'm sure a number of the flashes really were accidental. If they just said no photos—period, they'd solve a lot of problems.

While there were no postcards in the gift shop, they did have a number of interesting items. I picked up a book highlighting the hundred most important documents in our nation's history (some of the modern ones were interesting choices), as well as a coffee mug with a reproduction of the World War II propaganda poster "Loose lips might sink ships". **[I use the coffee mug frequently; it's one of my favorites. I don't think I've looked at the book more than a couple of times, though.]**

It was still raining as we made our way back to the metro station. We took the train to Pentagon City, where we went to the same mall (the Fashion Center at Pentagon City) I had taken kids to when we'd been in Washington for quiz bowl before. The kids explored the mall for quite a while (I'm not sure when I've seen a group of boys who were more into shopping), but I basically just had dinner. Everything in the food court at Pentagon City is ridiculously overpriced. Their lease fees must be exorbitant, because the same value meals that cost \$3 in Algona and maybe \$4 in Chicago are a minimum of \$6 here. I had a cheesesteak, fries, and iced tea, and I parted with over \$9 after tax. (Later this summer I'd order almost the same food at the ballpark in Huntsville, and the whole meal cost \$6.50—and that's with stadium prices.) I also had a pretzel, and I stopped at the Haagen Daaz ice cream shop, which I knew would be expensive. It was. A single waffle cone was \$4.95, plus tax. It was worth it, though. I had an outstanding scoop of dulce de leche ice cream that tasted out of this world. I probably downed a week's worth of calories in fifteen minutes, but I enjoyed it. **[I was recently at Mall of America, and the prices there in 2010 were almost identical to what Pentagon City charged in 2004. I hate to think what stuff costs in Arlington today. UPDATE—I'm finishing this revision following our 2010 quiz bowl trip to Washington, which also included visiting Pentagon City. This time it didn't really seem particularly out of line. In fact the 2010 prices were about the same as they were in 2004. I wonder if Virginia diidn't put in a higher minimum wage law about the time of this trip.]**

We took the metro back to the hotel, where I spent a lot of time reading through papers. Kathy Kohlhaas called and let us know how much KLGA had played up the kids' story, especially the part about being stuck in the elevator. The kids were restless tonight; they definitely didn't want to go to bed quickly. While I don't usually do formal bed checks on these trips, I don't normally like to go to sleep before the kids do. Given everybody's mood, it was a short and not especially restful night.

## Saturday, June 5, 2004

### Arlington, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Since we played three games yesterday, we had most of the day free for sightseeing today. If I were here on my own, I'd have caught an early train into the city and gone out exploring from about 7:00 on. Kids, of course, live on a somewhat different schedule, though. From their point of view we still left early, but to me 8:30 was well into the day.

One thing almost all the kids agreed that they wanted to see was the National Holocaust Museum, which they had all heard described as moving and excellent. I knew tickets were scarce for the museum and often involved a lengthy wait, which is why we were off at a time that would allow us to get there before they opened.

For those who had been to St. Louis last year, our companions on the train this morning were familiar. A year ago we had gotten mobbed by women in pink T-shirts trying to raise money for breast cancer. Again today it was "the race for the cure"; I only hoped that, unlike last year, we wouldn't lose anyone in the group in the rush of people getting on and off the train.

Angie Kohlhaas had already seen the holocaust museum (when she played piano in a concert at Kennedy Center), and she had no particular interest in seeing it again. Daryl didn't seem to care one way or another, so the two of them went off on their own for the day. Apparently their main destination was the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the gorgeous church where I had taken previous quiz bowl teams to mass when we had been here for nationals.

When we got off the metro downtown, it was clear that the "race" part of "the race for the cure" was over. No one among the swarm of women crowding Independence Avenue was running. They were slowly walking (waddling might be a better description), and the thing seemed more like a social event than a "race". It was still raining (the news said parts of the metro area had gotten five inches of rain overnight), and most of the women were decked out in race-logo ponchos and umbrellas. It intrigued me that only women seem to participate in these events. I'd think that the ladies would get their husbands or boyfriends to join them, but it pretty much seems to be "ladies only". It bothers me that if a similar event for, say, prostate cancer were limited to men, that event would likely be criticized, but it seems to be okay to have an event that's just for women.

The combination of the rain and the cancer walk definitely worked in our favor from the point of view of seeing the museum. We arrived about half an hour before the place opened, and only one couple was in line ahead of us. The tickets are all for specific entry times, but we were able to enter right when they opened. By the time they did, the line had grown to where it stretched a whole blocked and turned a corner; I don't know how much further it went.



**Garrigan boys with cheap umbrellas  
outside the Holocaust Museum**

It was still raining as we stood in line—not pouring, exactly, just an annoying, steady rain. A street vendor nearby hollered “I’m here for you” as he gestured toward a collection of cheaply-made umbrellas. Several of us (myself included) parted with \$5 each to get a bit of portable shelter. The price was really quite reasonable. The umbrellas were not well constructed, but they did their job, and I don’t think we could have touched an umbrella at the Walgreen’s down the street for \$5.

We went through some rather cursory security and entered the enormous museum. The place was interesting, but I could see why Angie wasn’t all that eager to see it again. Its disturbing theme makes it a place you don’t so much enjoy as appreciate. The galleries are just unending; it’s five immense floors crammed full to every corner. That size (which may have been intentional to portray the magnitude of the tragedy) was really overwhelming, too much to digest in one visit. There’s so much truly tragic stuff here that after a while you just sort of get numb. Also somewhat annoying was that they played tragic muzak (basically a series of musical moans and gasps) in the background; to me that got in the way, rather than setting the mood.

It seemed odd to me that this museum was in the United States, rather than in Europe, and it was even stranger that almost nothing in the museum was an authentic artifact. Almost everything was “an impression made from” the originals, which are in Germany, Austria, Poland, or Russia. Someday I’d like to visit Auschwitz or Buchenwald or Thekla; I think it would be much more moving to see the actual site of the Holocaust than to walk through a museum that re-creates it.

The museum does a good job of portraying all the many groups that were pursued in the Holocaust. We so often think of it as a massacre of the Jewish people, forgetting that many others were also slaughtered. Gypsies, gay people, the handicapped, and the mentally retarded were also among the groups that were systematically sent to concentration camps. In addition, they portrayed just how little the rest of the world was willing to help avert the tragedy. From the vantage point of history, we can see many missed opportunities where Americans or west Europeans could have and probably should have stepped in to change the course of events. There’s nothing we can do about that now, of course, except to ponder things and hopefully learn from the mistakes of the past.

There was an encyclopedic treatment of Hitler’s rise to power that made me see some scary similarities to modern-day America. I’m not trying to say that Bush is like Hitler (although both men established agencies in charge of “homeland security”, which was also what the initials “KGB” stood for in the Soviet Union), but rather that people in both 1930s Germany and 21<sup>st</sup> Century America seem to over-react to what they perceive as threats on their security with unquestioning patriotism toward questionable leaders. There are so many people today who seem to think that any kind of dissent is unpatriotic, who seem willing to give up all the liberties that our ancestors fought for in the name of “preserving freedom”. People seem to think it’s a good thing to just blindly follow and be told by their government what to do and how to think—almost like the students I’m complaining about on this trip who preferred to never make a decision for themselves. To me that’s not freedom, and that’s not a healthy society. My father didn’t fight World War II so that his children could live in a police state. Our country hasn’t yet become the police state that was depression-era Germany (although some politicians have said in no uncertain terms that they’d like it if we were), but that is the direction in which we’re headed. We need to be vigilant to ensure we don’t lose our freedoms—to terrorists or to the government.

