

BACK TO CHICAGO

20TH NATIONAL QUIZ BOWL TRIP

2019

BACK TO CHICAGO: 20th National Quiz Bowl Trip – 2019

[UPDATE: January, 2025—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 may also add some additional photos to enhance the original travelogues.]



The quiz bowl team at the Cloud Gate sculpture in Millennium Park – with David Burrow's reflection taking the picture

It's hard to believe that this was the twentieth time Garrigan headed to the National Academic Championships. A few weeks ago out of nowhere I happened to get an e-mail from one of the kids who had made the first of these trips, heading to Dallas in 1995. He's far from a kid these days—married, with multiple children, and switching careers—and I suppose that tells as well as anything just how long we've been doing these trips. Sometimes that seems like it's yesterday, while other times it's more like ancient history. [The son of another of the guys who made that first trip is a sophomore at Garrigan now, and he's also in quiz bowl. While it's unlikely we'll have a second-generation trip to nationals, it is interesting that the tradition continues.]

We qualified for nationals early in the season this year. We actually won our home tournament in October. That's the largest tournament we go to, and one we almost never win. We then followed that up by taking the conference championship in November. Unfortunately the player who was largely responsible for those wins would not be going with us on this trip. He is in baseball, and our baseball coach puts **a lot** of pressure on the kids to commit to being at every game of the season. Indeed we had another baseball player who dropped out of the trip to nationals after he'd already paid what he owed for the trip. Unfortunately I couldn't really refund anything, because we still needed the same number of hotel rooms. There were two other baseball players making the quiz bowl trip, and apparently they'd gotten lectures from the coach before leaving. **[Baseball continues to be the biggest conflict we have with national quiz bowl.]**

I have to say the conflicts with baseball did annoy me a bit. I'd actually chosen the Chicago site for nationals (which is usually the toughest of the places they hold it) because it had the fewest conflicts with the sports schedule. The main thing the baseball players would be missing was a rather pointless tournament down in Des Moines. To the baseball coach, though, every game is vital, so it was difficult for the players to balance their activities. So, while the players we were taking weren't bad, it wasn't really the best team we could have put together. Here's the low-down on who did make the trip:

- **Logan Heying** – A recent graduate and our captain, this would be Logan's fourth trip to nationals. He will be majoring in engineering and participating in ROTC in college next year. He's one of the two baseball players who did go with us, often serving as designated hitter for that team.
- **Gabe Trainer** – Another senior returnee, this would be Gabe's third trip to nationals. It was his little brother Joey who decided at the last minute not to come with us. Gabe will be a pre-med major next fall, and he's very talented in music.
- **Bryce Capesius** – That Bryce was here at all is remarkable, as he spent much of his freshman year at the Mayo Clinic with brain cancer. He is fully recovered, though he'll likely be on lots of medications for the rest of his life. Bryce has been to all-state music three times, and he plans to major in music at college.
- **Sami Darling** – The last of our seniors, Sami is the younger sister of Trevor Darling, who went on our trip to Orlando last year. She is a very talented artist, and she plans to be an art teacher in the future. Sami is normally quiet and polite, but she can have a very sarcastic tone at times.
- **Grant Bormann** – A junior, Grant is very knowledgeable at history. He's a quiet, polite kid, though he can have some devious streaks. Unlike a lot of Garrigan kids, Grant has lived in other places and travelled quite a bit.
- **Aric Laubenthal** – A sophomore, Aric is our other baseball player. I first got to know him when he was in an accelerated summer math program. He does decently well at almost every school activity, but he doesn't take himself too seriously. Of all the kids on this year's trip, he was probably the most fun to travel with.
- **Abbi Heying** – Logan's little sister, Abbi is a sophomore. She's a cheerleader and can sometimes come across in the superficial stereotype you'd associate with that. She's taken accelerated classes since seventh grade, though, and she does know a lot about a wide range of things.

In addition to me, there were three other adults who made the trip this year, and it was a different mix than what we've often had. Here's the chaperons:

- **Alana Heying** – Logan and Abbi's mother volunteered herself as soon as we decided to make this year's trip. She and her husband run a financial services company, and she has traveled extensively both for business and pleasure. While I've enjoyed most of the parents who have come on our quiz bowl trips, honestly Mrs. Heying and I butted heads quite a bit. While I'm sure it was as much my fault as anyone's, it seemed like as hard as I tried, we just couldn't get along. Partly that's because she tended to ignore the kids who weren't hers, but mostly it's because she'd plan things without consulting me at all. **[I do like to be in control of things, and I believe she's the same way. The combination didn't work well together.]**
- **Colleen Conway—Schiltz** – Colleen, a California native who was a freshman when I started at Garrigan and who served as the school's dance coach for many years, has asked before if she could accompany us on one of the quiz bowl trips. To comply with the diocesan rules, we needed an additional female chaperone this year, and I was delighted to ask her to come along. She's always bubbly and fun to travel with. She also has lots of experience traveling with high school age kids, since she's taken her dance girls to contests all over the country. **[Colleen has retired and moved with her husband to the Des Moines area. She's one of many of my long-time colleagues who I've really missed after they left Garrigan. Colleen is one of those people who comes across as a beam of sunshine. She was always someone who could brighten everyone's day.]**
- **Jake Rosenmeyer** – A former quiz bowl player, Jake has taught religion at Garrigan since graduating from college. His big news is that he recently made the decision to enter the seminary and become a priest (something I noted he was thinking about in one of the national quiz bowl write-ups when he was in high school). Jake is one of my best friends on the faculty, and I'll definitely miss him next year. As has always been true when he's gone to nationals—both as a student and a chaperon—he was a great travel companion. **[Of my friends who used to be on the faculty, I probably miss Jake the most. I coached speech together with Jake for several years. Right now we're in the middle of speech season, and I really miss working with him. I do still keep in touch with Jake. Last summer I went to his ordination as a deacon, and next summer I plan to be back in Sioux City to see him become a full priest. It's interesting that Jake is one of three kids I've taken to nationals who went on to become a Catholic priest. What's more, the kid I referred to in the first paragraph of this travelogue who had been on our first trip to nationals is now an Episcopal priest in the Twin Cities.]**

FRIDAY, JUNE 7

ALGONA, IOWA TO SCHILLER PARK, ILLINOIS

Friday, June 7: Algona, Iowa to Schiller Park, Illinois

I was up at 5:30 this morning, though I must say I yawned more than usual. Last night I'd been at a baseball game that I'd intended to just stay a few innings. Unfortunately, the regular P.A. announcer didn't show up, and at the last minute they asked me to fill in. So much for slipping out early.

After showering and throwing my bag in the car I stopped briefly at McDonalds. I started eating my Egg McMuffin while I was pulling the school vehicles around so the kids could load up. Unfortunately, while I was opening the door to the school Suburban, the sandwich fell on the asphalt and became covered in grit—not the greatest start to the morning.

Shortly after that I got a call from one of our students saying her car wouldn't start. Fortunately she lived in the direction we were planning to travel anyway, so it was easy to stop and pick her up on the way. I was definitely hoping, though, that bad luck wouldn't come in threes.

