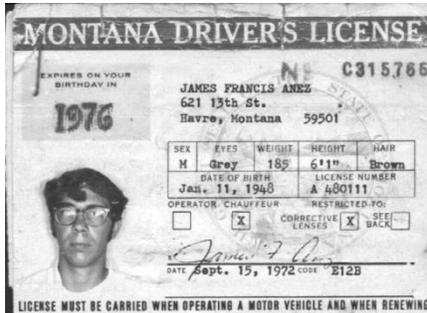


# 1972 - 1975

## Home & more Coca Cola

The week after I got home I went by the Coke plant to see about returning to work. It was too late to start the fall quarter at Northern and I wanted to take some time off so we agreed that I'd return to work in October.



My driver's license had expired while I was in the Navy so I had to get a new one. During August I'd gotten new glasses while the ship was in Sasebo, Japan thinking I'd save money by having the Navy pay for them. The Navy had sent me to a civilian (Japanese) optometrist whose office was located in a department store (much like what we now have in the U.S. at Walmart, K-Mart etc.) and no one in his office spoke English. That made it awkward as we kind of used a thumbs up/thumbs down process to reach the proper correction prescription for the lenses. At the time the new glasses seemed to be better than the glasses they replaced but in the end it didn't work out so well because I couldn't even pass the eye test for the license.

I bought a white Dodge Polaris (I don't recall what year it was - it was never one of my favorite cars) and I went on a trip. I went to Kentucky where I saw the Burketts; South Bend, Indiana where I saw Dave and Kris Craig; Rochester, MN where I visited with Glenn Stettler, a fire control tech from the Ouellet; and then came back through Minneapolis.

After I got back to work I started driving the "south" route again. Since it was fall and I wasn't going to school it was a once week every Friday. The rest of the time I worked in the plant doing pretty much the same things I'd been doing before the Navy.

About the middle of December I found an apartment and moved out of the folk's house. The apartment was part of a triplex situated on a corner and I shared an entrance with an older couple. Our first meeting occurred one day very shortly after I moved in when I was playing Christmas music as I set up my stereo system and organized the living room. My new neighbor



Home 1973-1974: 604 2nd Ave, Havre, MT

came over to ask me to turn the volume down on the music. At the time I thought it was an ominous sign if my new neighbors didn't even like Christmas music but they turned out to be very nice people. I lived there for more than 2 years and that was the only problem we ever had.

Mike Cassel, Wes's younger son, had returned from wherever he'd been and now had some role in running the Coke plant. We never got along that well and I wasn't too concerned exactly what his

job title was. I do remember he issued a document that I think was probably required by OSHA regulations in which we were forbidden from throwing snowballs or having water fights. At the time this seemed very "mickey-mouse" and we largely ignored it or laughed about it.



In December I was asked to go out with a driver named Warren, who'd been hired as a route driver, and show him the stops on the Hayes run. It was about 100 miles out into the south portion of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and Little Rockies where there were a handful of small communities (Lodgepole, Hayes, DY Junction, Landusky and Zortman). There were only five to seven businesses so we only went out there three or four times a year. This was probably the first delivery route that I'd gone on with my dad when I was a really young kid. As a 15 year old I'd gone on this route with Wes Cassel's son-in-law because "he'd hurt his back and couldn't do any heavy lifting". I'd run the route a half dozen times on my own so it was no biggie.

Well to start things off Warren wanted me to go to the plant, get the truck, and pick him up the Saturday morning we were to leave. The company Christmas party was to be held that evening so we decided to get an extra early start and I pulled up in front of his house about 5:30 AM expecting him to hear the truck and come out. He was apparently deaf so I had to go knock on his door. Then when we walked to the truck he climbed in to drive. I was a little peeved but rationalized that I was getting the commission so I might as well let him do the work.

The drive out to Hayes was uneventful and we made our delivery or deliveries there. As we left Hayes southbound we had a long, rather steep hill to climb. Going up the hill we could feel and/or hear a thumping sound that at first we thought might be a flat spot on a tire. It didn't quit so about two-thirds of the way up the hill, on a reasonably flat area, we pulled off the highway into a hay field and I got out while Warren moved the truck. The noise was coming from under the box of the truck but I couldn't see anything that seemed wrong. We traded places and repeated the maneuver and came to the conclusion that the problem must be the drive shaft or universal joint. Since we were nearly at the top of the hill we decided to continue rather than turn back.

After we crested the hill the problem ceased but as we continued through the mountains we realized that any time he shifted to third gear or below we got the thumping. Eventually it started thumping in fourth gear and eventually got to the point that it didn't matter what gear we were in.

We decided that we'd better call for help when we got to the bar at the DY but it turned out they had no phone. The bartender or owner said that a rancher about a mile north of them had a phone so we drove there. The ranch house was probably a quarter mile off the road and by now it had warmed enough so the road into the house was a total sea of mud. We were sure we'd get stuck if we tried to drive in so we decided it'd be best if we walked to the house.