**[It both intrigued and offended me in 2008 when Republicans tried to portray Barack Obama as if he were Hitler. He certainly is a charismatic leader, and while I mostly agree with him, I will certainly acknowledge that there are those who seem to follow him blindly. He’s much more like Roosevelt or Kennedy than Hitler, though. While he’s mostly a centrist, there are legitimate reasons Republicans could call Obama a socialist. He’s most decidedly NOT a fascist, though—and no one who knows anything at all about history would claim he was.]**

The Holocaust Museum was another place where the kids’ passion for doing everything as one big group was a problem. The museum is enormous, with four floors of encyclopedic description. Different people wanted to go through the galleries at different speeds, but—because they also wanted to stay together—everyone actually ended up going through at the pace of the slowest person. It was well into the afternoon by the time we were finally finished going through the place.

We did eventually finish touring the museum, and when we did—big surprise—no one could decide what they wanted to do next. Several people wanted to see “the Smithsonian” (which is more than a dozen large museums), but no one could agree on exactly which part of the Smithsonian they wanted to see. Everyone was also hungry, but no one could seem to agree on where they wanted to eat. Again I ended up making a decision for my little zombies; we got on the train and headed back to the food court at Pentagon City. **[Having learned that this behavior is more the norm these days, on later trips I’ve gone in with a plan about what we’ll do if a quick decision isn’t made. We pretty much always end up doing exactly that.]**

We finally did split up into two groups at the mall. The majority of the group decided they really didn’t want to see anything else, so they just went back to the motel to chill out for the afternoon. (I don’t think I’d ever find lounging at a motel preferable to sightseeing, but to each his own.) The rest of the kids still wanted to see “the Smithsonian”. I suggested we go to the National Museum of American History, which has been described as “America’s attic” or “the nation’s junk cellar”. The enormous museum covers the equivalent of about two square blocks, and features displays on almost every conceivable aspect of history—including “shrines” to famous movies, television shows, and musicians. The kids agreed this would probably be the most interesting of the Smithsonian museums, and we made our way over there.

We had less than an hour to see things before we’d have to head back for our last tournament game, so we had a **very** cursory overview of the immense museum. We saw the display called “pop culture” (which seemed to be mostly 1970s housewares), a gallery of Beatles memorabilia, a hall called “The Black Experience” that traced the great migration from southern farms to northern cities, the “Hall of Agriculture”, an entire floor tracing the history of transportation with full-size examples of every mode of movement, and a gallery dedicated to Presidents and their first ladies. We didn’t really stop anywhere, but just kept moving from one exhibit to the

next. We got a quick glance at maybe 10% of the exhibits (and that's being generous) and then were out the door again. Still, now the kids could say they'd been to "the Smithsonian"—and from their point of view that was the point.

We took the metro back to Arlington, made a quick change into dress clothes, and then drove to Marymount. Our final game was in the college auditorium, a much better setting than the earlier games. The moderator was Chip Beall, the man who runs the tournament, and one of the best quiz bowl readers I've heard anywhere. He was working with a radio announcer from New Orleans who we've also seen many times before at nationals.

We played Delaware Valley Regional High School, a school that was remarkably similar to the kinds of teams we play in tournaments around Iowa. Delaware Valley was from Milford, a small town on the Delaware River where New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania all come together. (Milford is in Pennsylvania.) The town is in the heart of the Pocono Mountains, which are best known for their honeymoon and skiing resorts. It's less than 100 miles from both New York City and Philadelphia, but it really is a truly rural area. **[I'd comment on the trip I made later, flying into Allentown and driving through New York and Pennsylvania, that it's amazing just how rural much of the East is.]** Their school was about the size of Algona High, and—like us—they'd qualified for nationals by winning a regional tournament against other schools like them. Also like us, they hadn't done especially well at nationals; they were now 0 – 3, which made us look better on paper.

This was a **very** close game. It was back and forth all the way, and we ended up losing by 15 points, or essentially a single "Stump the Experts" question. It was frustrating to end up with a 1 – 3 record, but our consolation was that with just a couple of questions going slightly differently we could have easily been 3 – 1 (which would have assured us a playoff spot). This year we had a team that definitely deserved to be at nationals, and the best thing about it was that while our senior captain had always been the core of our team, it was actually the junior ("Larry Bird") who answered far more questions than anyone else at this tournament. He'll be back next year, together with some smart kids younger than him, so we might just stand a chance of returning another time (...and next year would be in Chicago, which is an easy trip and a city I love). **["Larry Bird" was the first person from Garrigan to go to national quiz bowl all four of his years in high school. We'll almost certainly have two other people who can make that claim in 2011.]**

Before we left Chip Beall asked if we'd like to return in the evening to play an exhibition game in a new format they were considering for future tournaments. We had no special plans and the point of our being here was to play quiz bowl, so we agreed.

Before that, though, we needed to get to church. Whenever we go to nationals, I see to it that my Catholic school students go to mass. (Having visited with the sponsors of other activities, I sometimes wonder if I as a Protestant might not be more aware of the kids' fulfilling their weekly obligation than the Catholic teachers are. **[That's definitely true. In fact, I've sometimes had Catholics who were my fellow chaperons that wondered why I was bothering.]** A surprising number of activities don't schedule church time when activities fall on a weekend, but I've always made a point of doing so.) The way our schedule worked out this year, it was not easy to find a church that fit well into the schedule. Saturday evening was the obvious time, but virtually every church in greater Washington held its Saturday mass at 5pm. It would have been much simpler if even one church had the "anticipatory" mass at 6:00 or even 5:30, but every last one was at 5:00.

Our final game finished around 4:30, so that didn't leave much time. It would have been impossible to get all the way across town to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in time for 5:00 mass, and most other churches were equidistant. I had, however, searched online, and I managed to find a church in downtown Arlington (two metro stations and a short walk east of us) that we just might be able to get to in time for 5:00 mass. St. Charles **[technically St. Charles Borromeo, one of the Medicis and apparently "the patron of learning and the arts"—so perhaps an appropriate choice for a quiz bowl mass]** was just a local parish church, nothing historic or architecturally significant, but it fit our needs perfectly. **[On a later trip to Chicago we'd go to a similar church, which also worked really well.]**

My hope was that we could drive straight from campus to the park and ride at East Falls Church and then immediately catch a train. Unfortunately several of the kids had forgotten to bring their metro passes with them, so we had to stop by the motel. Needless to say, we just missed a train; we could see it leaving the station as we pulled into the parking lot. Trains run every fifteen minutes on weekends, so it was about 4:50 when we finally left the station.

It was all of 5:00 when we made it to Virginia Square station in downtown Arlington. **[It didn't help that the church was almost exactly halfway between the Virginia Square and Clarendon stations, so a walk was required to get there from either one. I should also note that the Virginia Square area really isn't "downtown" Arlington. That would be further east, near Rosslyn. This is a dense neighborhood that's mostly residential, but has businesses serving the locals and a lot of office buildings (like the headquarters of the FDIC) mixed in.]** We ascended the escalators but still had to walk about three blocks in the rain to get to the church. We missed the opening hymn, and we could hear them singing "Glory to God in the highest" as we neared the doors. We actually arrived just as they were starting the first reading. That's pretty good, all things considered. I was also pleased to see that several other people arrived after us. The sanctuary was packed, and we the group had to split up and fill in here and there throughout the pews. We seated ourselves. That got some looks from the ushers, but no one complained or told us to move.

The homily was definitely not the most inspirational message I've ever heard in church. Today was Trinity Sunday, and a very young priest chose to take this opportunity to spew back everything he had learned in seminary. He pointed out that if we had gone to 11:00 mass tomorrow, Fr. O'Connell would likely use the shamrock to describe the Holy Trinity. I couldn't help but think that this man's sermon would be improved had he focused on that metaphor. Instead he read at length, word for word, from the catechism, and proceeded to leave the congregation more confused as to exactly what the Trinity entails than we were when we came in. I must confess that at many points during his rambling, my attention drifted to the church's beautiful windows, which featured the Stations of

the Cross portrayed in Picasso-esque abstraction on stained glass. I saw some of the kids thumbing through the Spanish misalletes that were stacked at the side of each pew. I think both methods of passing the time were more inspirational than the homily.