All the other kids showed up right on time, and we left promptly at 7am. We made a quick stop in Wesley to pick up the girl whose car wouldn't start, and then we were on our way for real. It was an easy drive over to Charles City, and it was good to see that most of the crops were finally starting to emerge. This has been a very wet spring, so the crops are about as late as I've ever seen them.

We stopped at the Kwik Star convenience store in Charles City, where I picked up my second breakfast sandwich of the day. While I've had plenty of them over the years, I can't say I'm a great fan of the breakfast foods at Kwik Trip/Kwik Star. They always seem like they were made weeks ago and have been sitting in the warmer ever since then. The stale croissant did manage to fill my stomach, though, and I was able to consume it without it spilling on the ground.

For the next stretch of the trip Colleen drove the Traverse (the smaller of the two school vehicles we were taking), and I was in the passenger seat. We had a lovely chat as we made our way down Avenue of the Saints. Colleen has a fascinating personal history. While she is a relative of the priest who founded Garrigan, she actually began her school years in Santa Ana, California, and she still has the look and mannerisms of a Southern California girl. She's been through a lot in her life, rising from poverty to a very comfortable life. **[Her husband invented and patented a conveyor system that is mostly used in factories, which is what allowed them to retire earlier than most of their peers.]** Her main job has been working with struggling students, and she excels at that. While she has little formal training in education, her life experience helps her relate to kids and lets her show them what it takes to succeed.

Colleen married a successful businessman. Their youngest child graduated from Garrigan a year ago, and her older kids have made her a proud grandmother. The family owns a lovely home outside Algona, and they've also bought a retirement home in Palm Springs. **[I believe that in retirement they're splitting time between Iowa and California.]** She has a lot to brag about, but she's in no way pretentious or conceited. She can make anyone feel comfortable, and she asks the sort of questions that make a conversation flow effortlessly. It was really fun to visit with her as we drove along.

I saw an amusing bumper sticker on I-80 as we passed through the Iowa City area. It was similar to the picture I inserted here, though there were a few differences. The bumper sticker featured patriotic colors and stars and the same typeface Trump uses in his campaign materials. (The different typeface is one of the things that's wrong about the picture I found. Everything online was for sale, though, and I'm sure it would violate copyright to use that font for commercial purposes.) Instead of "TRUMP", the large word on the bumper sticker said "ADULT". When I read the small print, what it actually said was "ANY FUNCTIONING ADULT – 2020". I definitely got a laugh out of that, and it certainly would be nice to be back to having a President who doesn't have temper tantrums all the time. When I looked for a picture of this bumper sticker, it amazed me that there were dozens of variations available. There are more than a dozen similar stickers on Amazon alone. **[As I write this Trump is in the second day of his second day as President, and he seems to have made good on his promise of being a dictator on day one. I still don't understand what people see in the man.]**



When I read the small print, what it actually said was "ANY FUNCTIONING ADULT – 2020". I definitely got a laugh out of that, and it certainly would be nice to be back to having a President who doesn't have temper tantrums all the time. When I looked for a picture of this bumper sticker, it amazed me that there were dozens of variations available. There are more than a dozen similar stickers on Amazon alone. **[As I write this Trump is in the second day of his second day as President, and he seems to have made good on his promise of being a dictator on day one. I still don't understand what people see in the man.]**

We stopped at the big I-80 truck stop west of the Quad Cities. While their prices weren't anything special (\$2.69 for unleaded **[pretty close to what prices are six years later]**), they were certainly doing a booming business. We had to wait nearly ten minutes before we finally found space at the pumps. Then, when we pulled around the building, it was quite a chore finding space in their parking lot.

We had lunch at the truck stop. They've got a big food court inside with lots of branded food. I chose Taco Bell, though I was disappointed that their "cravings menu" (which goes for a dollar an item at many locations) was priced at \$1.79 here. Beggars can't be choosers, though, and that was still by far the cheapest food they had available. **[After post-COVID inflation, a buck seventy-nine would be a bargain for any kind of fast food.]**



The start of the trip, in the Garrigan parking lot

A lot of the kids ate at Taco Bell as well, though their bills were quite a bit higher than mine. One got a single entrée that was priced at \$5.89 just by itself. With various other items, his total came to nearly fifteen bucks. He didn't blink at the cost, but it certainly struck me as a lot. If I'm going to pay that much for a meal, I want something better than fake Mexican food.

On the next stretch of the trip I drove the black Suburban, with Mrs. Heying in the passenger seat. This was a rather dull drive, and honestly our conversation was rather forced. Apparently the kids in that vehicle had played trivia games earlier in the trip, but they were almost completely silent on this stretch.

We stopped at the tollway oasis outside DeKalb for our afternoon break. I switched to driving the Traverse again, since I far prefer smaller vehicles. (For me the Traverse seems enormous, and I never know where I am on the road in a Suburban.) The first part of this stretch was easy driving, but things became rather congested once we passed Naperville. When we exited onto I-294 (the Tri-State Tollway, which generations ago was a beltway around Chicago), things slowed to a crawl. We only had to go about eight miles, but it took a full half hour to cover that distance.

We exited at Balmoral Avenue, which is just west of the Rosemont Theatre where I've seen a couple of shows. The exit mostly serves an outlet mall. I've considered checking out that mall when I've been in Chicago in the past, but it appears to be all but impossible to access as a pedestrian. **[I've yet to ever actually go to Chicago Fashion Outlets.]**

On the Illinois Tollway, most people these days pay their tolls with I-pass, electronic transponders that are sensed automatically as you drive along. At the major toll plazas, you can also pay with cash. To do that, we pulled clear over to the right (essentially exiting) and paid at a single old-fashioned tollbooth set up for that purpose. There's tolls at most of the exits in Illinois as well, but they don't have manned tollbooths there. (Doing away with them has actually helped speed up traffic by eliminating back-ups at the exits.) Since we didn't have I-Pass, we'd have to pay the toll at Balmoral online later on. I had to wonder how much of a cut Mastercard took out of our \$1.60 toll. At least it was possible to pay online, though.

[A couple years ago I got an I-Pass for my own car, a device that's inter-compatible with the EZ-Pass that's used in numerous other states. Illinois is one of many states that has now completely eliminated cash tolls. If you don't have an I-Pass, they photograph your license plate and use government records to bill you at a higher rate.]

It was about 3:30 when we got to our hotel, the Comfort Suites—O'Hare. This is located just beyond the forest preserve that marks the Chicago city boundary on the northwest side. Rooms on the east side of the hotel would have a nice view of the park, but unfortunately our room looked out on the alley behind some tacky strip businesses. The hotel is a concrete tower that looks like a college dormitory. It's by far the tallest thing in a low-rise suburban neighborhood.

I'd never stayed at this particular hotel before. I'd chosen it because it was just about the cheapest place that was reasonably close to the place the tournament was taking place. We paid right at \$100 a night, while the Sheraton Four Points where we'd be competing wanted \$119. What's more parking and breakfast were both included at the Comfort Suites, while they'd be at an additional cost at the Sheraton. The Comfort Suites was also pretty well located, and it turned out to be a decent hotel.

The check-in experience was probably the biggest negative for this hotel. It was slow for everyone in line, but even slower for us. The issue we had was that I'd reserved double rooms (two beds, plus a sofa sleeper). Apparently they had plenty of king rooms available, but the maids hadn't finished making up the doubles yet. (The official check-in time was 3pm, so we were well past that.) I'd also guaranteed the rooms with my own credit card, but I wanted to pay with the school card. The clerk did manage to make that switch, but it took her forever to do it. In the end we got rooms scattered on three different floors—not the greatest arrangement, but it worked out okay.



