

I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)

Lee Frank

Traveling

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Here I am about one year later with my brother Dennis and our cousin Louise and her husband, Mark (right to left). This is my parent's living room in Union, and obviously some family function. Non-trivial given the suits. My guess is my brother Robert's Bar Mitzvah, placing it in March of 1958. I look pretty much the same as the fella in the previous picture. I would have to guess this three year period, from '57 to '60, I really didn't change much. Externally.

Internally, I was learning who I was. For one thing, I began notebook entries in earnest. Sometimes, I put down ideas on how to improve things. (Remember the designing things for people?) Mostly I wrote about how I saw the world. How we see the world shows us something of who we are. Of interest to me, now, is that many of those thoughts from back then are still quite readable. (Which you can if you can connect to me online—at my Website, www.lee frank.com.)

The other thing I was learning is *what* I wanted to learn. Out of college, apparently for good, I wanted to know more. And, naturally, the more I knew, the more I wanted

to know. Out of the confines of college, I wanted everything. No longer simply looking to supplement architecture, I freely ranged everywhere: From Sorokin's *Cultural and Social Dynamics* (the three volume set) and Korzybski's *Science and Sanity*, to the complete works of Shakespeare. And everything in between and outside—and on every side.

My physical being wasn't idle, either. In '58 the family took two long trips. The first, in January, was to Mexico and chronicled in detail in *My Life*. The second, in the summer, was to Denver and also mentioned briefly in that book. The only common ground of these two trips was the participants, our whole family. We reached Mexico by air (seven brutal propeller-driven hours back then). Denver was achieved via car, over fifteen hundred miles sealed in close quarters with parents and two younger brothers. Close, that is, while we were driving. In the evening, we found freedom—and fresh air. No motels for our intrepid crew, we camped out every night.

First, you should guess from previous discussions about the Boy Scouts, we were not amateur campers. Dad had thirty-five years of Scouting experience to add to my three. Our equipment was real, too. The tent was not one of your slick pre-packaged Sears' specials. This was real canvas on a real wooden ridge pole, held in place with non-nylon rope and wooden tent pegs. It's the kind you see shared by a platoon in World War II movies. With cots, pantry, and kitchen, we were self-contained. All this in the family car. Well, not all of it was inside. We had a roof rack for the rectangular two by four tent poles.

Despite the accident in '55, my parents trusted me to do my share of the driving. Well, a little more than my share. I drove the first eighteen hours, straight through to a campground outside of Chicago. From there we took turns, with one eye on the road and one on Dennis laboring through various stages of carsickness. I can still see the

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endless wheat fields in Kansas and a sky full of stars in Nebraska. I remember crossing and re-crossing the Platt River and marveling how such a significant river could be so shallow. Then there was the approach to Denver. An endless plain, then hints of a city in the distance dwarfed by the mountains behind. As we closed, the city became larger, and the mountains became, well they became enormous. A lifetime in the Appalachian Mountains does not prepare you for the Rockies. One more thing about Denver in 1958. The air was pristine, crystal clear. So was the city. When I returned in the mid-eighties, the air was brown, almost obscuring the mountains. The city was dirty, too.

Every summer in the seventies, I traveled back and forth from Florida to New Jersey. From year to year, the air above major cities became more and more visible, from greater and greater distances. Approaching these cities, the air gradually turned from a light gray haze to a solid brown smudge. I observed this yearly degradation as the country debated whether or not pollution was a problem. The same people who said it wasn't a problem were also denying the reality of acid rain. (Real enough today; it's been in new car manuals for over a decade.) And now they're debating global warming.

In Denver, we visited Aunt Sara and Uncle Harry (my mother's uncle). The rest of our visit was full of side trips to ghost towns and such. Most of these excursions are easy drives from Denver, the Rockies providing many tourist attractions. To the south were Colorado Springs and the newly completed Air Force Academy (especially interesting to one still thinking about Architecture.) Also south were Pike's Peak and an especially scary tram ride down some other mountain. Denver was also the site of our first McDonald's hamburgers. Interesting, but a little less impressive than the Rocky Mountains.

What I remember most about this trip west was how much I missed Patty back east. Dick had dated Patty for almost two years. I think we might have even double-dated. Somewhere between the family trips to Mexico and Denver, I fell in love with Patty. Unlike Carol and Gil, I didn't take Patty away from Dick. For some reason he broke up with her. I say some reason because she didn't know why. She came to me for solace. We talked a lot; she cried a lot on my shoulder; I consoled her a lot. It—love—happened. A natural thing, but not because I felt sorry for her. What I felt was how much she needed love. And her need allowed me to admit my need.

I say this was how I (and we) felt when I was in Denver, but I have no records to confirm this. It is possible that being away from her pushed me over the edge into love's abyss. I do know by the time we left Denver, I was in agony. On our way back, things got worse—in a hurry. First, my Dad had flown back, having used up his vacation time. Second, the car coughed to a stop in Cheyenne. We spent an unplanned day waiting for an irregular repair (for Cheyenne). I remember nothing pleasant about the trip back. Without Dad, my younger brothers were unruly passengers. For them too, the return trip offered nothing but endless boring miles until we were home again.

By the time we hit Chicago, I couldn't take this snail's pace anymore. Over my mother's protests, I bailed. I left Mom up against another three days of driving. I had to see Patty as soon as possible. But how? I couldn't afford a plane ticket. I did have enough for the Greyhound straight through to Newark. Mom was left to struggle home with two fidgety teenagers. I couldn't help myself. Sorry.

I spent the next twenty-something torturous hours in a dream-like state. After a few stops, I was napping between towns. I awoke to see the less desirable side of every town east of Gary, Indiana. As sleep deepened, fellow passengers mysteriously appeared and disappeared. I

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began to look forward to bus station cafeteria breaks, no matter how seedy. The bus was my solution for a swift return to Patty. With apologies to June 6, 1944, this was my longest day.

Two things that made this Denver trip possible were Dad's vacation and my being out of work. My impression is I stayed out of work most of that year. I know I found, or rather Dad found for me, another job. But all I remember of that year are those two trips and my deepening involvement with Patty. And I can't remember our being anywhere or doing anything in particular that year. With one exception.

Gil's cabin cruiser was afloat. Bigger than its predecessor 14-foot runabout, taking it out was a much more complex affair. More civilized, its guests were often less experienced boaters. Gil's father now had a boat *his* friends could really enjoy. Gil, Dick, and I rarely commanded the boat for ourselves. Another difference was that the three of us were drifting apart. One example was the time Gil and I used the boat to double-date. Since I was dating Patty, Dick was left out of the equation. And this excursion is the only other thing I remember from that summer.

Another reason I recall this trip was a minor contretemps. It seems I was at the wheel as we came in from the ocean. Going up river to the mooring required passage under a few bridges. One of these was a railroad bridge. The height of the others easily allowed us to pass beneath. Railroad bridges are always at level grade. And always open except when a train approaches. As we approached this bridge so did a train. If you didn't know, trains have the right of way over boats. The bridge came down. I began to turn into a circle to wait for the bridge to reopen, but the boat kept heading for the bridge. Gil and

his father had indeed made this boat in their garage: The steering was a series of ropes and pulleys. Somehow the ropes had slackened and escaped the pulleys. And left us drifting towards the bridges. In its first year, another savings had been achieved through the use of twin outboard engines—we had no reverse. (The next year they installed an inboard engine, a converted Ford V-8 with reverse—and cabled steering.) As we drifted towards the closed span, Gil and I managed to open the side panels and, pulling the ropes by hand, steer the boat. We turned short of the bridge by less than two boat lengths.

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