After the homily came the Prayer of the Faithful, the litany for various intentions. It went through all the usual stuff, but there was something more at the end. Almost as an afterthought, the young layman who was reading the intentions added, "For the soul of President Ronald Reagan, who passed from this life today, we pray to the Lord." There were several audible gasps around the sanctuary. This was the first anyone in our group had heard of this, and it was obviously news to almost everyone else at church, too. We all knew Reagan had been suffering for a long time and could die at any time, but I don't think anyone expected it to actually happen. This one little prayer, of course, was the first taste of what would be **the** news for all the rest of the trip.

Unlike some of my relatives, I never particularly hated President Reagan. I didn't vote for the man, but I certainly found him infinitely preferable to our current President. I disagreed with many of Reagan's political views (I am, after all, someone who doesn't think "liberal" is a dirty word), but I at least got the feeling that he was willing to tolerate a variety of opinions. President Bush and his supporters seem to see everything in black and white; people are either "with us" or "against us". I can't remember a time when our country was so divided, and it's largely because the President makes it seem that anything less than 100% support of the issues he feels strongly about is traitorous, and a lot of Democrats feel the same way about other issues. My own personal views (liberal on most social issues, but very conservative in my own private life) seem to be denounced by both parties today. I hope that one good thing that might come out of President Reagan's death is that politicians of both parties might see of compromise and diversity of opinion as good things—things that should be the cornerstone of our democracy. **[If anything, of course, our country got even more divided in the second term of the Bush Presidency. Since the Obama election the Democrats seem willing to compromise on most issues, but the Republicans have become so absurdly extreme that to them compromise of any sort is unacceptable.]**

The announcements after communion included one rather lengthy commercial for the church website. That stood out because that website was the reason we were attending this particular church. They were apparently looking for people with computer skills that could help maintain it—which shouldn't be too hard to find in this overwhelmingly white collar city.

We slogged through the rain back to Virginia Square station and took the train back to East Falls Church. The kids were all starving, and we hoped to get just a bite to eat before we played our extra game. We saw a Wendy's along Lee Highway and pulled into their parking lot. Unfortunately, while they hadn't taken down the signs, the place was permanently closed. A surprising number of fast food places seem to be going under lately (like almost every Hardees in the country and the Burger King in Clear Lake)—I suppose a sign of just how tight money is everywhere. **[Strangely in the "real" recession of the past couple years, comparatively few businesses have gone under.]**

By the time we realized Wendy's was closed it was really too late to stop anywhere else. We drove back to Marymount and made it to the auditorium with only a little time to spare before the match was to start. Officially our exhibition game ended in another loss, though neither we nor the other team (a Catholic school from South Bend, Indiana) were really trying. Both teams purposely gave some stupid answers on questions they later realized they knew, and in the end it was just a five-point difference, so essentially it was a draw.

The exhibition format was for a shorter game. They had far fewer toss-up and bonus questions, and they dropped the introductions where they read the player biographies. They still had an endless string of "Stump the Experts" questions, though. Apparently some schools had complained because they were able to play **only** four games at nationals. With the shorter game format, the hope was that a schedule could be formed that would allow each team six games. They wanted us to comment on how the game flowed and what we thought of a six-game tournament format.

The game seemed to flow okay, although I think I'd cut the "Stump the Experts" round all together and perhaps include more of the toss-up/bonus combos in the second round to create the same reduction in time. I'd also save time by not playing five minutes of taped classical music to set the mood before each game. That would allow them to keep the biographies, which the kids enjoy. I really don't care for the idea of a six-game format, and neither did the kids (though we were definitely in the minority). Coming from the rural Midwest, the opportunity for sightseeing is an important part of these trips for us. With six games, it would be highly unlikely that there would be a significant block of time that would allow for much sightseeing. What's more, for a small school from Iowa, it's bad enough to think of an 0 – 4 record; going home 0 – 6 would be **really** embarrassing, but perfectly possible.

**[They did switch to the new format the following year, and we would later on go 0 – 6 at nationals. They have cut the music, but they also don't do the player bios. The games come fast and furious, since they've also condensed things into two days of preliminary matches instead of three.]**

Some of the same people who wanted to stay at the motel this afternoon still didn't want to do anything tonight. Some others, though, figured (as I would have) that if they were in Washington, it was silly to just sit around in a motel room. They still didn't want to go anywhere on their own, though **[which is actually probably wise at night]**, so I offered to take a group of five kids to Washington's Hard Rock Café. We took the metro downtown and walked about five blocks to the café, which is just around the corner from Ford's Theatre. We were told at the entrance that there would be a 35-minute wait, even though about a third of the tables in the restaurant were empty. **[That's a pet peeve of mine. Last Christmas I did an about-face and walked out of a restaurant in Boston that made me wait when numerous tables were empty.]** We were given a beeper which they told us would only work in the restaurant itself; we had to spend our wait in the gift shop.

One Hard Rock Café gift shop is pretty much the same as another. They all have the same collection of T-shirts, jackets, pins, and drink glasses **[though, of course, they're labeled with the specific location where you're at]**. It took about ten minutes to see

everything there was to see. A couple of people made purchases, but that took no time either. The most interesting thing in the store was the young black man who ran the cash register. He asked where we were from and proceeded to tell us that “Iowa is the second most boring state in the union.” Apparently only Ohio is duller in his eyes. He proceeded to relate two stories—one of spending a snooze-ful weekend in Ames one winter (I must say that Ames also strikes me as one of the duller college towns anywhere) and the other of taking a Greyhound bus that got into Cleveland late at night **[which I would have found scary rather than dull]**.

Washington's Hard Rock is located in an office building. Once we had done the gift shop we went out to the vestibule by the elevator lobby to wait. The woman at the entrance had implied that our beeper might not even work there, but it did. Fortunately it took them only about twenty minutes to slide three of the empty tables for two together and seat our group of six.

This Hard Rock Café struck me as expensive, and it struck the kids even more that way. It's been a long time since I've eaten at a Hard Rock in America (Hard Rocks in both Canada and Europe seemed comparatively cheap), so I don't know if Washington's prices are typical of the whole country or not. You basically couldn't touch anything on the menu here for under \$10, and \$15 was more common. **[I'd go to the one in New Orleans on a later trip. It struck me as more reasonable—though that may have been because they were trying to woo customers back after Hurricane Katrina.]** It cost another \$2.50 for a soft drink—plus tax and tip. I think the kids had imagined something closer to \$10 than \$20 for a tab, and I'm pretty sure a couple of them didn't have enough money. I offered to put the whole bill on my credit card and have them reimburse me when it was convenient. This was disguised as simplifying things for the waitress, but I could tell that some of the kids were grateful.

It must have been '80s night at the Hard Rock tonight, because we had an endless parade of Duran Duran, Blondie, the Eurhythmics, the Pet Shop Boys, Poison, and the like on the video screen. Most of that isn't exactly what I'd call **hard** rock, but it beats some of the more recent stuff they could have selected.

One of the boys in the group was celebrating his eighteenth birthday today. He said he didn't want us to do anything for his birthday, but I could tell he didn't really mean that. I didn't know if the Hard Rock Café did anything special for birthdays or not, but I made a point of letting the waitress know we had a birthday boy. As we were finishing the main course, the waitress asked the boy to go with her. She stood him up at the side of the room and announced that there was a birthday. All the other waiters and waitresses basically started screaming in what I assume was some kind of a birthday rap, and they presented him with a free hot fudge sundae. He looked mortified as he went up with the waitress, but he wore a big grin the rest of the evening.