I had overshoes so could take them off and go into the house without making a mess so I made call. I reached someone at the plant and explained what we'd experienced and said we thought it might be the universal joint or the drive shaft. I told them we'd go back to DY and make our delivery and then wait till help arrived. I assumed that someone would come to tow us home.

After we finished our delivery we waited. And waited some more. Eventually, about the time we expected help might arrive I saw a pickup coming down that long straight road from the mountains and realized that they had sent mechanics from G&B Motors to fix the truck rather than someone to tow us.

The two mechanics, from the garage that normally worked on our trucks, climbed under the truck and then disgustedly advised us that there was nothing wrong with the u-joint. Well, we said, there's something wrong - you figure it out. So the first mechanic climbed in the truck and headed down the highway. He stopped after about a mile and we piled into the pickup with the second mechanic and drove to where the truck was stopped. The first mechanic was looking under the truck scratching his head. He now agreed that something was wrong but couldn't figure out what it might be. So mechanic number two got in the truck and headed up the road. He also stopped after about a mile and we headed after him in the pickup. As we pulled up behind the truck we could see the driveshaft hanging from the u-joint and laying on the road.

The mechanics removed the driveshaft and we discussed options. Their pickup wasn't heavy enough to pull us. We couldn't leave the truck unattended on the reservation and besides it would freeze once it got dark so we'd lose all the pop either way. One of the mechanics said he knew a rancher not too far from where we were stopped and they would go call Havre and get someone to come rescue us.

While we waited for the mechanics a gasoline bulk truck heading to Tubb's Oil in Harlem (about halfway to Havre) pulled up and offered to tow us - provided we didn't mind being towed behind a truck full of gasoline. Seemed like a plan to us so we hooked up and headed north. We could run the truck so had steering and brakes but without the driveshaft the speedometer didn't register. When we got to the top of the hill above Hayes (where all our problems started) the gas truck driver pulled over and said he needed to pull in at Hayes to make a delivery. He suggested that he give us a push and we coast down the hill and go as far as possible. Then after his delivery he'd catch up and tow us the rest of the way into Harlem. I wasn't so thrilled about this plan but really didn't see any option so off we go. That was scary. I have no idea how fast we were going but it was too fast. Once we got to the bottom of the hill we coasted at least two miles and finally pulled off on an approach road.

While waiting for the gas truck our mechanics caught up with us and said they'd reached the office and my dad would be coming out with another truck to tow us in. Since the gas truck was willing to pull us into Harlem we suggested the mechanics drive ahead to Harlem, flag down the truck from Havre and have him wait for us.

That plan worked out great. When we got Harlem the other Coke truck was there, we chained up to it just as it was getting dark. All of a sudden Warren said he was too tired to drive so I had to handle the chore the rest of the way into Havre in the dark behind a big boxy truck that I couldn't see around.

As mentioned this was the night of the company Christmas party. It was supposed to start at 6:00 PM and it must have been after 7:00 PM when we got back to town. We all went home and

got cleaned up as quickly as possible and headed for the party. Now Wes wasn't adverse to a drink now and then, but his wife, Edith, frowned on drinking so as a compromise Wes would normally buy one round of drinks before dinner and another round after dinner. Well, since they were waiting for us, everyone kept drinking and I always felt Edith blamed me, personally, that we were late and there was so much drinking.

The final straw was that I had to go out the following week to finish making the deliveries that we hadn't gotten to because of the breakdown. I noted as I headed up the hill by Hayes that there were skid marks from dual tires on the downhill lane - they had to have been ours!



At the beginning of January I asked for some time off one morning to go register for the Winter Quarter at Northern. I had decided that I didn't want any part of engineering or science and since I had so many math and science credits all I wanted to take were interesting liberal arts courses. My goal was to balance my transcript for when I decided I wanted to be "something" specific so I registered for 21 credits of history courses.

When I got back to work management (mainly Mike Cassel) was in a tizzy. Apparently no one realized that I intended to go back to college and, I guess, I never specifically said that was my plan. I figured there was plenty of part time work and it would be easy to shift the south route to Saturdays as we'd done prior to the Navy years so I never imagined that there would be a problem.

But there was. Mike was adamant that the south route could not be run on Saturday. I have no idea what his agenda was, but his argument about Saturday delivery being against company policy was so bogus it baffled me. The city route always delivered on Saturday and the out of town route was always 6 days a week in the summer. I suppose Warren started driving the south route and I don't remember being particularly upset about losing it. I started school on schedule and mostly loaded trucks and made syrup in the evenings. Probably I was being stubborn about going to school and refused to let Mike's attitude affect me although I always considered that he was trying to find a way to "get me" if he could.

My youngest brother Daryl was also working part time while he attended college as a freshman and I think there may have been another part time kid, but I don't recall for sure. Mike's son, Scott, who was a pretty nice kid, had been working at the plant but had left to join the Coast Guard, so there was plenty of work for us part time guys.

I recall this period as a pretty comfortable time. Between the GI Bill, which more than paid for my college expenses, and my income from the plant I was doing pretty well financially. I was getting excellent grades in school and it was interesting. I pretty much came and went from work as I felt necessary and it was never questioned.

