

Don Heinlein

Becomers Mystery Person of the week - March 14, 2007

Born in Cincinnati on April 14th 1938.

At the age of 5 the family moved to a 63 acre Farm east of Cincinnati. We lived in the area for 7 years and moved 3 times.

I escaped getting caught inside a refrigerator, drowning in a creek and I witnessed our landlady hanging in the barn.

We moved back to the Cincinnati area and then moved three more times.

I joined the YMCA and learned how to swim and got involved in crafts.

Junior high was not my cup of tea. In those days one could attend trade school. I learned machine shop, woodworking, plastics, automotive repair, aircraft repair and drafting.

At the age of 13, I took a correspondence course in Radio and Electronics and worked part time as a TV repairman.

At age 17, I enlisted into the Air Force and attended their Electronics & Radar School in Biloxi, MS. I spent the remainder of enlistment in North Dakota and Minnesota at an isolated radar site.

When I was discharged from the service, I returned to Cincinnati and worked in an electronic parts store. It was there that I met my mentor, Smokey Mendenhall, a physicist from Cal Tech, who offered me a job as his assistant at the U.S. Public Health Industrial Safety research laboratory.

Smokey urged me continued my education. To earn extra money, I would volunteer as a guinea pig for various health studies, such as letting them pour rotten celery juice on my arm and grow 2" blisters and sitting in an ionic chambers to determine any health detriments to me from excessive exposure. Hey! \$ 25.00 easy money.

In 1961 I was lured away for a job offer that would take me to world travel as a tech rep for Bendix Radar services. My wife and I traveled and worked in Minnesota, S. Dakota, Iceland, S. Vietnam and Europe.

During my tour in Northern Minnesota, I took up flying.

California Here We Come: In 1966 the company relocated us to the JPL in Pasadena.

Shortly afterwards I quit to because my daughter was born and a few years later a son came along.

We wanted to settle down. I took a job as a field engineer in aerospace and once again traveled alone on short assignments in Europe and in the Midwest.

Then came along the end of Vietnam where thousands of aerospace workers got the "pink slip. I wandered about for two years without finding a job. Trying to find a job was hard. When a prospective employer learned that you came from aerospace background, the door closed quickly. We came close to loosing our home.

During that time I befriended a man named Byron who ran a small machine shop in Arcadia, who was a very gifted mechanical engineer. We teamed up and built one of the 1st biggie tie machines.

That led to other jobs in the control fields, however, the money was indeed scarce.

Along the way I met pappy Dowdel, who ran a TV shop in Duarte, a man then in his mid 80's,

who came from Chicago driving a '32 Chrysler convertible. As seen from a photo, He had a circular sign made on his spare tire that read "Dowdel Radio". He drove across rural America stopping in small farm towns repairing radios on the running board. He took a liking to me and I would fix his problem TV repairs. I gained some good business sense from the old boy. He got married to a nurse and fathered a son.

I did some job shopping for a while. The first job I was sent out on, I got fired after a couple weeks after being insensitive to the vice president when he would come back to the lab where I was working. He was almost in tears telling me that the hood on his 1948 Mercedes classic roadster became unlatched and got wrapped around the windshield. Not once did he complain, but daily. So as they say in Germany, "That's the way the old Mercedes Benz"! Gee no sense of humor!

In 1972 I joined Magnavox Marine systems and again worked as a field engineer. In some 7 seven years I traveled worldwide working on various ships and land surveys. I would make 2 to 3 trips a month anywhere in the world. On one assignment I worked on a Russian spy ship and got locked in a room all night while they tried to make me drink vodka.

Again, I was lured away to another company as a project engineer, which led me to working in ship's propulsion and maneuvering systems (Bow Thruster's) and more travel.

It was then that I took up sailing and have loved it ever since.

Found Christ: In 1989 we attended the CC and we were never the same. Our love for each other was better than the day we were married. My friends and cronies would scoff at us for finding RELIGION! We knew we were finally in the right path of life.

In 1991 I set out on my own by starting my own company, building customizing electronic controls. It was a wonderful adventure for a loaner like myself. I did reasonably well for what I had to work with. It was both feast and famine But I wouldn't have traded it for anything. It was definitely a baptism by fire experience.

It was shortly afterwards that I picked up what I presently do. I work with a group that monitor's wave measurement study projects for the Army Corps of Engineers.

I married young and stayed married 42 years to my wife, Pat, who died in 1997.

In 1999 I married a teacher (Elaine) who has a life story well worth hearing. In the past 8 years, we have shared some wonderful adventures through our travels. Her Christian faith keeps me on track.

Life is good when you walk with Christ and have wonderful friends.