When we finished eating at Hard Rock, several of the kids told me they wanted to go to the ESPN Zone. I'd never been to one of those places before and didn't really know what they were. I still haven't been inside one, but I got the idea (mostly from the fact that they wouldn't let 18-year-old kids go inside unless I accompanied them) that it's basically a big sports bar. I figured if this was a place where people needed to be carded, I didn't need to be their excuse to get in—even if the person who whined at me the loudest was my principal's son. I let them visit the gift shop (where they could get anything they wanted to show to their friends and make up stories about how cool the place was—pretty much the whole point of going there), but I wasn't going to let them go “inside”.

The boys' ESPN Zone bags proved an icebreaker on the metro ride back. A man in our car had apparently just come from the bar part of the place, where he had been watching a hockey play-off game on the big-screen TV. The boys pretended that's what they had been doing too, and I didn't correct them (nor acknowledge that they were with me). They ended up having a long discussion about every aspect of sports that lasted until we reached East Falls Church.

It was nearly midnight when we got back to the motel. I settled in quickly and got a fairly decent night's rest.

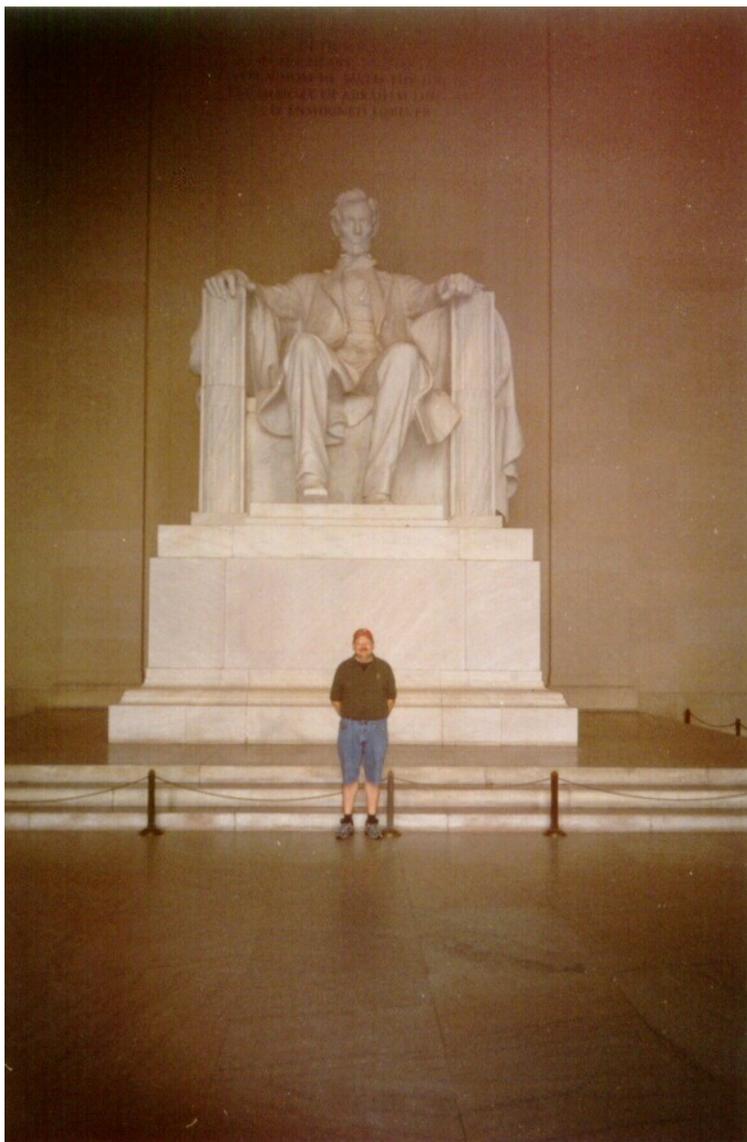
## Sunday, June 6, 2004

### Arlington, Virginia to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

This morning they had cereal as well as muffins on the breakfast bar, and I enjoyed a big bowl of granola. I had written a letter to my brother and got my morning exercise walking around the neighborhood trying to find a place to mail it. The most interesting thing I saw was a Baptist church that obviously served a very diverse congregation. Their sign gave times for weekend services in eight different languages. It's no surprise for a church to have a Spanish service these days, and I've seen a number with Chinese or Korean services. This place, though, offered church in Arabic and Russian—not to mention a couple of Asian languages whose alphabets I didn't recognize. This church could well be the modern descendent of the institution (a Baptist church by a waterfall) for which Falls Church was named.

I got things packed up so I'd be ready to leave later in the morning. Then I set out back into town with some of the kids who wanted to see a few more specific things. We took the metro to Foggy Bottom and walked past George Washington University, the Navy Hospital, and the State Department. We paused near the State Department for a minute while a boy in the group bought a Mountain Dew. He paid \$2 for the bottle, which turned out to be completely frozen. I think the street vendors bring frozen pop with them in the morning. As the bright sun beats down on it, the pop thaws, so it can be sold as an “ice cold” liquid later in the day. Early, though, this was not “ice cold”, but merely ice—not to mention a waste of money.

Our real purpose for going into town this morning was to do a quick tour of the “must see” monuments. We started at the Vietnam Wall and then made our way to the Lincoln Memorial. After seeing the ugly fence surrounding the Washington Monument, it was quite a surprise that there was virtually no security at the Lincoln Memorial. They had blocked off the street immediately in front of



**David Burrow at the Lincoln Memorial**

ington to Baltimore. They're not exactly "twin cities", but places between them (like Laurel) are really suburbs of both cities. We left the Washington beltway and joined I-95 at Exit 27, and we turned onto the Baltimore beltway at Exit 49. Before you get to Baltimore the destination signs start saying "New York", which shows you that nothing is that far from anything else out here.

I-95 is an easy interstate to drive, but the Baltimore beltway (I-695) isn't. It's only six lanes wide, and it really should be at least eight—even on Sunday. Moreover, the lanes aren't continuous. Lanes keep becoming "exit only" to the right, and other lanes enter from the left, so you have to keep shifting left to stay center. There was construction here the last time we were out this way for quiz bowl, and there's construction here again this summer. **[There was construction again when we went here in 2010, but they'd improved the beltway quite a bit. It's mostly eight lanes now, and the lanes are mostly continuous.]**

We made our way to Pikesville in the northwest corner of the metro area and exited onto Reisterstown Road (highway 140). Years ago when we came out east for quiz bowl we had stayed in a cheap motel on Reisterstown Road. Today we just drove south a mile or so to a park and ride for the Baltimore metro.

When I took kids here several years ago we had some unpleasant experiences on the Baltimore metro. That was definitely not the case today. There were lots of people doing the same thing we were—parking in the suburbs and taking the train to a ballgame downtown. Service was not frequent on the metro's single line, but we didn't have a long wait either. The mostly elevated trip past housing projects and crumbling rowhouses hasn't become any more scenic with time, but we managed to get downtown efficiently.

We exited at Lexington Market, an area that had improved dramatically since the last time I was in Baltimore. This area, at the northwest corner of the downtown area, was more than a little rough around the edges in the '90s. Our group had gone to a night game then, and walking back to this station after dark was downright creepy. The area has gentrified a lot since then. They've restored a couple of old theatres in the vicinity, and trendy bars and restaurants have opened. There are other construction projects all over, and it's obviously a place on its way up. It's still not the jewel of the city, but you no longer feel like someone's going to jump out of every doorway and try to mug you.

the building, but they didn't even search bags for people going in. I'd love to know how they assess the comparative risks and decide what security to allocate where.