About 7:00 AM one morning in March, during the break between winter and spring quarters, I received a phone call from Phil Cassel. His first question was "What time are you coming to work"? In a mild panic I tried to think of some reason that I should have been in early that day

and then replied, honestly, that I was planning to be in at 8:00. He responded saying, "Good, can you meet me at the 4-B's [restaurant] right away I need to talk with you"

Now my level of concern really shot up. I knew that Daryl was not planning on going back to college for Spring Quarter and would be working full time at the plant. There were rumors that Glenn Cassel was not going to be able to stay in the Coast Guard because of some eye problems and would likely be coming back to work at the plant. Given the animosity between Mike and me, I feared that he'd prevailed and Phil was going to tell me that they no longer needed me part-time.

The news I got from Phil when I sat down at the 4-B's was even more startling than what I imagined. He informed me that LeRoy, the town driver, was going to be "let go" and offered me the job. He said that it paid about \$12,000 a year (about \$68,000 in 2014 dollars). I was stunned and asked him to give me some time to think about it intending to discuss it with my dad when he got home that night.

I spent a good part of the day in something of a daze. First of all, LeRoy had been with the company for as long as I could remember (probably since the mid 1950's) and although he wasn't the sharpest tack in the drawer he was a nice guy. Secondly, I was having a great time in college and I had always expected that I'd finish college. Tempering that however, was that I really had no clear idea of what I was going to do with a college degree and my dad had more than once told me that he thought it was a waste to just go to college for the sake of going to college. The idea was to become a doctor, lawyer, teacher, journalist, etc. or else get out and get a job.

As the day wore into the afternoon I pondered my future and I started to feel that I already knew what my dad would say about the choice between working and getting a liberal arts degree. I talked to Phil again, and while I don't recall my side of the discussion, I do recall that he told me that I shouldn't feel like I was "taking" LeRoy's job. LeRoy was going to lose his job regardless of what I decided. It didn't matter if it was now with me taking the route or someone else in a week or two weeks, LeRoy was "gone". That must have eased my mind because a while later I told Phil I'd take the job. I asked when I'd start and his response was, "Tomorrow morning. As soon as LeRoy gets in this afternoon he's through."

**A couple of years later I did find out what happened. LeRoy was caught under-reporting his sales for the for the third time. He'd been told after the second time that if it ever happened again he would be fired immediately, and he was.**

Now I was again in a panic because I had only a vague idea about the route. I'd driven for LeRoy for 2-week periods during the summers of 1967 and 1968 but it was now spring 1973 and things change. The drivers had route books that had a page for each stop, supposedly in sequence, with a record of deliveries, but I knew from experience that these were treated very casually. I was also concerned about what I'd say to customers about the sudden disappearance of a guy who'd been around so long. Especially since I had no idea of what had happened to precipitate his sudden termination.

The next morning began a real adventure that lasted, I guess, about six months as I took the route books and developed, largely by trial and error, my own route structure.

After I'd started driving the route I got my grades from Northern. You could have knocked me over with a feather - I had nearly a 4.0 average for the quarter. I thought I might be able to continue school and took a single night class at Northern that spring. I did OK, but I learned quickly that school was out of the question while I was working 50 to 60 hours a week.

Then a week later I received notification that I'd flunked golf. I'd forgotten that in 1968 when I made the trip to South Bend I'd skipped the golf final and received an incomplete for the course. The policy of the school was that I had the "next" quarter to make up the incomplete, but since I'd totally forgotten it the incomplete became an "F".



After about 4 months I had the routes pretty well organized and things settled into a routine. I used to complain that sometimes the only time it was interesting was when something "bad" happened - and that wasn't good.

An example of the type of things that could break the routine occurred on a Saturday. One of my first stops was Marra's grocery, a small store which was run by a real jerk. There was nothing specific about the guy's attitude, but there was an undercurrent of conflict with him and he maintained a very tight control on what inventory he kept on hand. I heard a story that led me to believe his attitude toward me may have dated back to the days when my dad was delivering in town but I can't say for sure. At any rate on this particular Saturday I told him he was low on Ginger Ale (I think he may have been down to 4 or 5 bottles). He said that was plenty and made some derogatory remark about trying to sell him stuff he didn't need.

I finished my deliveries just about noon and called the office as usual to see if there were any calls. I had one call... Marra's Grocery needed a case of Ginger Ale! It was bad enough that I'd tried to tell him he was low on Ginger Ale but now I had to go back for one lousy case. My attitude didn't improve when I got there and the manager accused me of not letting him know that his stock was low.

By the time I left that store I was totally pissed. I jumped into my truck, made a left turn out of the alley (across the street from the Post Office), then another left at the corner in front of the Courthouse. As I made the second turn I heard a funny sound and glanced in my rear view mirror to see Coca Cola cases and bottles tumbling from the truck bay that I had forgotten to close.

I pulled over to the curb and looked at the situation. There had to be close to 40 cases of Coke bottles (mostly all broken) in the middle of the intersection. I didn't know whether to get back in the truck and drive away or to just sit on the curb and cry. I'd stopped about a quarter of a block from the intersection and as I walked back towards the mess a guy from the service station on the corner walked up to me with a scoop shovel and a push broom. I thought he was going to help but he just handed them to me and said something like, "Bummer man".

