

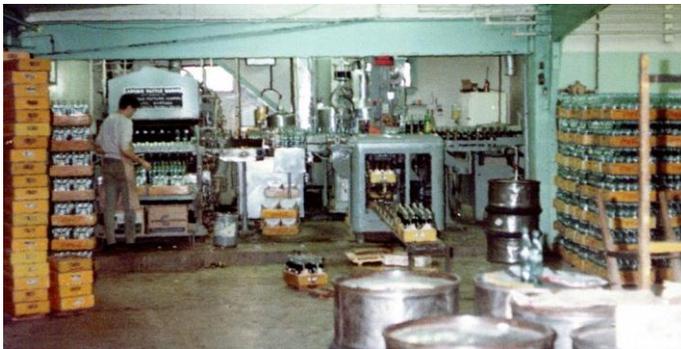
1966 - 1968

College (and Coca Cola)

I registered for Fall Quarter at Northern Montana College in Havre at the end of the summer. Somewhere along the line I had been convinced that I wanted to be an engineer so declared that as my major. I was never infatuated with engineering and don't think I was ever committed to the major but I knew that I'd have to transfer to another school, probably in Bozeman, for my last two years. I figured I'd make a final decision before that time came.



Dave Craig's dad was head of the English Department at NMC and somehow he got me lined up for a work-study job as a movies projectionist. I showed movies every Sunday evening in the little theater in Cowan Hall. I don't think it paid much, and I really didn't need the money, I think he selected me because he knew I'd be dependable. I did find it interesting but I felt a tiny bit guilty for taking a job from someone who might need the money. The movies were 16mm but I did have two projectors so I got to really play the projectionist roll, learning to switch projectors without a break in the movie.



Coca Cola bottling plant production area

I continued working at the bottling plant, loading trucks and making syrup. Dave Craig also worked through the school year except during basketball season. In December I was asked to get a commercial driver's license so I could drive the delivery trucks and I did so about January or February but nothing developed from it at the time.

Beginning in the spring of 1967 I was making \$2.00 (\$14.25 in 2014) an hour. Bob Donaldson was gone so Dave and I took turns working on the production line. One day I'd come in at 7:00 AM and work on the bottler and the next day I'd come in at 8:00 and load trucks and sort



One of the few pictures of the 1968 Dodge and a memorable event was a late spring storm in May of 1967. It snowed so much that Spring Quarter finals at NMC had to be postponed.

bottles while he came in early to bottle. At the end of the day we'd load trucks, and I'd make syrup after we finished loading.

That summer they had me drive the route for the town driver (LeRoy Averman) and for my dad, out of town, when they each went on vacation. And I got to have my first accident that could be reported.

In Malta one of the first morning deliveries was at the Great Northern Cafe. We'd park at the bus stop/delivery zone on the corner to make our delivery. This

was possible because there were only two buses a day and they weren't due at that hour. Unfortunately patrons of the coffee shop, parking diagonally, also knew this and tended to encroach on the bus stop space. In my case as I swung into the bus stop and as I turned my wheel to the left to park parallel to the curb the rear end of my truck swung into the quarter panel of a little black Dodge Dart. To compound the problem my front tire was against the curb so I had to actually back into the car slightly before I could pull forward! THEN I had to go into the coffee shop and make an announcement, asking who owned the car! What blew me away was that, although I'm sure the company paid to get his car fixed; the owner of the car was cited for parking in the bus stop.



Towards the latter part of the summer the driver on the "south" route quit so I was given that route as my own. In the summer this was a twice a week route - on Tuesday I'd go south to Big Sandy and return and on Friday I'd go to Loma and work back. In the winter this was cut back to once a week so I kept the route when school started, driving on Saturdays.