On the 'L' platform at Roosevelt

After settling into our rooms, we drove up to the Rosemont park-and-ride. This took quite a while, because there was an event celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Chicago Bears going on at the Rosemont Convention Center. We eventually made it, and we managed to figure out the new all self-service method they've implemented to pay for parking. This is actually fairly similar to what a lot of ramps have gone to, but it's the first time I've seen it in a big lot. You take a ticket on entry and keep it with you throughout the day. When you return to Rosemont after your trip, you scan that ticket at a machine near the exit to the 'L' station, which tells you how much to pay (\$7 for up to 12 hours, with the rates rapidly climbing beyond that to discourage people from parking here when they go to the airport). You insert money in the machine and then scan your ticket again to open a barrier at the exit to the lot. Once you figure out the system, it works fine. Unfortunately there's no directions printed on the ticket, so I had to mostly figure things out from observation.

I'd bought Ventra cards for everyone in the group (including the kid who dropped out) when I was in Chicago at Easter. While I provide the other adults with a free trip for chaperoning, I always divide the cost by one more than the number of kids—essentially paying my own way. This year the bulk of what I contributed was in the form of those Ventra cards—which cost \$33 each with a weekly pass. Buying them ahead of time did save a lot of time at the vending machine, allowing us to just walk straight to the turnstiles. I was pleased that everyone's card worked without issues, so we made it up to the platforms with no problem. **[While they've been through three different fare collection systems in the years I've dealt with them, the CTA's technology always does seem to work fine.]**

While some in our group complained about the 'L', our trip was really quite uneventful, and we made it downtown all right. We rode to Clark & Lake and transferred to the orange line, which we took to Roosevelt. We had dinner just around the corner from the station at a Five Guys burger place I'd taken kids to on an earlier trip. While I find Five Guys more than a bit on the pricey side, it did make for a tasty meal. **[At the time there were no Five Guys in Iowa, so it was something the kids found interesting and unique. They've since opened locations in Des Moines and Ames, so it might be less appealing on a trip these days.]**



Gawking at "The Bean"

(the reverse of the picture at the beginning of this travelogue)



The other chaperons at Millennium Park

We next went to Millennium Park. When we got there, it was strange to see that they had security (bag searches and metal detectors) at the park entrance. It turned out that the Chicago Blues Festival was going on. This brought a series of free concerts, which meant the park was mobbed with people. I absolutely hate crowds, and I especially don't like having to be responsible for other people in the midst of a mob. I was forever counting to ten to make sure everyone else was accounted for. **[Our Spanish teacher will be taking a group to Spain this summer, and not long ago I was joking with her about having to forever count kids on such trips.]**

We managed to clear security and elbowed our way over to Cloud Gate, the enormous reflective kidney-shaped sculpture that has become a symbol of Chicago. Oddly, that was the least crowded part of the park. Cloud Gate (or "the Bean", as everybody refers to it) really is a lovely work of art. I love looking at the reflections of the skyline in it, but the kids—and most tourists—prefer to stare at their own reflections in what is essentially a fun house mirror. It would be fascinating to know just how many photographs have been taken there.

Millennium Park in general is a lovely public green space, and it appears to be aging well. It's a huge improvement over the once exposed railroad tracks that lie beneath it. There are parts of Chicago that are very dreary indeed, but the lakefront is one of the most beautiful areas any city has to offer.

We basically just saw the "bean" and then made our way back to the 'L'. The real point of the outing was to get the kids oriented to the city and to the 'L' and also to have dinner.

We got back to the hotel before sunset. The kids mostly played video games in their rooms, while I read and watched a bit of TV. I also had a long conversation with Jake about everything that is involved in becoming a priest. It is fascinating, given the serious shortage of priests there is nowadays, that they seem to make it as hard as possible for young men to enter that profession. Jake has definitely thought out everything, though, and he knows what he's getting into. I certainly wish him well going forward.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8

CHICAGOLAND, ILLINOIS

Saturday, June 8: Chicagoland, Illinois

I was up around 6:00 today. I could have slept in a bit later, but the room was quite cold—the air conditioning having run full blast all night. One positive feature of this hotel was their breakfast. While it was kind of weird that they served it in a sports bar, the buffet itself was very nice. They had eggs, sausage, hash browns, waffles, pastries, hot and cold cereal, yogurt, and a wide variety of fruit. I really couldn't have asked for much more. **[The Comfort Suites is a nice hotel, and it's well priced. I've considered staying there on a few occasions when I've been in Chicago on my own. The problem is that it's just not well located. It's too far from the 'L' to really be a practical place to stay.]**

Many of the guests at the Comfort Suites this weekend were there for the quiz bowl tournament. There were four or five teams staying there, including Ankeny, the only other school from Iowa that was competing. I've read for the kids from Ankeny a number of times at other tournaments, so they're familiar with me. We greeted each other in the elevators on several occasions. **[Ankeny continues to be big in the quiz bowl sphere. They come to our tournament every fall and generally do very well.]**

Today was our first competition day, so we headed over to the Sheraton. This was a straight shot, about a mile and a half west on Irving Park Road. We had to make a U-turn at the intersection with Manheim, but that turned out to be quite easy.

I purposely timed it so we'd get there early and suggested the kids watch a junior high game that was happening before ours in the first room we'd be in. Several told me later that they were glad I'd had them do that. There are a bunch of odd quirks to the rules at nationals **[they've actually changed the rules even more in recent years]**, and the easiest way to understand them is to see them being used. One of junior high schools we saw (Chaffin, from Ft. Smith, Arkansas) was staying at the Comfort Suites. It turned out that they would end up winning the junior high division.



Formal picture of the Garrigan team before their first game

For the past couple years, they've required that all the teams at nationals bring signs with their students' names on them. I'd printed these out at school earlier in the week. For three of the students I'd actually made two signs each, since they sometimes do and other times don't go by nicknames. There was "Gabe" and "Gabriel", "Sami" and "Samantha", and "Abbi" and "Abbigail". The kids seemed pleased that I'd done that, and they mostly opted for their full names.

Our first game was against Norris, a "rural" school in Nebraska. I put "rural" in quotation marks, because they're in a rapidly growing area south of Lincoln. There are similar schools all over Iowa (Woodward—Granger, Sergeant Bluff—Luton, Clear Creek—Amana, and Hudson, for instance) that are technically still rural, but might as well be suburban. We play teams like that all the time, and mostly we've fared decently against them.

As is often true in quiz bowl, Norris was a one-man team. They'd brought six players, but five of them combined answered just two questions. Their good player (a kid named Marshall) was both smart and annoying, constantly elaborating on his answers to show off his superior intelligence. He was smart, though, and he beat us soundly.



The Bishop Garrigan and Norris teams at nationals
kids to nationals down in New Orleans. That made for one of the best experiences as a coach I've ever had. Everyone was in all the time, and they all worked together well.]