I still wasn't sure what I was going to do with the mess. It was around noon and it was a rather busy intersection. Then, Joe, the owner of the Dairy Queen pulled up. He had a couple dozen boxes in his van which he let me use to haul the glass away. I don't know how long it took to clean up the mess, I had to respond to many comments from drivers passing and I don't remember having any actual help, but it obviously all got picked up and I survived the embarrassment.



I think it was late in the summer of 1973 that I decided to get another car and traded the Polaris for a 1972 Plymouth Fury 3. It was kind of a boat, but it was a good car and it had a hard life.

I had gotten into a "discussion" with one of my customers, the owner of the Golden Spike bar. The price of sugar was very unstable and it seemed like every month or so I had to advise my customers of price increases. When I broke the news to this guy on this particular occasion he really went off on me, telling me that he couldn't make money with the prices we were charging for syrup. Since the Golden Spike was one of the bars that I frequented I knew that he charged 50 cents for an 8 ounce glass of Coke. I had him fill a glass with ice - the way they sold the drink - and we determined that he was actually selling only about 4 or 5 ounces of Coke for the 50 cents. Roughly extrapolated that meant he got about 600 drinks (or \$300.00) out of a tank of syrup for which he was paying \$25. That pretty much shut him up but I thought I should discuss this with Phil so after work that day I stopped by his house. I'd parked in his driveway and was sitting in his living room talking when his wife, Sandra, bustled through saying she was late for something. I didn't think much about it for a minute or so and then realized I'd have to move my car. I headed for the door - where I met Sandra. She'd opened the garage door and, without looking, backed her big Buick station wagon directly into my car. She hit it so hard it was knocked about 100 feet into the street and while it was drivable the grill and hood were pretty smashed. Phil told me to take it to the body shop and have them bill him. His kids had so many accidents he couldn't afford any more being turned in for insurance.



1972 Plymouth Fury

About 8 or 10 days later I was still waiting for the body shop to get parts. I'd gotten home and was cleaning up in preparation to go bowling. I heard a knock at my door and upon answering found my neighbor who said he "thought" someone had hit my car. I glanced out the window and there was a car stopped in the street just past my car. I threw on a shirt and went out to see what was going on. As I walked around the back of my car I saw that the other vehicle had sideswiped my car from the quarter panel to the fender and the offending driver was just sitting in his car.

I walked up to the driver's door and was surprised to recognize the driver. His name was Al and he sometimes tended bar at, of all places, the Golden Spike. I asked him what was going on and he said, "Nothing, just sitting here", and he totally denied that he'd hit my car. He was goofy acting and I couldn't make him understand that the blue paint on his car and white paint on my car

were due to him hitting me. It turned out that he had really good insurance and I called the body shop and told them they had more work.

I heard later that he had been drinking during the afternoon and was out delivering medication for a local pharmacy when he just blacked out.



During this time I had begun to get involved in the community and to make some new friends. I joined the Jaycee organization, I'd met become friends with Chuck Nelson who was Registrar at the college, I'd also become friends with a guy, I met during my one quarter of college, who was director of operations at Citizen's Bank.

During the summer I played softball. We had a lousy team but it was a lot of fun. We played about 3 times a week and, in 1973, we hit the bars after virtually every game. We were about the same kind of team in 1974, but I only went out after games about a third of time. By the spring of 1975 I just played softball and seldom went out after games.

During the fall and winter months I was bowling on Thursday in the same league, but not on the same team, as my dad.



Jim at home before work (1973)

The time I spent on and off the routes between 1973 and 1975 tends to blur together. I think that although it was a relatively short period of time so much was happening that it seemed longer. The impatience of youth probably made me feel that things weren't moving along fast enough.

As fall approached I began to think about the future and realized that I was nearly 25 years old and already making as much as my dad who'd been there over 20 years. I recognized that because the bottling company was family owned there was no "management" future for me, but I thought that if I could learn more about the business I could play more of a role in running it and perhaps make more money. I felt that over the years I had done just about everything except installing fountain equipment and repairing cooler refrigeration. So I theorized that if I could learn that stuff I'd be in a better position. I started to ask if it would be possible to put someone else on the route so I could move back into the plant and learn more, and I was told maybe something could be done, but nothing ever happened.

Friday was payday and it was normally a fairly short day for me so I was normally able to take my check to the bank for deposit before closing time. Often I would then go across the alley to a

quiet little bar with some of the people from the bank and have a few drinks. One day it was mentioned that there was an opening for a loan officer at the bank and I was encouraged to apply. I didn't feel at all qualified for that type of position, I'd never even taken bookkeeping in high school, but I thought, "What the hell, let's see what happens".

I completed the application and went through an interview with the head of the loan department. I knew him casually from my Friday afternoon visits to the Stockman's Bar and I made that cut. Then I had an interview with the bank president and my friends advised me that if I passed his interview the next step would probably be an interview in Great Falls with the owners of the bank system. I still wasn't too sure I was interested in the job, but as usual thought I'd see what happened and if I was offered the final interview I would then make the decision as to whether I wanted the job for real.