A most memorable event had to be the day I "purposely" drove off the highway. As I said earlier, Dave and I took turns coming in early. This particular day I'd come in early but we didn't run the production line and I was just doing general stuff around the plant. About 2:30 in the afternoon I was told to take the pickup and empty trailer and go out to the Sun Dance grounds in the Bears Paw Mountains and pick up all the stuff we had there. I was ticked because I obviously wasn't going to get off early (not that I had anything to do) and because 3 of us had taken the stuff out and set it up and I was being asked to go alone to pick it up.

Well I hooked up the trailer and headed out. The weather was nice and there was very little traffic. Only one car passed me as I headed onto the reservation and I wasn't even meeting any traffic. As I rounded a corner at the top of a hill I noted the guy who had passed me was at the bottom of the hill going really slow. As I coasted down the hill I noted that he was nearly stopped but figured I could see a good $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile ahead and there was no traffic coming so I could just pass him. Then I realized he was actually stopped, and then, almost simultaneously, I saw his backup lights come on and a car appeared coming down the hill from the other direction. Now I couldn't pass him so I jumped on the brakes. I had both pickup and trailer brakes locked and thought I would come close to stopping but would most likely hit the guy. Then I saw a little boy in the back window of the car waving at me and realized that wasn't an option. The guy had stopped backing up and the car coming from the other direction had stopped but now I was too close to actually pull around and pass so all I could do was to go for the ditch on the other side of the road.

I suppose there must have been about 30 feet of fill and I went off at about a 45 degree angle. I remember glancing out the side window just before leaving the road and thinking I was probably going to roll and that would be kind of interesting.

I didn't roll and in fact came to a stop on the inclined embankment. The front bumper was just touching the barbed wire fence at the base of the fill but wasn't pushing it.

The guy from the car came running down to see if I was OK. I was, except my legs were shaking so bad I could barely get out of the pickup. I asked about him and his family and he said they were fine, and he was amazed that I hadn't hit him. But as we climbed up to the road we saw that the right side of my rear bumper was bent about 30 degrees back from the trailer hitch and figured I must have hit something. When we got to his car we found that his left tail light lens was broken and the strip of chrome from tail light to the back door had dropped to the ground next to the rear tire. The guy apologized for backing up, he said he was home from the Navy and had missed the turn to his brother-in-law's place.

I quickly sized up the situation: 1) He shouldn't have been backing up. 2) I should have been able to stop. 3) We were on the reservation and he was an Indian. It was a no-brainer... I gave him our company info and told him we'd fix his car. Then we discussed how I was going to extract myself. The fill dirt was too soft and the embankment too steep for me to back up. The guy said it was his brother-in-law's place so it'd be OK if I just cut the fence and drove into the field. I hated to do that because it was a brand new fence that the rancher had just put up that spring, but saw no other choice. We figured that, although there was a small creek to the northeast (my left) I should be able to find a place to drive through it and get on the road that lead to the ranch - the same road that the Navy guy had missed and was backing up to.

Naturally it was much easier said than done. As I drove along the creek any place that look shallow enough to ford was hemmed in by trees and the places where there were no trees had high cut banks or looked too deep to drive through. Logic told me that there had to be a way into (or out of) the field and if I just drove along the fence (that I'd cut) I ought to find a gate. So I drove over to the fence and started up the hill. I didn't get very far before I lost traction and was forced to back down the hill. In the process I jack-knifed the trailer and broke the safety

chain. Disgusted, I got out and threw the chain in the back of the pickup. Then I drove all the way back to the creek to take a quarter mile run at the hill. As I bounced across the bottom land building up my speed I expected at any minute to lose the trailer, but I made it to the top. Now I was following the fence driving through brambles and on sides of hills that made feel like I might really roll over. Finally things flattened out and then the pickup started roaring. I knew instantly that I'd lost my muffler!

Even more disgusted, I walked back, found the muffler and grabbed it - unfortunately the hot end - and burned my hand. I dragged it back to the pickup, threw it in the box and resumed roaring along following the fence. About this time a car pulled up on the highway opposite me. The driver was one of the guys I was supposed to meet at the Sun Dance grounds and he asked what I was doing in the field! After a brief discussion he said he would drive ahead and find the gate. A bit later I saw the tiniest speck up ahead - the guy was standing on his car waving at me - so I waved back happy to know there was a gate ahead and I would escape the nightmare.