Something that's always an issue at nationals is deciding which players to use at any given time. That's especially an issue at times—like this year—when we have numerous alternates available. I started the seniors in this game, figuring they were likely to know more than the other kids. A couple of them buzzed in too early on questions that we'd have gotten if we'd waited. There were also a few times kids on the sidelines clearly knew answers to things the kids who were playing didn't. That always happens, and it seems as if no matter who I put in, it's the wrong choice. Really it's a matter of luck, of course, and luck just wasn't with us in this game. **[This past summer we took just four**



During the Brandywine game

We had an hour between our first and second games. We killed the first part of that doing nothing in particular and then watched another junior high game. Our second game was one of two that we should have won, but didn't. We played a school called Brandywine, which is from Niles, Michigan, just across the border from South Bend, Indiana. The team had already played one game (which they lost), but they clearly didn't understand the rules at nationals. They didn't seem to get the concept of different rounds with different types of questions. The lightning round in particular seemed to catch them totally by surprise. Several times they'd stare at each other blankly and exclaim "What's with that?" I'd bet their local tournaments all follow NAQT rules (where everything is strictly toss-up/bonus), but you'd think they'd have bothered to check online for the rules of the national tournament they'd entered. **[A lot of quiz bowl "snobs" look down on the rules they use at the National Academic Champ-**



ionship. Their format does make for a more interesting game, though.

We actually led through much of this game. Unfortunately our captain buzzed in too quickly on about four consecutive questions in the “Stump the Experts” round. We didn’t get those points, but we did eliminate answers that made the questions easy for Brandywine. We ended up losing by about 60 points, and those quick buzzes probably were the difference in the game.

We went back to the Comfort Suites, and the kids changed into more casual clothes. Then we drove up to the Rosemont park-and-ride. The ‘L’ was kind of annoying today, because they were doing construction on the rails. They’d put in a “bus bridge” between Harlem and Jefferson Park stations. That meant we had to exit, board a shuttle bus, take about ten minutes to do what would be a five-minute ride on the train, get off the bus, and board another train to continue our ride. They actually had the bus bridge organized to work as seamlessly as it could, but it was still annoying to have

to transfer twice. **[There seem to be fairly frequent bus bridges in the freeway median sections of the ‘L’. I wonder if those sections are somehow more difficult to maintain.]**

The group had decided they wanted Chicago-style deep-dish pizza as our official team meal, so I decided to take them to the downtown location of Giordano’s. I’d taken a previous quiz bowl group to that location, so I knew they could accommodate us with minimal issues. During our long ride downtown I called to make a reservation and then called again to let them know the types of pizza we wanted. Chicago-style pizza takes forty-five minutes to cook, so it was good to place our order ahead of time.

A couple of people in the group made it clear they were not happy I’d chosen to go to Giordano’s. They had wanted to go to the better-known Pizzeria Uno. The Uno chain claims to have “invented” deep-dish pizza, though in reality it long predates either restaurant. Chicago-style pizza is pretty much interchangeable, and I really didn’t want to deal with taking a group to a restaurant I’d never been to before. Some in the group were quite vocal in their opinions, though. Indeed, I’d keep hearing that we should have gone to Pizzeria Uno well after we returned home.

Regardless of where we ate, the kids seemed to enjoy their lunch a lot. We had some appetizers and salad, plus more pizza than we could possibly eat—which is always the case with Chicago-style pizza. The meal was basically my gift to the kids. Many times in the past our former superintendent, Gene Meister, donated money for us to have a nice team meal. Gene died three years ago, but I like continuing the tradition in his memory.

Some in the group had requested a vegetarian pizza, so one of the three large pizzas we got was spinach and broccoli. It was not surprising that about half of that was leftover. One of the kids suggested we should give the boxed up leftover pizza to a homeless person. That was much more easily said than done. Indeed, two different street people flatly refused the gift of food, which leads me to suspect that any money they were given wouldn’t be spent for that purpose either. A third reluctantly accepted it, and hopefully she found it a decent meal.



Picture of the first slice of cheese-laden pizza at Giordano’s

In recent years one of the hardest things about organizing these quiz bowl trips has been getting the kids to decide what they want to do. Kids today are used to having all their time pre-scheduled, and they don’t seem to like being provided with options. I presented a lot of options both during and after lunch, with minimal response from the group. They kept asking what I wanted to do. The honest answer was that I’d done all the touristy stuff tons of times, though, and while I was perfectly willing to do any of it again, I didn’t really want to do anything. If I were on my own, I’d have sought out places I hadn’t been before. That wasn’t really an option with a group, though.

At the suggestion of one of the other chaperons, we ended up going to Dylan’s Candy Bar. This is a chain of candy stores based in New York that has a location on Chicago’s Magnificent Mile. I hadn’t really planned on going there, but I was certainly happy to add it to the plans. We took a bus up to North Michigan and waded through the crowds there to find Dylans.

The kids did seem to like Dylan’s, and I’ll likely add that to the itinerary if we make future quiz bowl trips to Chicago. That said, I really didn’t care much for the place myself. They bill themselves as an old-fashioned candy store, though “old-fashioned” seems to mostly mean packaged goods from the ‘60s and ‘70s (things like candy cigarettes and wax lips). They also

sell lots of modern packaged candy, plus the sort “pick and mix” stuff you used to find in dime stores. There’s definitely no bargains to be had, though. The bulk candy goes for \$7.99 a half pound—which of course is sixteen bucks a pound. They also have stuff like lemonheads and Boston baked beans for the same or more than you’d pay at Walgreen’s. Those candies are made in Chicago, and you can buy them at the Ferrara Pan factory store at six boxes for a dollar. **[To be fair, the boxes they sell at the outlet store are smaller than the standard size.]** Dylan’s, however, saw fit to charge a buck fifty per box. I didn’t buy a thing at Dylan’s, but several of the kids parted with forty or fifty bucks.

I walked the kids up Michigan Avenue to Water Tower Place. It's only about half a mile, but I hated this particular walk. The whole area is a big mob of people, and I was forever turning back to make sure the kids hadn't gotten separated.

We rode the fountain-lined escalators into the main mall area at Water Tower Place, and then the kids spent an hour or so walking around the place. The boys' favorite place was the Lego store, where they sell kits that can be used to create what are basically sculptures made of plastic bricks. Most of the kids didn't actually buy much, but they had fun gawking at everything.

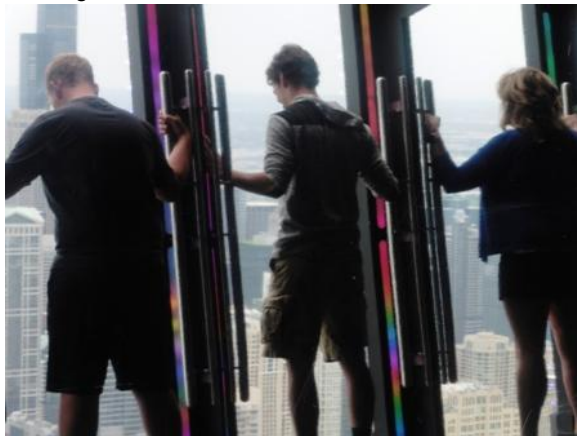
Many of the kids had asked to go up in a tall building, and I knew Hancock offered a better view than Sears (or Willis Tower, which even tenants of the building don't call it). A couple in the group complained that we weren't going to the better-known tower, but once we were upstairs, they all agreed this was the right decision. Hancock's location right on Lake Michigan makes it preferable, and it also affords a view of the Sears Tower.