Each afternoon, before I returned to the plant, I would call in to see if there were any special orders that I needed to take care of before wrapping up for the day. One afternoon I was given a message that the bank president wanted me to stop by for a talk. I assumed, as I changed clothes, that he would either be telling me that I was recommended and would have to make the trip to Great Falls, or that they had decided on someone else.

I was wrong! They wanted to hire me. He said he was sorry but my starting salary would only be about \$8,000 a year and he knew that was a cut. He also mentioned that they expected their officers to join all the local service clubs, like Rotary, Elks, Eagles, Moose, etc. I was so taken aback by this unexpected turn of events that I asked for 24 hours to decide, although I think I knew right then that I wasn't going to take the job. I wasn't crazy about having to join everything, I figured I'd have to acquire an entire wardrobe for the new job and the cut in pay seemed draconian. I stopped back the next day and turned the offer down. The brother of one of my friends got the position and within a year he was managing the branch bank in Big Sandy

By the fall I was frustrated and had come to the conclusion that nothing was ever likely to change at the Coke plant so I dug out an application for a job as an FAA Air Traffic Controller that someone had given me the day I left the USS Ouellet and sent it off.

An unexpected result of the bank interviews, however, was that inquiries made by the bank about me apparently convinced management that I really didn't want to drive delivery trucks all my life. By the beginning of winter Gary Toldness had been hired to take over the route and I moved into the plant. I loaded trucks, sorted bottles, drove routes now and then. and generally was available to do anything necessary.

I'd met and started dating Pat Brannigan in the meantime and she never had been too crazy about the hours my job demanded, so when I went to a more normal work week she was quite happy.

One memorable day around the Christmas holidays I was supposed to take a pickup load of pop to Malta. Displays needed to be set up for the holidays and dad wouldn't know what he needed until he talked with some of the store owners. The plan was that when he got there he would determine what he needed extra and give us a call. He normally got Malta around 8:00 AM and I figured it would take a couple of hours to put his order together, but it was nearly noon when he

called. He advised that the roads were a sheet of ice and he hadn't gotten to Malta until around 10:00 AM. I'd need to put chains on the pickup for the trip. I got away shortly after noon and everything went fine, I got to Malta, we set up the displays and I helped him through the remainder of the afternoon. After finishing work we had supper and I headed back to Havre around 8:00 PM. Driving with chains when the pickup was loaded hadn't been too bad, but when it was empty it was really rough and noisy. So finally, when I was about 20 miles out of Malta I stopped with the idea that I would take the chains off. I stepped out of the pickup onto the highway, fell flat on my ass, got back in and drove the remaining 70 miles with the chains on!



Things changed again one Saturday morning early in the spring while we were sorting bottles. Gary Toldness unexpectedly pulled up in his truck, came through the overhead door, removed his uniform jacket and threw it across the floor, walked out the side door, and drove away. He never said a word and we all just stood in amazement wondering what the hell had just happened. Then the phone rang and it was the police asking if someone would be coming to "... clean up the mess on 3<sup>rd</sup> street". It seems that Gary had forgotten to close a door on the truck, dumped a whole bay of pop onto the street and then just drove back to the plant where he "quit" in his own special way.

I took one of the loaded trucks out and finished the route while the other guys from the plant went and cleaned up the mess. And I knew I was back on the truck route again unless a replacement could be found.

The following week I took action to get back off the route. There was a guy, I believe his name was Tom, who worked in the produce department at Super Save. He was a few years younger than me and we'd chat when I was in the store stocking shelves. He had, more than once, asked how a person got a "good" job like I mine so the first time I saw him after the "event" I asked him if he was really interested in my job. I told him that it was open if he was interested and he applied a week or so later.

In the meantime I was notified to take the Civil Service Test for the FAA. I just parked the Coke truck in the Buttery's parking lot and walked over to the Post Office for the test. There were only two parts to the test that seemed directly related to ATC one of which was to evaluate heading, altitude and speed of aircraft to determine if they would conflict. The other portion was a test to evaluate a person's ability to listen, think and act simultaneously. This part was quite easy because of my experience in the Navy working on the radio in CIC.

I knew of an Air Traffic Controller at the center in Great Falls who'd worked part time at the Coke plant when I was a little kid so I arranged for him to give me a tour of the Air Traffic Control Center in Great Falls. The personnel at Great Falls Center had just learned that it was to be closed and they would all have to move to either Denver or Salt Lake City and many of them were unhappy about the prospect. Probably because of this he was very negative about working in a Center and advised me that I if I was offered a job I should hold out for a tower or Flight Service. I knew what a tower was and, while I wasn't sure what "Flight Service" was, I liked the idea that there were a lot of them and you could have more choice about location.

A few weeks after taking the Civil Service test I returned home after work on a Friday afternoon and walked in to a ringing phone. It was a guy from the FAA in Denver and his first words were, "Don't you ever stay home, we've been trying to call you for a week"! I was a little put off by this and told him that I had a job and couldn't just sit by the phone. Anyway he said that the FAA wanted to hire me and if I wanted a job I should go to Great Falls and report to the Air Traffic Control Center at Malmstrom AFB. I asked him what would happen if I didn't take this opportunity and he said that my name would stay on the register for 12 months and if nothing else came up during that time I'd have to reapply.