I hadn't gone much further and in one of my frequent checks to see if the trailer was still there I saw a huge cloud of dust following me. Like in the cowboy movies when the Indians are chasing the wagon train. Well, guess what... when the rancher put up the new fence he left the old barb wire laying just inside the fence line and I had wrapped it around the axel of the trailer. I was dragging a few hundred feet of wire. The only thing I had to cut the wire was a pliers and the wire was wrapped around the axel so tightly that I had to cut each wrap as I pulled it off the axel.

Eventually I got moving again and, after a while, encountered another fence across my path. My heart sank with the thought of having to cut my way through another fence. I was sure the guy who waved at me couldn't have gotten it wrong so I turned back and shortly I found the gate. It seemed like a lifetime, but looking at the location on a map today I realize that it was only about a mile from where I went off the road to the gate!

I finally got to the Sun Dance grounds and after all that had happened picking up the tanks and dispensers was a pretty minor deal. I got it all home OK, but it was a really, really long afternoon.



I wasn't the only one who had accidents. I believe this was this summer my dad had the only accident that I know of. He was heading west on a Monday morning. A farm truck was laboring up a slight hill when suddenly the farmer stopped to turn off the road. I don't know how closely dad had been following but he couldn't stop quickly enough and hit the grain truck. The collision pushed the grill of the Coke truck into the fan so it couldn't run and I was recruited to go with Phil to salvage the situation. Phil took a replacement truck and I drove a pickup that was still loaded with premix tanks and dispensers from a fair somewhere the previous weekend.

When we got to the collision site Dad took off with the replacement truck and Phil hooked a chain to the broken truck to tow me. As we got ready to leave Phil reminded me that because we couldn't run the engine I would have no power steering so I need to keep a good hold of the steering wheel. He also reminded me I had no power brakes and said that when we started down

the hill into Havre I better be standing on the brakes because if I ran over him he'd kill me when he got out of the hospital.



One event that never got reported happened on a Saturday afternoon. Dave and I had finished loading trucks for the day. The town route truck needed to be loaded, but we planned on doing that on Sunday so we were putting all the trucks away. Two trucks were kept in the warehouse, side by side, and two were kept in the plant, nose to tail. Since the town route truck was already in the plant we planned on pulling it ahead and bringing another truck in behind it.

The ceiling sloped downward the further you went into the plant, but it was high enough for a truck provided there were no cases of empty bottles on top. As I pulled the truck ahead I heard a horrible noise and slammed on the brakes. It turned out there was one case of empty bottle on top of the truck and it was dead center so it hadn't been visible. As I had driven ahead the case hit a copper water pipe that ran across the ceiling. This pipe ran to a stanchion then down to a hose reel that was mounted on the stanchion. When I hit the pipe it flipped up, tearing the hose reel from the stanchion and throwing it across the room and there was water spewing from the broken connection and the pipe was twisted so it was flat against the ceiling.

We got the water turned off and pulled the pipe down from the ceiling, twisted it even further, so it again ran down the stanchion. We clamped it in place, reconnected and remounted the hose reel, and cleaned up all the water. When we were done the only sign that anything had happened was that the paint on the pipe had chipped away where it had been twisted. Oh, and we got the case of empties off the top of the truck.

In 1968 the company moved to a new plant on the south edge of town and in 1972 I had the opportunity to go to the old plant. The missing paint and twist in the pipe were just as we'd left them after our repair. Apparently no one ever noticed.



A memorable event during the summer of 1967 was spending a week with my grandfather. He was 86 and because Grandma Anez went somewhere to visit family I was asked to stay with him. I think it was to be for four nights and, although he didn't believe he needed anyone to keep an eye on him, we both just put up with the situation. The day I took my stuff over he advised me that he locked the door at 9:00 PM and if I wasn't home I would have to sleep in my car. I slept on the sofa in the front room and maybe the car would have been OK.