We also saw the Korean War Memorial, where we first became aware that flags were now at half mast in honor of President Reagan. We then made our way past the reflecting pool, snapped a few daylight pictures of the World War II Memorial, and caught a glimpse of the Jefferson Memorial. Finally we walked back to Smithsonian station.

All the Washington metro stations have electronic signs that tell how long it will be until the next train in each direction arrives. (They're starting to install similar signs in Chicago now, too **[though as of 2010 they're still only in three or four total stations]**, and they've had them for years in Europe.) When we entered Smithsonian station the sign said the next train to Vienna—Fairfax (our direction) would be in 19 minutes, and we settled in for a long wait. Fortunately the sign was in error. Just two minutes later a train pulled into the station. We boarded, and in about 19 minutes we were back in Falls Church.

The check-out process was very slow. The woman at the desk had to process each night for each room separately and wait until it was printed out and the charge went through on my credit card before going onto the next one. That was twelve different charges, each of which took about a minute. They've obviously not heard of "express check-out" around here.

Around eleven we left the Econolodge and made our way back to the Capitol Beltway. What had been jam-packed on Thursday seemed positively empty on Sunday, and we made our way around quickly. Before long we were headed up I-95 toward Baltimore. I-95 is eight lanes all the way across Maryland. Even in the rural areas it's very busy, but traffic moved along at about 60 mph (about five miles over the speed limit) **[They've since raised the speed limit on the "rural" part of I-95 to 65mph.]**

You get a clue of just how close things are in the East when you realize that it's less than an hour from Wash-

It's about three-fourths of a mile from Lexington Market to Camden Yards. Most of the walk is down Eutaw Street, a neighborhood of blue-collar bars that was never nice in the past and I'm sure has no plans to gentrify. This is the area where Babe Ruth led a troubled childhood a century ago, and I'm sure it's still got more than its share of tough young men. I was very glad it was a day game we were going to this time, so we wouldn't have to worry about walking back after dark. **[This walk can be avoided by crossing Lexington Market and taking Baltimore's light rail system down to Camden Yards.]**

The biggest difference at Camden Yards from the first time I was here is that now there's a football stadium just south of the baseball park. Instead of being named after the historic rail yards it was built on, the other stadium is one of those "Your Name Here" places with an unmemorable name. **[At the time it was apparently PsiNet Stadium; today it's M&T Bank Stadium.]** Thankfully the Orioles haven't given into quite so much commercialism—yet.

That's not to say they're not out to make a buck everywhere you look. Our tickets cost about \$15 each, but I'm sure they got a minimum of \$10 more out of each of us from one kind of concession or another. They serve excellent food at Camden Yards, but pretty much everything is about double the price you'd pay outside the gates. **[That's true at EVERY ballpark, even in the minor leagues. I've learned to just budget for it when I go to games—which doesn't mean I still don't complain about the gouging.]**

There was a weird crowd at this game. It was Little League Day, which meant that most of the upper deck (which is where we were) was filled with elementary school athletes. I would have thought kids that play baseball themselves would be interested in watching the game, but pretty much none of them were. For most of the kids the biggest thrill was doing "the wave", which made its way around the stadium eight full times before dying with an exciting play. I, on the other hand, enjoyed the game; it was an offensive battle that the Birds ended up winning 5 - 4.



**Garrigan fans entering Oriole Park at Camden Yards**

We waded through the postgame crowd and made our way back to Lexington Market, from where we took the train back to Old Court station. I stopped for gas at a station on Reisterstown Road, but the school credit card wouldn't work at the pump. I remembered two years ago when a hotel had put a hold on the card during CYO baseball which caused it to become useless to us on our quiz bowl trip. I went inside, and the clerk (a plump and pleasant middle-aged black woman) said she's try to put the charges through by hand. They went through fine that way; there must have just been some problem with the pump.

The clerk at the convenience store was impressed that we were an academic team. She was also surprised that we were already out of school for the summer. (In fact, we had been out for some time.) Her sons still had two more weeks to go, and one of them would immediately turn around and go to summer school. Apparently the Baltimore public schools are not air conditioned, and she said her sons had told her it was already miserable in school a month ago. It amazes me the different schedules schools around the country use. When I was in the South a year ago everyone had started school at the beginning of August, while here they go through mid-June. It made me wonder if anyone follows the old "Labor Day through Memorial Day" routine anymore.

The rest of our trip was up I-95. All the destination signs said "New York", which is a little over 150 miles away. We were going about two-thirds of that distance, stopping at the south end of Philadelphia. (Philly, even though it's one of the largest cities in the country, didn't appear as a destination until we got to Wilmington, Delaware, which was about 15 miles from our destination.) We cruised around the rest of the beltway and then up 95 past Joppatowne, Aberdeen (where we saw the new stadium named after and owned by Cal Ripken), and Havre de Grace. The interstate here is allegedly a free highway (it appears in blue in the atlas), but there's a toll bridge over the Susquehanna River just past Havre de Grace. I was expecting to pay 50¢ or maybe a dollar, but the bridge—which is tiny compared to a lot of the Mississippi bridges—costs a full \$5 per vehicle. For \$5 you can cross the entire state of Indiana on the turnpike, and it seemed more than a little excessive for one little bridge. **[Part of that is that, like a lot of roads in the east, toll is only collected in one direction—in this case northbound.]**

We had more toll to pay when we got to Delaware. The Delaware Turnpike is fourteen miles long (essentially the width of the state at this point), but you have to pay \$2 for the privilege of being stuck in almost constant congestion—even on a Sunday evening—along it. **[They've since raised the toll to \$4.]** The "New York" signs avoid the city of Wilmington and head east to join the New Jersey Turnpike. I-95, by contrast, winds its way right through downtown Wilmington, a four-lane monstrosity that has to be one of the

worst interstates anywhere. Wilmington is not a very big city (maybe the size of Waterloo), but I swear they have a 15 mph exit for every warehouse and every factory in the place.

Wilmington ended abruptly at the Pennsylvania border. The interstate widened to six lanes, and for about five miles the surrounding area was positively rural. Then, just as suddenly, we were in the Philadelphia suburbs.

I had printed out directions to all our hotels before we left for this trip, and I had read through them several times. I was pretty sure I knew the directions for tonight's destination, so I didn't bother digging up the print copy from deep in my bag. My mind told me to take Exit 12, which is precisely what we did. This was the exit for Philadelphia International Airport, which made some sense since ours was an airport hotel. Unfortunately Exit 12 didn't lead in any direct way to the roads near the airport; it lead right straight into the airport itself. We drove around the circle road that led past all the terminals, stopping periodically behind taxis and car rental shuttles. Once I had committed to this road, there was no way to go back, so I just kept circling. Finally, when we were almost back to the interstate, I saw a sign leading to an abrupt right turn that led to "Bartram Avenue", the road we wanted. (I had totally missed Exit 10, which leads directly to Bartram Avenue.) We drove past the shell of a car that had been abandoned after an accident and made our way to the same strip of hotels where Margaret and I had stayed a few years ago. Before long we checked in at the Fairfield Inn.

The good thing about this hotel was that it was far enough from everything that there was pretty much no way the kids could possibly get in trouble. (They basically sat around their rooms or swam in the pool all evening.) The bad news, which I remembered from having stayed here before with Margaret, was that it was close to nothing but other motels. A single restaurant (Ruby Tuesday's—I've never eaten at one of those **[and I still haven't]**; it looked expensive and didn't appear to be a place the kids would want to eat) serves more than a dozen mid-range and luxury accommodations. Someone could make a fortune by opening a Wendy's or a Subway in this development.