Tom was now driving the route and I was working with Phil installing fountain equipment in Malta - finally learning some new aspects of the business. Since circumstances seemed to be improving at the Coke plant and I'd been advised to try and get into tower for "Flight Service" with the FAA I decided to wait and see what else might come up.



I did get to do some interesting things during this time. As I mentioned the price of sugar was pretty high and unstable so instead of buying by the truck load we were buying smaller lots from a broker in Missoula and transporting it ourselves. So one morning, about 4:00 AM I found myself leaving Havre with an empty truck on the way to Missoula. I'd never driven any of the trucks when they were empty so the trip down was kind of fun. Once I got to Missoula it seemed to take forever to get the truck loaded and it must have been around 2:00 PM when I finally started home. Because there were springtime weight restrictions on some highways I had to return via a different route making the return trip about 6 or 7 hours instead of 4 to 5 hours. But first I had to get out of Missoula. The truck I was driving had a screwy problem with the linkage from the gas pedal to the carburetor and every now and then it would quit working. When this happened the truck would run but it was hard to get it much above idle speed. It was fairly easy to fix but required tilting the cab to reach the affected part. This "problem" happened to me right in the middle of the busiest intersection in downtown Missoula and caused a massive traffic jam until I could work my way to a place where I could park and fix the linkage.

As the summer of '74 progressed I was asked to drive while dad took his vacation, then I was asked to resume the south route on a regular basis. I didn't mind this as the money was better, it added some variety to my life and I did enjoy the route work. Pat was very unhappy about it so we eventually broke up and she returned to Connecticut.

About this time I had another, not-so-good experience related to the Little Rockies and the DY Bar. Only a couple of businesses need pop so I took a pickup and trailer instead of a truck. I had the delivery for the store in Hayes in the trailer and the delivery for the DY in the pickup. I stopped at Hayes first and emptied the trailer. Then, at the DY, I dropped the trailer so I could back the pickup to the door and unload it. After unloading everything I went into the bar to collect and the bartender told me I'd need to go to the owner's house behind the bar. When I got behind the bar I was confronted by two German shepherds that were obviously watch dogs. The older dog was a mean looking son-a-bitch and had me pretty scared as he barked and growled. But it was the young one that attacked. He made one leaping pass at me and as I twisted out of the

way his teeth or tooth caught my shirt about chest level just below my left armpit and tore it. As soon as he landed he came at me again and this time he caught my pants leg about midway on the back of my thigh. Just then the owner came charging out of his house and called the dogs off. He asked if I was OK and so far as I knew the only problem was the tear in my shirt. He said he couldn't understand the dogs had never done anything like that before.

We went into the bar, he paid me and I went out to hook up the trailer and head for home. When I squatted down to fasten the safety chain on the trailer hitch I felt something wet on my calf and for the first time realized I really had been bit on the thigh and was bleeding. I went back into the bar and told the guy that I had gotten bit and asked if they had any first aid stuff so I could bandage the wound. They said they "didn't have anything like that" but not to worry because the dogs had their rabies shots. He totally blew me off and I could see he wasn't going to do anything about the bite so I left. I put something under my thigh so I wouldn't bleed onto the seat cushion and decided I'd stop at the clinic in Harlem. The bleeding stopped fairly quickly and there was never any pain except that the dried blood caused my pant leg to stick to my skin and whenever I had to step on the clutch it would pull.

Since I wasn't bleeding I figured I'd skip the clinic in Harlem and just get home. When I got to the plant my brother Daryl saw my pant leg and said I had some grease on it. I told him it wasn't grease - it was blood and we went into a secluded corner and I dropped my pants so he could take a look. Because of the location of the bite I couldn't actually see what it looked like but Daryl's told me I'd better get to the clinic right away. So I did and it was interesting. I walked up to the counter and a lady came to help. I told her I'd gotten hurt at work and she, in a bored fashion, handed me some workman's comp forms, and asked what happened. When I told her I'd been bitten by a dog all of a sudden there were three or four other woman at the counter asking questions. I managed to get out that the owner said the dogs had their shots and everybody sat down again. I tried to fill out the forms but it was difficult because all the questions seemed to be related to getting hurt by machinery. When I'd finished as best I could I handed the forms to the lady and she told me to have a seat and wait. I turned around, pointed at my bloody thigh, and asked if she really wanted me sitting on their furniture. When she saw the blood stain I was again a priority and was taken straight back to a treatment room. I had two doctors working on me, Dr. Almas, a surgeon, and Dr. Elliott, a pediatrician and they both knew me. Dr. Almas knew me because his kids went to St. Jude's and Havre Central. I have no idea how Dr. Elliott knew me but they had a field day kidding me about the location of the bite. The dog had taken a chunk of flesh and they had to cut further into my leg to get enough skin to suture. They suggested next time I should get the dog to bite a little higher where there was more skin and fat (like my butt).