The first morning he woke me at about 5:00 AM for breakfast. He had, literally, everything laid out on the kitchen table. There was cereal and milk. He'd made oatmeal and was cooking bacon and eggs and offered to make pancakes. He had also laid out leftover chicken and roast beef, mash potatoes and vegetables. There was some kind of casserole and there a bean salad. There was a Jell-O salad and lunchmeat and bread. He had milk, orange juice, tea and coffee to drink. I've never been a big fan of leftovers to begin with and couldn't imagine them for breakfast so I had some cereal, bacon and eggs and OJ and hoped the rest of the stuff would disappear. No

such luck, the next morning I found the same layout on the table and realized it probably would continue to be there every morning until it was gone or spoiled.



There are random memories that I can't necessarily put dates on that are burned into my memory.

One day I was driving the company pickup headed home from somewhere and I had stopped for gas in Chinook. Service stations were still full service and the attendant had checked the oil and washed the windows as was the routine. As I was leaving Chinook and just starting into a slight left hand curve the hood of the pickup flew up. I knew there was oncoming traffic so I knew I had to stay on my side of the road, but I didn't want to drive off the side of the road either! I frantically got the window rolled down so I could stick my head out and see where I was and got stopped OK. Except for a sprung hood no damage was done. When I got back to the plant and reported the incident Wes's response was that I should have checked to make sure the hood was properly latched!

College football players always liked to get jobs at the plant during the summer because it was the kind of work that kept them in shape. One year we had a guy who was probably 6'4" 270 lbs., without an ounce of fat, and, although he was nice, he came across as being really tough. I thought he was pretty cool and kind of looked up to him until one day when we were sorting bottles and he nicked his middle finger on the edge of a coke case. It was a bad enough cut, blood was spurting out, but nothing we didn't see now and then. This guy totally lost it. He was running around screaming looking for something to stop the bleeding and was about to start digging through the barrel of dirty grease rags when a couple of the older guys got him under control. They took him to the clinic and I think he got one or two stitches. I revised my opinion of the guy after that and decided that appearance and talk alone didn't mean much.

Getting cuts when working around all that glass was not uncommon and I wouldn't want to even guess how many times I had cuts or scrapes over the years. The strangest event happened one evening as I was unloading a truck. It wasn't unusual that there would be some bottles in a case of empties that weren't entirely empty so as we carried the empty cases from the truck to the stack we'd sometimes get splashed a little. On this particular night as I walked back and forth I realized that every time I walked back to the truck my hand was wet and I was wiping it on my apron. At that point I looked at my apron and it was smeared with blood. I looked at my right hand and it was covered with blood. I had to trace the steady trickle of blood up my arm to even find out where it was coming from because I hadn't felt a thing. Apparently, when reaching into the truck to pull out a case of empties I'd brushed my arm across the top of a broken bottle and had sliced a thin layer of skin from the inside of my forearm just below the elbow. I must have been bleeding for a while because there was a well-defined trail of blood on the floor where I'd been dripping as I walked back and forth. It was easy to stop the bleeding but I still have a scar about the size of a quarter where that skin was shaved off.

Late that summer I bought my second car, a 1963 LeMans. It was a neat little car with a 326 engine, red bucket seats, and shifter on a floor console. I loved driving it.



1963 Pontiac LeMans



I was really into photography during this time as well. As I related I'd started to learn something about photography during my senior year in high school and my parents gave me a good 35mm camera for Christmas in 1966.

I had joined the yearbook staff at NMC when I started college and learned another lesson. In high school I had been co-editor for the year book and newspaper and consequently had a good deal to say about the pictures I took. When I got to college I was just one of several photographers, and the "junior" one too, so I was given assignments and pretty much told not only what to take, but often how to take it. I didn't find that very rewarding and didn't join the staff for my sophomore year.