It now costs \$25 to go up in the Hancock tower. Most of the kids didn't even blink at that admission, but it certainly struck me as overpriced. I must say I was also annoyed that they've done away with the outdoor walkway they used to have, replacing it with a thrill ride that tilts out from the building over the street below. Of course the kids had to pay extra for that



At the Lego store – Water Tower place

ride. I volunteered to hold their belongings and take their picture from behind. At least to me it wasn't worth eight additional bucks to lean out over the skyline.



"Tilt" ride – John Hancock Building

We'd passed a number of locations of Garrett's popcorn while walking around, which were recognizable from the fantastic caramel smell that wafts through the air around them. Some in the group had wanted to stop there, but all the locations we'd passed had long lines. I knew another location that wouldn't be so crowded, though, and we made that our next destination. We took the 'L' down to State & Lake and headed to the building that houses what used to be the Oriental Theatre. (It's now called the Nederlander, after the production company that owns it.) I'd stayed in a hotel on the upper floors of that building at Easter, and I knew the popcorn place in the building was busy right before plays. It's on a side street, though, and at other times of day there isn't nearly as much traffic as there is along North Michigan. There was no line when we got there, and all the kids (and me as well) got their bags of caramel corn.

We did a bit more shopping in the Loop. Then it was time for part of the majority of the group to see the play *Hamilton*. I'd seen this at Easter (and honestly didn't care a lot for it), so I volunteered to accompany the kids who didn't want to go while the others went to the theatre.

Hamilton is playing on an open run at the CIBC Theatre. I know this best as the Schubert Theatre, and it was built at the turn of the last century as the Majestic. It's gone through a bunch of names in the past decade, but it's now named after the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. While the Bank of Montreal has lots of locations in Chicagoland, as far as I can tell, they're the only Canadian institution that operates as a normal bank in the city. I assume CIBC must just handle investments in the States, because they don't seem to have any actual branches. **[Apparently the theatre is now called the Schubert Theatre at Boch Center; I have no idea what the "Boch" in the name refers to.]**

We queued outside the doors of the theatre for about ten minutes before they finally unlocked the entrance. I had to accompany the group, because of the awkward ticketing method they use for *Hamilton*. All they allow is mobile ticketing, meaning you have to access the tickets through a cell phone app. (My bet is that the point of this is to reduce scalping.) I had the Ticketmaster app on my phone, which meant that only I (who was not actually attending the play) could let those who were attending in the door. I went through security with the others, and then explained the situation to the usher. Apparently this happens quite frequently. He scanned a QR code for each ticket on my phone and then just waved everyone else inside. Then I went back and rejoined the kids who weren't going. **[Ticketmaster has since changed things so you can now share tickets with other people.]**

A couple of the kids said that they wanted to use a restroom, so I walked them over to the Palmer House Hilton to use the facilities in their lobby. I know there's a nice men's room off the lobby, but the one we ended up in was cramped and not particularly clean. It did serve the purpose, though.

We walked up State Street, past the old Marshall Field's store. **[Why I didn't take them to the restroom there, I have no clue.]** They're doing major construction there at the moment. I think they're restoring the façade, though it looked like there was work going on inside as well. We just walked on past, ending up at a Chick-Fil-A, where the kids I was with had dinner.

We took the train back to Rosemont. Normally that trip is right at 45 minutes, but it was a little over an hour with the bus bridge. On the way back to the hotel we stopped at a convenience store, where the kids picked up some snacks. Then both they and I just watched some TV until the rest of the group got back. Jake returned about 12:30am, and we were quickly asleep after that.

SUNDAY, JUNE 9

CHICAGOLAND, ILLINOIS

Sunday, June 9: Chicagoland, Illinois

Sunday was our big competition day, and because of the schedule we didn't go downtown at all today. I was up around 7:00. Jake was still sleeping when I got back from breakfast, so I went out on a fairly lengthy walk around the neighborhood. Schiller Park is a middle class suburb that mostly dates to the '60s. The housing is a mix of brick bungalows and mid-rise apartments. There's also a weird mix of businesses—with elegant restaurants right next door to auto repair shops. I stopped briefly at a Dunkin' Donuts. They were doing a brisk business, but there were even more customers at a neighboring liquor store. Why anyone would need to go to a liquor store at 8:00 Sunday morning I have no clue, but Jim's Liquor in the Aldi minimall was certainly drawing in the customers.

We'd arranged to meet in the lobby at 9:45. I went down around 9:30, and Bryce was already there. Eventually the rest of the group showed up, and we left for the Sheraton shortly after 10:00.

Our first game this morning was another loss that should have been a win. We played Valley Christian from Spokane, Washington. While located in a major urban area, they're not that much larger than we are. They were nothing special as a quiz bowl team, either. Unfortunately, in this game I had the wrong people playing in each round. We also had a couple of times where our kids just weren't listening to the question. They'd give a river when the question called for a mountain range, for instance, or a book title when the author was required. We ended up losing by 40 points, and with a couple of small changes we could have won by 60. **[Occasionally there are games I remember in detail from our trips to national quiz bowl. Six years later none of the games we played on this trip brings back any memories at all, though.]**

After the first game we went to church. While the church was less than five miles away, getting there was a bit of a challenge. The main road we followed (Cumberland Avenue) was under major construction. They'd torn out the old pavement and put in a thin layer of asphalt. That left all the manholes and other breaks in the street higher than the surface of the pavement, so we basically had to dodge an obstacle course the whole way. **[I do distinctly remember this drive. Some of those manholes towered six or eight inches above the asphalt.]**

We went to mass at St. Eugene's, an enormous church just inside the Chicago city limits. I'd been here a few years ago on another quiz bowl trip, and that service was not particularly memorable. This one was more so—though not necessarily for good reasons. While it was Pentecost, they barely made mention of that. Instead almost the entire service was a farewell ceremony for a departing assistant pastor. It was pretty clear that this young priest was climbing the ladder of diocesan churches. St. Eugene was the second church he served, after a short stint at a much more urban church on the city's south side. He will be moving to the north shore suburbs for his first time as a solo pastor. His homily was basically just a big thank-you to all the powers that be in the parish and its school.



The group in line for communion at St. Eugene

At first I thought it would be a very small crowd at church. Mass was at 11:30, and even at 11:15 there was barely anyone there. They kept coming and coming, though, well after the opening hymn. I'd estimate that St. Eugene's sanctuary seats about 1,000 people, and there were around 800 in attendance at this mass. They managed to crank out communion pretty quickly, though. There were at least twelve distributors, and they got everybody through in the time it took to sing one hymn.

Several of the kids had wanted to try Chicago-style hot dogs, so—in spite of Mrs. Heying poo-pooing the idea—I decided to take the group to Portillo's for lunch. There were several other options nearby, and a few of the kids decided instead to go to Raising Cane's, a Louisiana-based chicken restaurant that I like a lot myself. I had a hot dog and a shake at Portillo's, but most of the kids had far bigger orders. Most got multiple sandwiches (like a Chicago hot dog and a chili dog or a hot dog and an Italian beef sandwich, plus onion rings and a shake). My bill was right at \$7, but most of the kids paid closer to \$20.