I found out a couple of weeks later, through the owner's brother-in-law, that these two dogs had attacked a toddler, the owner's niece, and bitten her in the face earlier that year. About 6 months later we heard that the DY Bar burned to the ground and I have to admit the news didn't break my heart.



I wasn't being given all the opportunities I'd expected working out of the plant, but I was slowly learning more about the business all the time. A less happy problem was that I was also driving

the south route again and frequently required to take the town route because Tom was sick quite a bit. He finally told me one day that his doctor thought that repeatedly going from the outside heat into air conditioning and back out was what was making him sick. I told him that he'd better quit then, because it was going to be a lot worse in the winter when he was going from the cold into heated places. He did quit and I went back to the route. I now was almost resigned to the idea that I might keep doing this for the rest of my life, but I think I had come to enjoy the work more and was kind OK with it.



That fall I took a vacation and drove to the east coast stopping on the way in Findlay, Ohio where I visited with Eric Qualkenbush from the Ouellet. In Connecticut I stayed with Pat, her son Sal, and her sister Kelly. We talked quite a bit and I told her I still had a chance to get hired by the FAA but it looked like I would likely be staying with Coca Cola, most likely as a route salesman, and for some reason asked her to marry me.

On the return trip I stopped in South Bend and saw Dave and Kris Craig again and then headed for Minneapolis early on a Saturday morning. There was very little traffic as I drove through Chicago and as I took a clover leaf exit to change from one interstate to another I hit a patch of ice. The back end of the car started to come around on me and being on the curve I couldn't effectively turn into the skid. I expected that my left quarter panel was going to smash into the guard rail and my biggest concern was how bad it would be damaged. Somehow, the rear spring hangers flipped which had the effect of raising the back of the car so when I stopped I was cross ways in the road with the back of my car on top of the guard rail. I opened the door and looked under the car to see what had happened and discovered that my rear wheels were still on the ground and gas was pouring from a gash in the gas tank. Without thinking, I restarted the car and pulled forward and onto the right shoulder of the road.

Meanwhile a trucker who had been behind me and stopped was running towards me shouting and waving. It never occurred to me, but he was afraid that in restarting the car I might ignite the gas spill. I guess my angel was looking out for me that morning because nothing happened. The trucker called the state patrol on his CB and then left. A little while later a patrolman pulled up, got out and the first thing he did was to inspect the guard rail for damage. He came over to the car and informed me that in Illinois it was illegal to drive a car with the back end jacked up like mine. When I showed him how the spring hangers had flipped and were mashed into the trunk he knew this was a fluke thing. He then told me that since there was no damage to the guard rail he wouldn't give me a ticket... unless I wanted one! Huh? I told him I didn't really see a need for a ticket and with that he went back to his car to call for a wrecker.

Since all my gas had now run out onto the road (and was mostly evaporated) I couldn't run the car to stay warm so I just stood alongside the car in the cold. Finally the patrolman waved at me to come back to the patrol car and get in. He said he wondered why I didn't get in my car to stay warm until he realized I had no gas. We sat there for a while talking and he told me I was lucky it was early on Saturday, because during the weekday rush hour they would have just pushed my car over the embankment to get it out of the way.

A few minutes before 8:00 AM he told me that he got off duty at 0800 and had to go. He left me standing there in the cold waiting for the wrecker which showed up about 20 minutes later. The wrecker towed me to a service station and I was told that there was no chance of getting a new gas tank but the owner would be able to solder the rip in my tank closed when he came in about 10:00 AM. He did an excellent job too, because I drove that car for about more 3 years and never had a problem with the gas tank.



As I said earlier the routine of driving the delivery routes was only broken by the unusual events - sometimes good and sometimes bad. The following incidents stand out but I can't place exact dates on them so will just tell the stories.

One Friday morning I went into work to start my route and found a note from Mike Cassel asking me to stop by the Hi-Line Motel and get the serial number from their vending machine. Wednesday was my normal day to stop there and it was on the opposite side of town from my Friday route. In retrospect I suppose I could have just waited until the following Wednesday to get the number, but at the time I didn't think of that and it just pissed me off. Mike worked in the office and cruised around town as he saw fit during the day so I wrote, "What are you doing that you're too busy to get this" at the bottom of his note and put it in his box.

About 7:30 I was in a Circle K store on First Street and the clerk was checking my delivery when I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, the company pickup with Mike Cassel and Tom Gilead parked in front of the store. I ignored them and proceeded to put my product on the shelves and in the cooler. Then I went into the back room to sort my empties. After the clerk had checked my empties and I'd taken the first load out to the truck I went over to the pickup. Mike was furious. He asked if I'd written the response to his note. I said I had. He said he was my boss and I had to do anything he told me to do. I agreed that he might be a boss, but I told him I wasn't going to do his work for him. We went back and forth for quite a while, me agreeing that he was my boss, but refusing to do what he wanted. Tom, meanwhile, seated in the driver's seat (to Mike's back) was busting a gut laughing without making a sound. Finally Mike told me that when I got finished that day I was through and could pick up my final paycheck. I told him that if he thought he could fire me that was just fine.