Havre Central had decided to field a football team in the fall of 1967 and the coach approached me about filming their games. He had a small budget and asked that I take some movies around the school with whatever the budget allowed beyond the game films. He planned on surprising the student body with a movie at the end of the year. We found a wind-up 8mm movie camera and I took the game film using black and white film that could be developed locally. I had a good Super-8 home movie camera and I began shooting the school film with it whenever possible - paying for the film myself as costs soon exceeded the sports budget.

At the same time, in the fall of 1967, I attended Joan Schnurr's wedding. She was the sister of Gary, my best friend growing up. Having my camera with me, as usual, I took a ton of candid pictures at the wedding and during the reception.

Gary was home on leave from the Navy and at the Schnurr home after the wedding we were having a great visit catching up on things as we sat in the basement drinking wine and vodka. Then I remembered I was supposed to be filming a football game that evening! I made it to the game and was really proud of myself because I didn't miss a minute of the game even while changing film manually and winding the camera. Havre Central got beat 60-0 and the coach was a little upset about my lack of judgment in using all the film on such a poor performance. I didn't tell him that my judgment was probably affected because of the wedding reception

After I got the developed pictures back from Joan's wedding I had no idea what to do with all of them so I put them in an album and gave them to her as a wedding gift. It wasn't long before one of Joan's friends, who had seen the album and was getting married, asked if I'd do an album for her. Then someone else asked and before long I had a thriving if not lucrative business. I didn't want to compete with the professional photographers so if the person was a good friend I would take the wedding pictures and give them an album as a wedding gift. If they were acquaintances I would simply charge them for the film and the album book. In one case when the couple were total strangers who couldn't afford to hire a pro for their portraits I charged about \$300 (\$2100 today) which was significant but not a professional rate.



During fall quarter in 1967 I finally got to take some liberal arts courses like Business Law and Economics and I found that I liked them. By January 1968 I'd realized that I had absolutely no interest in the engineering program that I was headed toward. I really didn't know what I wanted to do and thought maybe it would be good to give the Navy a shot and see how I felt after that. When I talked with the recruiter I found that I was qualified for almost any program, but the one I wanted - photography - was not open for new recruits. I decided to enlist on a delay program where I would be inducted in March but not have to report until September and I'd take my chances on the photography thing.

I've been asked why I chose the Navy and I don't have a "good" answer. I just felt an affinity towards the Navy and I don't remember consciously analyzing other options. Gary Schnurr had said good things about the Navy and that probably influenced me. The delay program attracted me and I think the Navy seemed to offer more potential opportunities for training in advanced technologies. The problem now is that, because I found the Navy a very positive and fulfilling experience, much of what I "think" is based on the experience. It's hard to honestly recall what I was thinking at the beginning of 1968.



Early in 1968 the St. Jude's Parish decided that, due to declining enrollment and rising costs, they would close Havre Central High School at the end of the school year. This decision added significant value to the movie that I was making as it would document the last year of the school's operation and I made a little more effort to capture the last months of the school's operation. I don't know how much film I used, but after editing, the movie ran about 30 minutes and was a big hit.



Because I knew I'd be leaving for the Navy, when it came time for Spring Quarter in 1968 I took courses that interested me rather than those that I "needed" and this including a one credit PE class in Golf.

Meanwhile, Dave Craig and Gordon Whirry were both attending Notre Dame but Gordon planned on transferring to Bozeman for his junior year. As the end of the school year approached I

learned that Gordon was uncertain how he was going to get all his stuff moved home. Since I was approaching the end of my higher education for at least the next 4 years I figured it wouldn't matter if I missed a class or two and offered to drive to South Bend. Dave and Gordon would get a ride home we'd haul all of Gordon's stuff.