Enjoying lunch at Portillo's

We returned to the hotel and relaxed for an hour or so. Then we went back to the Sheraton. A couple years ago they added an elementary division at nationals, and we watched one of those games which was going on before ours. Our kids lamented that the questions were so easy, but I must say it amazed me just how much the little kids did know.

Our fourth game would end up being our only win. We played Watson Chapel, which is named after a neighborhood in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. This was a mostly black team, which I think represents the main ethnicity of the school. They seemed to know nothing at all about either science or history, and those two topics are big at nationals. We didn't do especially well either, but we ended up beating Watson Chapel by a score of 135 – 110.



Watson Chapel congratulating our team after the game

Jake spent much of the afternoon playing cards with the kids. I paid the online toll, did some research on prices for attractions we'd be seeing, bought tickets for the White Sox game some of the kids would be going to, made some notes for this letter, and then headed over to Aldi to buy some juice and snacks. I really wish we had an Aldi in Algona. It's much cheaper than other stores on basic goods. They had little individual bags of chips for sale at the hotel for \$1.75. At Aldi they had big family size bags for \$1.29. I also paid \$1.29 for half a gallon of "fresh" lemonade, while the previous night I'd paid \$2.50 for a 12-ounce bottle of essentially the same thing at a convenience store.

Our final two games were in the last two time slots in the tournament, at 6:30 and 7pm on Sunday. While I played around a bit with the line-up in these games, honestly no combination I could have put together would have made much of a difference. The two teams we played (Detroit Jesuit and Scarsdale, a wealthy New York City suburb) ended up playing each other in the championship game of the tournament, and they deserved to do as well as they did. We actually should be proud that we broke 100 points in both of those games, since many of their opponents did not.

A couple of things were noteworthy in these final games. One was that there was a question about the Dalai Lama. That stood out, because one of the kids in our group had actually met His Holiness. The Dalai Lama (whose given name is Tenzin Gyatso) happened to be undergoing cancer treatment at the Mayo Clinic at the same time Bryce was there. The two crossed paths in a parking ramp, and the meeting clearly had an impact on Bryce. He posted a picture of the meeting on Instagram at the time (which I've included at right), and that same picture was prominently displayed at his graduation reception three years later. There's certainly not many high school kids that can claim to have met such a prominent person.



The Dalai Lama with Bryce Capesius

There was another question about the Dalai Lama's homeland that was also memorable. The moderator during that game was a young man of South Asian descent who was easily the worst of the readers we had at nationals. While he didn't have an Indian accent, he mumbled and spoke too fast. This particular question referred to the Himalaya Mountains, and when he said the name of that range no one in the room had any clue what he'd said. When no one on either team answered the question correctly, he gave the correct answer (which I think was "Tibet"). I blurted out something like "Oh, him-uh-LAY-uh", which caused the moderator to tell me that the correct pronunciation was "huh-MALL-yuh". While I have heard it said that way (most notably by my brother Steve when I was a little kid), that really wasn't how the reader had said it before. I actually just googled the correct pronunciation, and it turns out that both are acceptable in English, and the original Hindi is actually about halfway between the two. The stress in Hindi is definitely on the second syllable (MALL), but "lay" is clearly pronounced with a long "A".

It always strikes me as more than a bit pretentious when people attempt to pronounce long-standing English words like they would be in a foreign language. Every language adapts place names. "London", for instance, is "Londres" in Spanish and "Londra" in Italian. Why, then, do some English speakers insist on saying "Sevilla" and "Milano" for places that have been known for centuries in English by simpler names? I can understand trying to do away with offensive colonial names, but insisting on using local pronunciation when saying a place name in English just seems ridiculous to me. **[I actually go back and forth in my feelings on this, and it's something that's been on my mind as I prepare for a trip to Japan next summer. Anglicization of Asian place names is particularly bad, because English doesn't normally use many of the sounds found in Asian languages.]**

We had dinner at a Chinese restaurant that was sandwiched between Aldi and the liquor store. The prices were low, and they served enormous portions—including two fortune cookies with every order. The food was surprisingly flavorless, though. Even doused in soy sauce it had very little flavor to it.

We met up back at the hotel to decide what we'd be doing the following day and whether we'd do everything in a single group or split up. Again most of the kids had a "whatever" attitude. The one kid who did have an opinion said, "I have an idea. Why don't we all go to an escape room?" Several others in the group agreed it would be fun. (Apparently they'd done a version of this idea—which involves the group being locked in a room and solving logic puzzles to get out—at after-prom, which is where the idea came from.) Had they brought up this idea before the trip, I might have considered doing it—though honestly I'm not much of a fan of the idea. I was far from pleased at adding it at the last minute, though, when there wasn't really time to research what we were getting into. I said I'd look into it, though I knew darn well it wouldn't be practical to combine with the other things the kids wanted to do. I also knew the price (which turned out to be \$45 per person) was beyond what a number of people (myself included) wanted to pay. **[If the idea had been presented earlier, I'd likely have divided the group like we did with those who did and didn't want to go to *Hamilton*. That was hard to do at the last minute, though.]**

We did make a variety of other plans, and then the group dispersed. Most of the kids stayed up far too late playing games. I turned the lights off fairly early myself, though I tossed and turned a long time before finally getting some sleep.

MONDAY, JUNE 10

CHICAGOLAND, ILLINOIS

Monday, June 10: Chicagoland, Illinois

We had scheduled to leave at 8:00 Monday morning. Almost everyone was down in the lobby at that time, but a couple were late. We ended up leaving about twenty minutes after we'd scheduled. I can't say I was terribly upset, since their tardiness pretty much guaranteed that there wouldn't be time to incorporate the escape room in our plans **[and notably it was those who wanted to do the escape room who were late]**.

It was of course right at rush hour, and the train filled beyond capacity as we headed downtown. My suggestion had actually been to leave before eight, since I knew the earlier we were on our way, the less crowded the train would be. Fortunately we were at least able to sit. **[That was the advantage of boarding at Rosemont, one stop from the end of the line.]** By the time we got downtown there were more people in the aisles than in the seats.



Chasing pigeons under the 'L'

We transferred to a bus and rode over to the Shedd Aquarium. While the aquarium is interesting, I was not looking forward to paying their entry fee (\$39.95 for general admission). Here I lucked out in two ways. First, an usher watching us in line noticed we had a group and suggested that it would be cheaper to buy a membership than to pay individual admissions. Jake then did some texting to his friends and arranged to have DARTS (a support group that used help with fine arts at Garrigan but now aids all non-sports activities) pay the bill. A bonus of the membership was that our admission included a whale and dolphin show that would have been cost ten bucks more if we'd paid separately—so we paid less (and, of course, we didn't actually pay a thing ourselves) and got more.

[DARTS has since expanded its reach. When we went to New Orleans last summer they provided a lot of the assistance, making the trip one of the cheapest we've done. In spite of providing funding to about a dozen different school activities, the group's account balance seems to increase each year.]

For me that dolphin and whale show was definitely the highlight of the aquarium. I'd never been to such a show before, and it was fun to see it. Apparently animal rights activists have stopped similar shows in other locations, but they still have trained animals in Chicago. They jump on cue and do various other tricks in exchange for food. I found the show both fun and educational, and the animals didn't seem to mind performing on demand.