I never heard another word about the final pay check or the vending machine.



Another interesting event was a Friday when I was leaving the Hi-Line Lanes on the east side of Havre. I was ready to pull onto the highway, waiting for traffic, when a flatbed semi came down the hill from the east and lost a wheel from his trailer. Because there was a bit of a curve to the road the wheel diverged to the right from the path of the truck and the driver never saw it. The wheel bounded across the field directly across from me and then hit a billboard on the east side of the veterinary clinic. The impact shattered the 6x6 billboard post, rebounded and then the forward spin caused it to continue forward to hit the door of a car parked in front to the clinic.

Two ladies who must have heard the noise came out of the clinic and looked east and west and saw nothing. One lady went back into the clinic and the other walked east around the car that had been hit, saw the wheel and the damage, threw her arms in the air and ran back into the clinic. I pulled over to the clinic and walked in as they were about to call the police. They had no idea what to tell the police so I told them what I'd seen and suggested they call the Highway Patrol. There was a truck scale on the west side of town and when the truck stopped at the scale they could stop the truck and tell the driver what happened.

The following Wednesday on my route I stopped at the scale for my delivery. I asked the patrolman if he'd been working the previous Friday and told him of my part in the episode. He said he had been there and then asked me how fast the truck had been going when he lost the wheel. I didn't really know but guessed it was about 30 or 35 (the speed limit in that area was 35) and the patrolman laughed. He said the driver had no idea where he lost the wheel and consequently when he called his boss to report the accident he'd sworn up and down to that he was only going 25 MPH.



About October or November dad, Tom Gilead, Phil Cassel and Phil's father-in-law flew to St. Louis or Kansas City to pick up four trucks and drive them to Havre. Phil had purchased the trucks from a railroad there and I think he planned on keeping one and selling the other three. I don't recall the name of the guy who was driving dad's route. It was probably a guy younger than me who normally did the south route and was filling in. With everyone else gone this left me as the most senior employee of the company. I was making my town route deliveries and when I arrived at the Super America convenience store was given a message to call the office. I was informed that the Highway Patrol had called to advise that one of our trucks was in the ditch west of town.

I had Daryl come to Super America and together we drove over the hill to find the truck off the side of the road, tilted at what looked like a very precarious angle. It was clear from the tracks that the driver had backed the truck off the road and he was lucky. There was a culvert about two feet behind where he'd stopped that, had he backed into it, would certainly have tipped the truck over.

It was a little scary, because of the way the truck was tilted, getting into the truck to see if it would run. It started fine but as soon as I tried to move it I realized the linkage had screwed up (yes it was the same truck I'd had in Missoula). We had to tilt the cab to correct the problem and I was really afraid that might change the center of gravity and cause the truck to dip over so we were very gently and only lifted the cab enough to reach the linkage. Then I got in again and was able to drive the truck up onto the shoulder and we took it back to the plant. Daryl then took me back to my truck and I went back to my routine, though behind schedule, delivery route.

It turned out that, because of the linkage problem, the driver had barely been able to make it to the top of the hill west of town so he turned around **at a truck stop** and started back into town. I guess he then realized he probably wouldn't get over the hill so he "parked" the truck, hitched a ride into town and took another loaded truck on his route. It never occurred to him that he could

have easily fixed the problem at the truck stop, or left the truck at the truck stop, or that he should leave a note about what had happened and where he'd left the truck.

I was pretty disgusted with the driver but I was proud of myself for getting the truck back to the plant without any of the older guy's help. When they got back to Havre, however, I was lectured that I should have just called a wrecker to get the truck. I never understood why they had such a problem with my actions since everything had worked out OK. And besides, in every other instance that I recall (and have related here) we relied on our own resources as much as possible.



Pat had moved back to Havre after Christmas and by April the "year" on the FAA register had gone by. I figured my chances with the FAA were done and when we were married in May I expected that I'd be staying in Havre literally following in my dad's footsteps. We moved into a new apartment, the same one that the Schnurr family had lived in when I was growing up, and I started to settle into a routine of family life.

Early in June we learned that Pat's sister, Kelly, was planning on moving to Havre. Pat was pretty happy to know that her sister was coming to live in the same town and we planned that she could stay with us until she found a place of her own.

Then on a Monday, about the middle of June, I got home from work to find a letter from the FAA offering me a job at the Flight Service Station in Miles City, Montana. I STILL didn't know what a Flight Service was, but with a new family and the prospects of doing the same thing for the rest of my life I really wanted to take the job. Pat was willing - as I said she wasn't at all fond of the hours my job required - although neither of us knew what we were getting into. The "catch" was that they wanted me to report on June 23<sup>rd</sup> and it was already the 16<sup>th</sup>. I didn't feel it was proper to give only a 6 day notice so I called Denver and explained the situation. They wanted me on board before the beginning of the fiscal year, so we compromised and my reporting date became June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Phil had been holding a job application from a returning Vietnam Vet and the guy was living in Kalispell so Phil flew up there the next day, brought the guy back to Havre and I trained him in a week and a half.