The trip out to South Bend went OK, I don't remember anything in particular about it, and I arrived in South Bend on the Friday afternoon starting the Memorial Day weekend. We had loaded all their stuff and were on the road by early evening. Gordon must have driven the first leg while Dave rode shotgun and I napped in the back seat. We stopped for gas in Wisconsin and Dave took over driving while I rode shotgun and Gordon napped in the back. As we were coming into St. Paul about midnight there was a detour and next thing we knew we were in a residential section of St Paul - totally lost. I was trying to locate us on a map, while Dave kept asking me to read the street signs because he couldn't read them. Finally we found a truck route which turned into a state highway and eventually we found ourselves in the middle of downtown St. Paul. After getting gas it was my turn to drive, with Gordon riding shotgun but now both he and Dave were asleep. The interstate was still being built, there was a lot of patchy fog and it seemed like every time I hit fog I would also run into a construction zone. To top that off I couldn't find a decent radio station to save my soul. The sun finally came up and we stopped for gas in Tower City, ND and had breakfast. Gordon took over the driving duties while I slept in back. Then, and this seems to be a recurring theme, in my sleep I heard an "oh no" from the front seat. It seems that there had been a few drops of rain so Gordon turned on the windshield wipers and the driver side wiper flew away - the whole assembly had broken off. We stopped in Bismarck and determined there was no way we were going to get it fixed before Tuesday (Monday was Memorial Day). So we just headed for home hoping we wouldn't run into a rainstorm. We almost made it too - it was just during the last 30 miles that we hit a thunderstorm and could only see by driving fast enough to make the rain sheet off the windshield.

A few weeks later Dave learned that he needed glasses. No wonder he kept saying he couldn't read the signs as we were driving in St. Paul.



That summer at the Coke plant I drove the south route twice a week and relief for the two primary routes when the drivers were on vacation or needed a second truck. I got to work a lot of the special events, like rodeos and fairs, as well. In August I began training Robert Murie on the south route. He was an Indian from Rocky Boys but because he wasn't full blood he was a little nervous about some parts of the reservation. It was very interesting to hear his stories about growing up on the reservation and I think he did pretty well on the route. In the fall of 1972 I ran into him at the Rocky Boys School where he was director of bilingual education.



I hadn't dated anyone too seriously at any time in high school or while in college. Sometime during 1967 a younger girl, still in high school, who had a crush on me started to hang around. She was a really nice girl and I attended her prom in the spring of 1968, but I was never that interested in her. During the summer of 1968 Dave Craig arranged a double date with a girl, Patty, who worked with his girlfriend, Kris. It turned out that I sort of knew Patty and Kris because they worked at

the drug store where I had my film developed and bought a lot of camera equipment. Patty claimed that she actually remembered me from when she sold tickets at the movie theater. We really hit it off and I was not happy about having to leave her when I went into the Navy.

In September, before it was time to leave for the Navy, I decided to go back to Sidney to visit relatives for a couple of days. Harvest was running late that year and the younger Prevost cousins had all gone back to school so I was pressed into service. I thought it'd be cool to drive a combine, but what they had in mind was that I would drive grain trucks from the field to the grain bins at the farm. I thought I could do that easily... after all I'd been driving Coke trucks for a couple of years. What I didn't anticipate was that I'd be driving across fields and through creek beds with a load that shifted quite easily. Additionally one of the trucks was older than me with upholstery that was an army blanket on bare springs and the grain box was a little loose. We'd work from about 9 AM (as soon as the dew was off the grain) until it was too dark to see. I think I was there for about 5 days and I was so glad when the time came that I had to get back to Havre.

I was still taking wedding pictures throughout this time and by the fall of 1968 I was taking pictures at weddings almost every weekend. On the Saturday after I got back from Sidney, while at a wedding at St. Jude's, the professional who was photographing the same wedding said he was overbooked the following weekend and asked if I would consider taking pictures for him. I, unfortunately, had to decline as I was leaving for the Navy the following Monday. I wonder sometimes what career path I might have taken if the offer had come at a different time.