A lot of the kids enjoyed interactive experiences such as touching a manta ray that is shown in the picture **[on the next page]**. In terms of animal cruelty, I'd actually think those were more suspect than the show. I also can't say I was terribly eager to touch something that looked like an aquatic bat. I did do it once, though.

The aquarium is enormous. We spent about two hours there and really just barely scratched the surface. Some of the kids would have liked to have spent longer, while others were getting antsy by the time we left. This is why I'd have preferred to split the groups up and have different people follow their own schedules. While we did split into smaller groups inside the aquarium, everyone seemed to think it was vital that we re-assemble before doing anything else.



Touching a manta ray



Colleen enjoys tropical refreshment
in the museum cafeteria. Fortunately they didn't complain.

We had lunch at a little stand that was operated by the Chicago Parks Commission. Prices were surprisingly reasonable, and the food was actually quite good. I had a chicken quesadilla topped with sour cream and pico de gallo. It cost five bucks, and I thought it was basically worth that. Some of the kids had burgers or barbecue, and they also felt they'd gotten good value. I've filed this place away in my brain and may go back there again on my own.

A lot of our group bought smoothies or other non-alcoholic tropical juice drinks from another stand. There are few places less tropical than Chicago, and on a chilly day the drinks were an interesting choice. They did look both tasty and fun, though, and I might pick up one of those when I'm back on my own, too. **[Sadly, having since been diagnosed with diabetes, this is not a drink I'll likely be having.]**

Jake was clearly not pleased with the tropical drinks. He has a strong aversion to pineapple, to the point that even smelling the fruit makes him gag. While I love pineapple myself, I can certainly relate to such things. The texture of mushrooms, the smell of asparagus, and the sight of rare beef are among many things that make me cringe. **[What I'm least looking forward to in visiting Japan is dealing with the local food there, much of which strikes me as disgusting.]**

The drinks were garnished with pineapple slices and paper umbrellas, and each came with a gay pride rainbow flag. The city apparently had their pride march a week ago, and lots of things were decked out in rainbow décor.

The kids got in an interesting discussion after lunch about the correct way to pronounce one of our chaperone's names. The question was basically whether the first syllable of Colleen should be pronounced like the "o" in "cold" or that in "collie". Back when she was a student, all of Colleen's friends used the former pronunciation. From the horse's mouth, though, apparently her family uses the latter. So I've been mispronouncing her name for thirty-five years. I do apologize—though my bet is I'll say it wrong again the next time I see her.

We spent the afternoon at the Field Museum, Chicago's enormous natural history museum. Even more than the aquarium, this was a place that different people wanted to spend vastly different lengths of time. We spent three hours there, and a couple of the kids had seen enough after forty-five minutes. Had the group been willing to split up, I'd have suggested they spend time walking along the lakeshore or at the beach. Instead they entertained themselves playing cards

We got an even better admission deal at the Field Museum than at the aquarium, again with a theoretical "membership". (I've already gotten fundraising e-mails from both institutions, but those are easily deleted.) The general admission is \$24 per person, but we were able to get eleven people in for \$185—again including ticketed exhibits that would otherwise have been extra. DARTS had been more than generous with the aquarium admission, so this time I put things on my credit card and had the kids reimburse me.

We left the museum at closing time, which was 5pm. Here the group did split up. Four of the boys wanted to go to a baseball game, so I'd be escorting them there. Meanwhile the other three chaperons and the rest of the other three kids would be spending the evening separately.

I'd warned the kids to be careful with their Ventra cards, so who should end up losing theirs—me! I'd worn a jacket because it was chilly outside. It was hot and stuffy in the museum, though, so I took that jacket off. Unfortunately my Ventra card was in a pocket of the jacket and it ended up somewhere on the floor of the Field Museum. I'm pretty sure I lost a \$20 as well, but of course there was nothing I could do about that. There was no use crying over spilled milk. I paid a cash fare on the bus and then bought a day pass at the train station. That was a waste of \$12.75, but there wasn't much else I could do. I was intrigued to check online later and find that my card had been used after I lost it. I clicked the link to report it lost or stolen, and I should be getting a replacement in the mail shortly.

[It's interesting that CTA fares are one of the few things that have actually gotten cheaper since this trip was taken. Largely in response to the decrease in ridership after COVID, Chicago started subsidizing transit even more heavily. Today one-day CTA passes are just \$5, and a 7-day pass is \$15—both less than half what I paid on this trip.]

One of the kids I was with wanted to have gyros for supper, so we made our way to Greektown. We found a place called Mr. Greek that fit the bill perfectly. It was also good that it provided a variety of other options for those who wanted different foods. Eating in Greektown also filled precisely the right amount of time before the ballgame.

We took the train south to the stop called 35th—Sox. This is just steps from the ballpark that used to be called Comiskey. Chicagoans mostly still call it by that name, though a few use the also outdated name U.S. Cellular Field. Absolutely no one calls it by its current name, Guaranteed Rate Field. Apparently the company with the naming rights sells residential mortgages, though I doubt anyone who hasn't googled it could tell you that. **[Apparently the company that bought the naming rights has since changed their name to simply "Rate", which to me implies they no longer guarantee their rates.]**



The stadium formerly known as Comiskey

Had we opted to see the Cubs play the Cardinals this weekend, we'd have parted with \$175 or more for horrible seats and up to a thousand bucks for good ones. Fortunately the White Sox aren't so popular, and neither are their opponent tonight, the Washington Nationals (at least since the departure of their franchise player Bryce Harper). We could have gotten upper deck outfield seats for just \$7, and even the best seats for this game were under \$100. The tickets I bought for \$34 were for section 118, which is just beyond first base in prime foul ball territory. We were in row 18, but the crowd was sparse enough that the kids were able to move closer in throughout the game without bothering anyone or incurring the wrath of an usher. While I stayed in the seat I'd purchased, they actually ended up in Row 1. One of the kids caught a T-shirt, and the whole group of them was on the scoreboard twice during the breaks between innings. The kids all said they had a wonderful time.

While the White Sox tickets are cheap, they definitely make up that money through concessions. Beer vendors kept parading through the aisles, touting suds that sold for \$10.75 a can. I really can't imagine paying more than the price of a twelve-pack for a single can of beer. Most of the other stuff was equally overpriced. I did what I often do at ballgames—buying a bag of peanuts and the souvenir cup of pop. While the White Sox charged six bucks for peanuts, the bag lasted throughout the entire game with leftovers to spare. The souvenir cup (\$6.50) was a less prudent purchase. Normally such cups are kind of cool, and I'll often use them for years afterwards. (In fact, as I write this I'm drinking lemonade out of a cup I got at a hockey game in Boston years ago.) The best thing I can say about the White Sox cup is that it's sturdy. It's certainly not beautiful or cool. It's a big hunk of black plastic on which they printed their game calendar for 2019. That's all. Still, it was cheaper ounce per ounce than the smaller size of pop, so I suppose I shouldn't complain too much. **[I still have that cup, which I use for iced tea, mostly because its black plastic hides stains.]**



The kids sitting in Row 1

While the White Sox got absolutely trounced by the Nationals (12 – 1), it was actually a pretty fun game. The one Chicago run was a homer, which meant they set off fireworks behind the scoreboard. There was also a cool double play and a video appeal (something I'd never seen at a game before), where the umpires overruled the initial call on a stolen base.