Daryl and I went out in one of the suburbans to see if we could find something else to eat. Bartram Avenue is a four-lane state highway and appears to be a major commuter artery, so it seemed logical that there ought to be somewhere to eat along it. We drove northward, but all we passed were hotels, office parks, and a few old rowhouses. Before long the road had looped around and re-joined interstate 95. That didn't seem too bad, because we figured we'd just go up an exit, and if there wasn't food we would just turn around and come back. What we didn't know was that I-95 was about to become an extremely high viaduct, soaring far above a vast industrial area surrounding the port of Philadelphia. There are no exits for about five miles as we made our way along the bridge. The next exit was for Pattison Avenue, the location of Philadelphia's sports complex. We passed the Spectrum and the nearby hockey arena, but even in this neighborhood there was nowhere to eat. It made me wonder just where Philadelphians do go when they want a quick bite. We followed signs for I-95 south, but it would be quite a while before we were back on the interstate. The signs took us onto Penrose Avenue, another high viaduct that parallels 95 above the industrial wasteland. We finally re-joined the interstate out by the airport and then almost immediately exited back onto Bartram Avenue. We never did find anywhere to eat.

The kids, possessing a wisdom far greater than Daryl's or mine, had sent out for pizza, and once we got back to the motel, that's exactly what Daryl and I did, too. I got out my cell phone and called Original Pete's, one of two pizza places listed in the business guide in our hotel room. The pizza took about half an hour to come from their location in nearby Essington, and it turned out to be both affordable and tasty—particularly as hungry as I was by the time it came. After eating I read through some newspapers and then settled into bed for the night.

## Monday, June 7, 2004

### *Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Camden, New Jersey*

Fairfield Inn has one of the best breakfasts of any hotel chain. While I enjoyed a wide assortment of pastries **[in particular I remember excellent cream puffs]** and fruit, most of the kids had fresh waffles. They also had both hot and cold cereals, at least five different kinds of juice, and excellent coffee. Unless someone thought of breakfast as eggs, meat, and hash browns, they'd be sure to find something they liked here. **[They've since added meat and egg biscuit sandwiches, so that nearly completes the possibilities.]**

We left the hotel and walked north for about half a mile along Bartram to the Eastwick commuter train station. Before leaving on the trip I had purchased day passes that were good for a one-way ride on the commuter train, plus unlimited rides on transit within the city. We boarded a train, and about half an hour later we arrived at Market East station in downtown Philadelphia.

Market East station is in the basement of an enormous mall with a surprisingly broad assortment of stores. A couple of the kids wanted to pick up film, and we stopped into a downtown K-Mart store in the mall so they could buy what they needed. They seemed to take forever to make their purchases (I think they circled the entire store before they found the camera department), but eventually we all left again.

We walked east and north to the Philadelphia Mint. Margaret and I had toured this a few years ago, and the kids were looking forward to seeing it. Unfortunately a guard stopped us in front of the building and rather rudely informed us that any tours now had to be arranged 90 days in advance. I assume the change is since the terrorist attacks, but I had to wonder why they felt the mint was a target anyone would care about. Modern coins aren't made of precious metal, and while there is quite a bit of value in the coins there, it would be difficult for anyone to make off with in an efficient way. The mint has always had good security, and virtually closing it to the public just seems silly. One of the kids joked about how terrorists would find the perfect way to attack a country—to cut off their coin



destination. The whole waterfront is a lovely park, and there are three big attractions along it: Tweeter Center (a brand new concert arena), the New Jersey State Aquarium, and the Battleship New Jersey.

The kid had seen a brochure for the Battleship New Jersey at the visitors' center in Philly, and they were especially looking forward to a side attraction it offered. There was supposed to be a "four-dimensional flight simulator". (I think the fourth dimension was supposed to be going back in time to different wars.) We passed the simulator as we came up on the ticket office, and it was moving up and down. Unfortunately walking past it was all we would do. They were testing the simulator, but apparently it would not actually open to the public until July.

We bought some overpriced tickets (\$12 I think) for the battleship, put on wristbands, and set out to the gate. A guard told us we would be taking the starboard tour and that we should "follow the red line in and the yellow line out". They had a variety of colored lines painted all over the ship, like some hospitals do to show which way different departments are. We made our way on board and began to follow the red line.



**Garrigan boys showing their "big guns"  
Battleship New Jersey – Camden, NJ**

Our first stop was in front of the guns at the front of the ship. The boys wanted to pose for a picture there, showing their muscles—comparing their "big guns" with those on the ship. As we made our way through the ship we stopped again for several other pictures: the boys sitting in the admiral's chair, the boys sleeping in the "coffins" where enlisted men spent the night, the boys operating the telegraph, etc. There was nothing saying photography was forbidden and nothing saying we couldn't sit in the furniture or touch things on the ship, so I'm hoping we did nothing wrong. The kids had fun, and while there wasn't anything special to see, it we all had an enjoyable morning.

It was very hot this morning, and after walking all over the ship we were all thirsty and could also use a snack. They had vending machines and a food stand outside the ship, but the prices were absolutely ridiculous. A bottle of pop was \$3.50, and an ice cream bar sold for \$4.75. We chose not to waste so much money so foolishly and went on our way.

As hot as it was, we figured it would be much more pleasant to take the light rail line than to walk, but once again we just missed the train. The local paper had an editorial today that

was complaining that ridership on the line was far below expectations. If you ask me, the reason is that they offer such infrequent service. No one wants to wait twenty minutes to catch a train, particularly in a neighborhood that might not be all that safe. If they ran twice as many trains, they'd probably quadruple their ridership.

We slowly made our way back down Mickle Avenue, sweating profusely with each step. I was intrigued to see Walt Whitman's home, which I remember visiting with my father the summer before I started at Garrigan. Back in the '80s, Whitman's home was part of a set of rowhouses in a neighborhood that was mostly rowhouses. Today it's a single brick building, standing in the middle of the block all by itself. All the rest of the rowhouses have been torn down, most likely replaced by the nearby housing project.

We stopped at the CVS Pharmacy to get something to drink. The kids were just a bit surprised to be the only Anglo whites in a store mostly full of black people, with a few Hispanics here and there. I can remember the first time I had a similar experience. It was right here in Camden on that same trip with my dad. The two of us stopped at a McDonalds about a mile east of here where absolutely everyone—worker or customer—was Hispanic. I always pictured my father as a fairly well-traveled person, but I got the feeling it was the first time he had been in such a situation, too. I remember him being proud that I was able to speak Spanish when neither of us understood what the clerk was trying to say in English.

We went back to the subway and boarded a train marked "Phila". This time we were in a brand new car with stainless steel construction and red plaid upholstery. Computer read-outs at each end showed the upcoming stations, and we could also hear the

driver announce where we were stopping. Most surprisingly was that the driver also said “Phila”—as in “8<sup>th</sup> and Market, downtown Phila.” when referring to the largest city in Pennsylvania. I’ve heard “Philly”, but “Phila” was new to me.

It was about 12:30 when we arrived at 8<sup>th</sup> & Market. We found a shady park just east of the security entrance for Independence Hall and waited there for the rest of the group. As we waited we entertained ourselves by feeding pigeons bits of potato chips we had bought at the drugstore.

Around 1:00 the other group showed up, having completed less than half of the walking tour. Both groups seemed to have enjoyed their mornings, though the walking tour group repeatedly made the comment (overstated, but not untrue) that everything in Philadelphia was fake. A lot of the historic buildings were re-constructed in the 1970s (for the American bicentennial) on the site of something from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The boys in my group rubbed in how much fun they had (in retrospect walking through a bad neighborhood was fun for them), and they made up story after story about how exciting the 4-D flight simulator had been.

We had been told to arrive quite early to make our way through security, but we needn’t have bothered. They had a metal detector that appeared to be off; I think you could have driven a car through there and it wouldn’t have detected any metal. They also made us put our bags on a counter. They didn’t X-ray them; they just had us collect them on the other side of the metal detector. It took maybe two minutes for our entire group to go through the procedure, and maybe five more minutes to see the Liberty Bell and the accompanying exhibits, which are housed in the same building.