We had a very uneventful ride back on the 'L'. We actually lucked out with our transfers. We got to the 35th Street station just as a northbound train was pulling in, and when we transferred to the blue line at Jackson there was only about a two-minute wait. That's about as good as you can do late at night. **[I recently watched a YouTube video done by a New Yorker who was complaining about construction on the subway that meant there were ten-minute headways between trains. Ten minutes is about the minimum headway on the 'L' (and most other transit systems, for that matter), and only a New Yorker would think that was bad. Chicago is one of many cities where you can wait half an hour for a train in the wee hours.]**

I got back to the hotel about 11:30 and spent a while chatting with Jake about their evening. Mrs. Heying had apparently gotten a cab for the group from the Field Museum, even though the bus would have taken them straight to their destination. They paid \$16.75 plus tip for the cab. That's not bad (particularly for six people), but they said they felt the driver was completely crazy. It's also strikes me as kind of silly to pay that when the bus would have essentially been free.

They took the cab to the John Hancock building. They didn't go to the top, but instead ate at a Benihana restaurant in the basement. I'm pretty sure that would have been way beyond my budget, but I gather everyone enjoyed the meal.

After dinner they went to Margie's Candies, where I've stopped numerous times. Jake apparently treated the others in their group to ice cream there. It was pushing ten by the time they got back to the hotel, so they were gone nearly as long as my group was.

TUESDAY, JUNE 11

SCHILLER PARK, ILLINOIS TO ALGONA, IOWA

Tuesday, June 11: Schiller Park, Illinois to Algona, Iowa

I was up at 7:00 Tuesday and packed things up fairly quickly. The kids were all quite a bit slower getting ready for the day. Everyone seemed very tired, and I can't say I blame them after our long day Monday.

There was a big crowd at breakfast, so large that we ended up sitting at the actual bar to eat. All the quiz bowl kids were checking out. The most noteworthy group there was the junior high team that won their division championship. They had an enormous trophy at their table and were obviously quite proud. I joked with Colleen that it reminded me of the danz squad's trophies, and it was certainly the largest academic trophy I'd ever seen.

I got the receipts and was annoyed that the cost was significantly higher than our confirmations had indicated. Part of that difference was a safe fee, something I'd have opted out of if I was just there on my own. The biggest difference, though, was that the taxes had gone up between the time I made the reservation and when we actually stayed. There are actually four different taxes on lodging in Schiller Park, Illinois—state, county, village, and an unspecified "occupancy" tax. They add up to more than 25% of the base price. I'm pretty sure that's the highest tax I've ever paid for a hotel room, though of course there's really no option but to pay it. I really don't blame communities for putting in lodging taxes, either. It's a tax no one local ever pays and a steady source of revenue for a town—particularly in a place that's packed full of airport hotels. The additional tax (about a hundred bucks) was also not included in what I charged the kids, so it's another expense I'll just be eating myself. In past years I could have juggled that expense and gotten reimbursed from entry fees at the tournament we host in the fall. The new diocesan accounting rules make that pretty much impossible, though. **[I gather someone at one of the diocesan schools must have gotten caught embezzling a fairly large sum of money, because the accounting they require is now absurdly complex.]**

We left at 9:10am, just slightly later than I'd planned. For variety as much as anything, I chose to leave Chicago via I-90. That turned out to be a very wise decision. They've vastly improved the Northwest Tollway (officially the Jane Addams Tollway) since I last took it. It's now eight to ten lanes all the way to Elgin and six lanes all the way to Wisconsin (or at least to Rockford—we left there). **[A year ago I drove into Chicago on the tollway. It is indeed six lanes all the way to Wisconsin, and in fact the six lanes continue to north of Madison—far superior to what it used to be.]** We zipped right along at 70 the whole way. The toll is also less than it is on I-88. We actually paid toll just twice—\$1.50 right by O'Hare and another \$3.60 by Elgin. That made it less than half what we paid coming into Chicago.

We stopped at a Road Ranger gas station in Winnebago, just west of Rockford. This was where I had a belt break in my car a few years back. Fortunately nothing bad happened, either in Winnebago or anywhere else on the trip.

The two-lane part of U.S. 20 in western Illinois is horrible. They're doing road work, but I don't think they're actually improving it a whole lot. We did make it through without a hitch, but I can't say I cared much for that part of the drive.

Part of the reason we hadn't taken this route the other way is that there's a major detour for eastbound traffic on the bridge over the Mississippi River at Dubuque. They take cars clear into Wisconsin and then back southwest, adding about fifteen needless miles. Westbound the bridge is open, though, and we made it across with no problem. What's more, I had the easiest time getting through Dubuque I've ever had. In the whole city we just stopped for one red light. That's absolutely unheard of.



**The school suburban at Dairy Queen
Dyersville, Iowa**

We had lunch in Dyersville. My plan was to stop at a Hardee's there, but it's apparently closed. We opted instead for a Dairy Queen. That's not somewhere I normally think of having an actual meal, but it worked fairly well. It was surprisingly affordable, too, and they even allowed me to get cheese curds as part of a value meal. **[Cheese curds often cost as much as a sandwich, so getting them with the value meal is a good deal indeed.]**

Our final stop was at the same Kwik Star in Charles City where we'd stopped when we set off. I bought gas this time. We're supposed to make sure we leave school vehicles with at least three-fourths of a tank of gas, and buying in Charles City would save me from having to gas them up after I got back to Algona. (It was also cheaper, though the school doesn't really seem to care about that.)

It began to rain as we headed north from Charles City. Mostly it just dripped, but there were some heavy showers on and off. We made it through all right, though.

We let off the girl whose car wouldn't start at he home in Wesley and then continued to Garrigan, arriving right at 5pm. The kids dispersed about as quickly as I've ever had them go on one of these trips. One kid had to wait for a parent to pick him up, but he was gone by the time I'd finished putting away the school vehicles. I turned in the keys and left fairly quickly myself, heading home to write a press release letting the radio station and the local newspaper know how we'd done. While it wasn't our best trip, it was good to say we'd at least won one game. I'm not sure what the future will bring, but it's nice to have completed twenty trips to nationals.

[We would qualify for nationals in 2020, but the event was held virtually that summer due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We did compete online, with the team including three of the kids who were on this trip (Aric Laubenthal, Abby Heying, and Grant Bormann) as well as the baseball kid (Joe Trainer) who had cancelled at the last minute. A lot of the regional tournaments we'd gone to never returned after COVID, which has made it much harder to qualify for nationals than it used to be. We'd wait until 2024 before we'd go to nationals again, this time heading south to New Orleans. In recent years I've had fewer and fewer kids out for quiz bowl, so I don't know when or if we might be making a trip in the future.]

While writing this revision I looked through the page on our school website that honors the teams that have been to national quiz bowl. It's weird to think that I've taken well over a hundred kids on trips to nationals over the years. It's only half a dozen each time, but that does add up over the years. When I was a student going to Davenport to tape *High School Bowl* shows on TV, I don't think I'd ever imagine coaching at a school others would refer to as a "quiz bowl dynasty". That is where I ended up, though, and it's been a major part of my career.]