We crossed the blocked-off street and had about 45 minutes to wait in the plaza behind Independence Hall. Our captain called KLGa again to let them know the how we did in the remainder of the tournament (there’s less of an incentive to call quickly when you lose than when you win), and we killed some other time chatting with an elderly couple who was visiting from England.

The Independence Hall tour was much more minimal than Margaret and I had gotten a few years back. After a film about the history of the place and a lecture from the guide telling us not to eat, drink, or chew gum, we saw the two main rooms on the lower floor of the building. That’s it—nothing upstairs and none of the outlying areas. The whole thing took about 15 minutes, but we had to wait five hours before we could do it. The kids found what should have been a highlight of the trip to be a major let-down. **[For that reason, I purposely avoided trying to go inside the Philadelphia attractions on our 2010 quiz bowl trip, opting instead for a few outdoor “photo ops”.]**



Garrigan “Thinkers” at the Rodin Museum – Philadelphia

Every single boy in the group had one other thing they wanted to see in Philly: the Philadelphia Museum of Art which is best known for the steps the title boxer ran up in the movie *Rocky*. Many in our group were track or cross-country runners, and running up the “Rocky steps” was something they were definitely looking forward to. The lone girl in the group was less excited about seeing them, so the boys went with me while the girl finished the walking tour with Daryl and Angie.

We made our way to a nearby SEPTA subway station and took the train to City Hall. Our plan was to catch a bus there that would head up Ben Franklin Parkway to the art museum. We couldn’t find a bus stop in the immediate vicinity of City Hall, so we just began walking up the parkway, figuring we’d pause at the first stop and wait there for a bus. We saw bus after bus head down the parkway, but nowhere did there seem to be any bus stops. So, hot as it was, we just kept walking. **[While this is one of the main streets in Philadelphia, apparently there is no ordinary city bus route that runs along it—just express lines and a special tourist bus called the Phlash.]**

Our only stop was at the Rodin Museum, where the boys posed out front in their best imitations of the famous “Thinker”. By the time we were there, it was just a little bit more on to the art museum. It’s a little less than two miles total, not the easiest walk on a hot day. **[It always seems that the longest walks are the hottest.]**

The kids left their cameras with me at the bottom, hoping I would be able to get pictures of them running up. By the time I had gotten about two shots the whole group was already at the top. (They are runners, after all.) I slowly walked up the steps myself and returned each person's cameras to him. There was a middle-aged black man at the top of the steps who seemed to permanently plant himself there offering to take photos of tourists for tips. I don't think any of the kids tipped him, but he took their pictures anyway—so they all got their souvenirs.

We walked back down the parkway, again seeing bus after bus, but not a single bus stop. I suppose they must use the parkway as an express route, with stops only at the ends. Come to think of it, though, we didn't see any stops at the ends either. About halfway back we stopped at a street vendor, where I bought an Italian ice and most of the kids got pop. That refreshed us enough to make it back downtown.

The kids had pretty much seen everything they wanted to see in Philly **[which is FAR from America's most interesting city]**, and said they were ready to head back to the hotel. There wasn't much of anything I was dying to see either, so we went to nearby Suburban station and bought tickets to go back to Eastwick. While we waited for a train I had coffee and a delicious cinnamon and fig scone from a stand on the platform.



**“Rocky Steps” at the Philadelphia Museum of Art  
(Note the flags at half mast in honor of President Reagan.)**

We made it back to the hotel, and the kids swam in the pool while I read through a stack of newspapers. I waited a **long** time for Daryl to return, but they were obviously making a longer day of it than we did. I was getting hungry, so I decided to drive the other direction on Bartram from the way we had gone yesterday to see if there was anything that way. I couldn't help but notice that the wrecked car we had seen yesterday was still sitting at the side of the street.

Driving south didn't seem too hopeful at first. If anything it seemed even less developed than the northern route. Before long, though, I came to Essington, home of the Original Pete's pizza parlor we had ordered from last night. Essington is a town of old brick rowhouses and grand Victorian homes that has grown from its own entity into a minor suburb of Philadelphia. The highway splits into two one-way streets in Essington, and I stopped at a McDonalds that occupied the entire block between the two one ways. (It reminded me of a McD's where I used to stop for coffee when I was student teaching that had a very similar location in downtown Ottumwa.)

I had planned to have another fiesta salad, but they didn't have any of those (even though there were posters all over the restaurant advertising them). The clerk suggested Cobb salad, which I'd had once before (at the Hard Rock Café in Paris), and I decided that sounded good. I drove back to the Fairfield Inn and watched *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* on TV as I ate my salad. It really wasn't very good. The vegetables weren't especially fresh, and it automatically came with a bleu cheese dressing that I didn't care for at all. I ate about half of it and dumped the rest.

Daryl arrived just as I got rid of the last of my salad. He hadn't eaten anything since lunch and suggested we again order pizza. Since I hadn't exactly stuffed myself on salad, I agreed, and we again used my cell phone to call Original Pete's. We ate pizza as we flipped between the Stanley Cup final and a Cubs/Cardinals game on TV.

## Tuesday, June 8, 2004

### Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Toledo, Ohio

I didn't sleep well last night. I think something in the salad didn't agree with me. Whatever the reason, I spent the night with indigestion and gas.

One of the boys in our group had spent much of the previous evening flirting with the girl at the desk. She had repaid his affection by making us the “Guests of the Day”. They put our group on a sign by the entrance and presented one of the rooms with a basket of snacks—not that they needed any snacks; they still had half the stuff left that they had lugged all the way from Algona.

We had breakfast, checked out, and left the hotel around 9:15am. I had purposely dawdled a bit this morning to avoid leaving right at rush hour. Even so it was **very** busy as we headed north on I-476, which decades ago might have conceivably been called a beltway. There was an accident on 476. Fortunately it didn't really back up traffic, but we got to see a wide range of emergency vehicles trying to make their way through the mess of traffic.

I-476 becomes the Pennsylvania Turnpike at the northwest corner of Philadelphia. The turnpike was one of the first expressways ever built. It was apparently built to the standards of the German autobahn, and engineers of more modern interstates learned a lot from the mistakes they made in those early roads. The turnpike was built on the absolute minimum possible amount of land. It's four lanes wide, with a cement barrier in the middle running its whole length. There is no real shoulder on either side, just a couple of feet of asphalt on the right and only inches before the cement barrier on the left. The road has a 65-mph speed limit, but tight curves frequently carry warning speeds as low as 40 mph. About the only good thing about it is that the exits are very infrequent—as much as thirty miles apart—so you don't have to worry about merging traffic.

We took the turnpike north past Allentown. In my mind I could hear Bruce Springsteen singing:

Well, we're living here in Allentown,  
And they're closing all the factories down;  
Out in Bethlehem they're marking time  
Filling out forms, standing in line. ...

**[It's actually Billy Joel who sang that; it just sounds like a Springsteen song.]** Allentown is probably better off now than it was when I first heard that song in college, but it's still not a place I'd bet President Bush goes to campaign. We passed one nice mall, but we passed a lot more shells of factories and warehouses and empty, grimy old rail yards. I mentioned Ottumwa in yesterday's journal, and Allentown reminded me quite a bit of an overgrown Ottumwa—an old industrial city that long ago saw its better days. **[I'd spend more time in Allentown on a later trip on my own. It's not a bad city, but it does appear to be a place whose glory days are behind it.]**

We exited the turnpike onto I-80 and soon after stopped at a Wendy's at Mt. Pocono. Most in the group really weren't hungry, so we mostly used the restroom and then were on our way again.

I-80 in Pennsylvania is a lovely highway through some of the most rugged terrain in America. It's scenic and carries remarkably little traffic, and it has the type of modern grades and curves that the Pennsylvania Turnpike lacks. Its only real problem today was construction. About every twenty miles they'd have a three- or four-mile section of rather nasty construction. Nothing was dreadfully bad, but it got a bit annoying.

All this time the white suburban was still sort of limping along. We had tested out the air conditioning again by Baltimore, but it still didn't work. The voltmeter was still showing less charge than it should, but it was still above the warning area. So the kids who had chosen the white suburban because they thought it would be the comfier one to ride in ended up spending the trip with the windows rolled down in the blazing sun, and they couldn't watch all those videos they'd hauled along. At least the vehicle still seemed to work, though. The last thing I wanted to do was to have major service on a school vehicle in unfamiliar territory.

We stopped for a late lunch in the town of DuBois (I think it's pronounced doo-BOYS) in central Pennsylvania. I was resting for the next leg, so I sat back and read newspapers as Daryl drove along. We cruised through western Pennsylvania until we hit the brakes and came to a dead stop right before the Ohio border. It was stop and go and mostly crawling as we inched forward for about five miles. Finally, just inside Ohio, we saw the reason for the delay. The single biggest vehicle I have ever seen pulled into the rest area just past the border. The truck was so wide that no one could pass it, even on the interstate, and while it had a single flatbed trailer, it was as long as most double-bottoms. The only load looked to be quite small, but must have been extremely heavy. (I pondered if it might not be some ultra heavy metal like plutonium). It was centered right in the middle of that huge trailer, with lots of padding all around it. The truck had obviously been going very slowly, and no one could get around it.

We stopped for gas at a Speedway station in Youngstown and then had a long drive across Ohio. The good news, though, is that almost all of the Ohio Turnpike is six lanes, which made for relatively pleasant driving the rest of the day.

Tonight I had made reservations at the Econolodge—Toledo/South, which was just off I-80 at Exit 59. This was a **very** strange hotel. The place looks like it used to be a nice convention center, but they let it go to seed. Now the property is divided into two hotels that share a common area. The northern wings of the old convention center are the Econolodge, while the southern wings are a Quality Inn. Both hotels share the same lobby, pool, and game room.

When we got to the hotel the girl at the desk had no record of my reservation. When I showed her the print-out I had made with confirmation numbers, she said they had recently updated their computer system; the reservation must have gotten lost in the transfer. It's been a while since I've heard "the computer must have lost it" as an excuse, but that's what they gave me here. Fortunately neither hotel on the site was remotely close to full, so getting a room was no problem. In fact, I actually paid slightly less than the rate I had originally booked. The one "problem" was that hotel policy supposedly required that there be at least one person 21 or older in each room. There had been nothing in their online information to indicate that; if there had been, I wouldn't have booked the place to begin with. I **think** Angie is 21 (though I'm not positive of that), but even with Daryl and me, that left us one person short—not to mention that Daryl and I would be sharing the same room. Hopefully I won't burn in hell for saying that Daryl and I were in separate rooms, that Angie was indeed 21, and that the largest of the boys was also 21. (He may well have the fake ID to prove it, but I'm not

going there.) All the girl really wanted was some responsible person's name on each of the four room slips, and I gave her exactly what she wanted.

While the kids liked this motel, I hated the place. They enjoyed the public areas—the Olympic-sized pool **[which I think was officially part of the Quality Inn]**, the hot tub, the game room, and the nicely decorated lobby. I squinted my eyes in the dimly lit room, cursed a shower that barely dripped, got a backache from a too-soft bed, and couldn't help but notice a series of patched holes in the wall. This was by far the cheapest of the hotels I had booked, and it definitely showed. The Econolodge in Arlington was quite pleasant, but I'd be glad to be leaving here.

While switching between driving and riding at some point today I had somehow misplaced my cell phone. I was also confident that I had lost \$20. (I had a \$20 bill left on me, and now I had essentially nothing.) I went out and scoured both suburbans and finally found the phone wedged under one of the seats. I still couldn't find the missing money, though. I all but gave up on it, but I decided to just casually ask in the different kids if someone might have found some money that might not be theirs (not saying how much or to whom it might belong). Sure enough, one of the kids had indeed come across a brand new \$20 bill on the floor of the blue suburban. I felt much happier—both at the kid's honesty and at the fact that I wasn't out a sizeable sum of money.

Daryl, Angie, and I walked down the street to what has to be America's most northerly Waffle House to have dinner. (It turned out that all the kids, in three separate groups, eventually went to eat at that same Waffle House.) I had the ham dinner and chili, while both Angie and Daryl had the chopped steak dinner, cooked medium well. (I didn't know you could cook hamburger to any particular degree of doneness.) The Waffle House was empty except for the three of us and the workers. That was kind of eerie, since usually those diners are full.

I got some money from an ATM (since I spent about half that \$20 at Waffle House), and then squinted in the bad light to read through some more papers at the motel. We watched CNN and then an NBA play-off game on TV. The game went into overtime and then double-overtime. They were playing in California, so it was a reasonable time there, but it was well after midnight Eastern time when we finally got to sleep.

## Wednesday, June 9, 2004

### Toledo, Ohio to Algona, Iowa

The motel offered a tray of doughnuts and an urn of coffee as their continental breakfast. I had told the kids to be ready to leave at 7:30. We were actually off at 7:45, but that was okay—my "official" schedule had us down for an 8:00 departure.

We stopped briefly at a dumpy little convenience store in Howe, Indiana. Some of us got breakfast, while a few of the boys picked up minor fireworks. If they were looking for serious contraband, they were disappointed, though. Indiana has slightly more liberal fireworks laws than Iowa, but nowhere east of us really has **legal** fireworks—and to my mind that's a good thing.

There had been signs since the Ohio border that warned of construction on I-80 in Gary and warned "EXPECT **LONG DELAYS**". There are always delays on I-80 in Gary; it was that word "long" that caught my attention. Heeding the warning of those signs, we exited east of Gary and took U.S. 30 across Chicagoland. This was probably not a wise choice. When I'm just driving myself, I can enjoy taking 30, even though it is mostly stop and go traffic. When two vehicles are trying to follow each other, though, it did not make for a pleasant drive. My bet is that it took just as long on 30 as it would have on 80, and it was probably more frustrating. **[The construction on I-80 must have had an effect, because on our 2010 trip we made it through Gary and all of Chicagoland in record time.]**

We made it through Indiana, though. I decided to stop for a break at a McDonalds in Olympia Fields, Illinois—straight south of the city of Chicago. We soon got back onto I-80, and traffic moved well through the rest of Chicagoland. We stopped for gas at a truck stop in Morris (the first thing of significance west of Chicagoland), stopped again at a rest area by West Branch, Iowa, and made our final stop for dinner at a Kwik Star convenience store in Janesville.

It absolutely poured as we made our way up Avenue of the Saints from Waverly to Charles City. I thought a couple of times of pulling off, and I wondered how miserable things were in the white suburban. It was still hot, and with the windows rolled up and no air conditioning it was likely becoming unbearable. No one complained, though. Just as I convinced myself I really should pull off, the rain let up. By the time we got to Mason City it was bright and sunny.

We let one of our team members off at her home in Wesley and then stopped at the Town Mart store to let off the rest of the Wesley delegation. The rest of used the bathroom there, and Garrigan student Samantha Kirsch greeted us all and asked how the trip had gone. We finally made it back to Algona about 8pm.

There's not much to tag on to the end this time. We had a good trip, and—with just a few quirks—this was a good group to travel with. While most of this group has graduated now, we have a number of smart younger kids, so we'll just have to wait and see what happens in the future. **[We'd head to nationals again in 2008, 2009, and 2010—and we're hoping to repeat yet again in 2011. Supposedly we also have some incoming freshmen who could keep the tradition going after that. Time will tell.]**