

## **THREE YEARS IN TEXAS**

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The year was 1965 and I was a research chemist at the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture Western Regional Lab in Albany, California, just west of Berkeley. After two years working for the government, I decided to move on to something more interesting and challenging. While looking for prospective job openings, I got a call from a physiology professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. He wanted me to collaborate with him on a research project. Initially, I was not very interested but he persuaded me to come for an interview. He offered me a joint appointment as Assistant Professor in the Departments of Chemistry and Physiology, and I finally accepted. After growing up and going to college in California, graduate school in Illinois, and then back to California as a postdoc at UC Berkeley and then a chemist at the USDA Lab, I was a little hesitant to move to Texas, but a job is a job and you go to where it takes you.

We planned to sell our house in Pinole, California (just north of Berkeley), and move to Texas in August 1965. By this time we had accumulated more “stuff” and would need to hire a moving van. As the time came near, our one-and-a-half-year-old twin girls came down with the chickenpox, and we decided I would drive with our five-year-old son while my wife stayed with our girls as they recovered. They would fly to Texas a bit later.

When the time came in mid-August, we packed our car – a 1962 Rambler station wagon – and my son and I hit the road to Texas. It was a fairly uneventful trip, but I do remember being stopped somewhere in New Mexico for a traffic violation – passing a slow-moving truck over the double centerline. The patrolman looked at my driver’s license and then just gave me a warning. Later, I realized my driver’s license had expired the previous May, oh well! The other thing I remember was stopping for lunch in West Texas. When the waitress asked what my son wanted to drink, I told her a root beer. She looked at me as if I had just asked for a real beer. Apparently, root beer is not known there, so he got a Dr. Pepper, the most popular soft drink in Texas – one of many little cultural differences.

As we drove on the freeway into Dallas on a sweltering hot August day, the first thing we saw was a huge billboard with the words “IMPEACH EARL WARREN,” then Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court. This was followed by a slightly smaller sign that said “THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY WELCOMES YOU TO DALLAS,” a paleo-conservative, far-right political organization. This describes the political atmosphere of Dallas – a huge cultural difference from what we were used to in California.

We found a nice motel with a swimming pool in North Dallas to stay while we looked for a rental house. A wife of a professor at the Medical School offered us a three-bedroom house to rent in a nice neighborhood of North Dallas. This looked good, so I phoned my wife to call the movers and then fly out to Dallas with our girls, who had then recovered from the chickenpox.

Since my California driver's license had already expired, my wife and I went to the DMV to get Texas licenses. All we had to do was take a written exam and fill out some papers. One of the items was "race." As over-educated people, we both wrote down "C" for Caucasian (right?). The clerk gave us a dirty look, scratched out the "C" and wrote "W" – another cultural lesson learned!

We soon realized that a car without air conditioning is unbearable in Dallas in the summer. After we settled in our house we looked for a new car. We bought a large Dodge station wagon, a better size for our growing family, and, of course, it had air conditioning – you couldn't buy a car in Texas without it.

Our son would ordinarily start kindergarten at age five in California, but Dallas schools did not have free kindergarten. We then enrolled him in a private kindergarten for his first year. After that, he went to first grade in a Dallas public school. Schools in Texas, as in other states, were technically integrated by then, but there was only one "token" black student in his whole school. Of course, North Dallas was a predominately white, middle-upper-class neighborhood.

The medical school where I worked was adjacent to Parkland Memorial Hospital where Kennedy was taken after he was shot in 1963. Usually, I took my lunch but one day I went to the hospital cafeteria. There were two doors and I took the first one, walked through the cafeteria line, and sat down at a table with my food. I then looked around and saw that I was the only white in a room full of black people. I realized that the place was still de facto segregated, although the signs had been removed. That was Dallas in 1965 – another cultural lesson learned.

Dallas was a nice city with many cultural attractions. I auditioned and was accepted to sing with the Dallas Civic Chorus. This was a semi-professional choir, directed by Lloyd Pfautsch, a noted choral director, composer, arranger, and head of the Music Department at Southern Methodist University (SMU). We performed with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and produced our own concerts. It was very challenging but enjoyable to sing with this group.

A side gig was to sing the National Anthem at the openings of Dallas Cowboy games in the old SMU Cotton Bowl. Singing in a huge stadium is acoustically fraught with trouble, so we lip-synced to our own recording. This worked well as I was often complimented by friends for our singing – I never revealed the secret. For this, we got free seats for the game. Once we did part of the half-time show for a nationally-televised football game on Thanksgiving Day. My wife's sister and family were watching in California as the camera panned the entire choir and then paused, pointing directly at me – they were quite surprised.

A favorite diversion for my wife and me on a Friday or Saturday evening was to hire a babysitter, go to a nice restaurant for dinner, and then watch a play at the Dallas Theater Center where we had season tickets. The cultural life in Dallas was good.

As I mentioned earlier, the political scene in Dallas was hard-right conservative. It took us a year to find the liberal underground – it was there but hard to find. Mostly it was centered around the faculty at SMU (a liberal, Commie outpost). After about a year we discovered the Dallas-Fort Worth regional group of the Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter where we found many liberal friends. We organized weekend camping trips around the area – the Wichita Mountains, an unusual mountainous outcropping in the middle of the flat Western Plains just north of the Texas-Oklahoma border; the Texas Hill Country west of Austin; and the forest and lake regions of East Texas and Arkansas. Often we were joined by [Orrin Bonney, his wife Lorraine](#), and their large dog. Orrin was, in his younger years, a first ascent climber in the Teton Range of Wyoming (“The Bonney Guide to Grand Teton”). They lived in Houston during the winter, and in a tepee in the summer near Jackson Hole, Wyoming. They would bring their large tepee to our camp-outs where we would gather for a nightly campfire and singalong.

Each summer we would spend a week camping with two other families in the Gunnison National Wilderness near Pitkin, Colorado – in that part of Colorado there were more Texas license plates than Colorado as every Texan wanted to get out of Texas during the summer. After day hikes we gathered around a campfire in the evening. At the end of our week each year, we drove west past the Great Sand Dunes National Monument and then south to New Mexico where we visited the San Ildefonso and Nambé Pueblos near Santa Fe, and the Pecos National Monument east of Santa Fe on our way back to Texas. New Mexico is indeed “a land of enchantment.”

After three years in Texas, my future at the Medical School did not look good. In addition to the usual politics (every academic institution has them), seventy percent of my salary came from soft money (grants) and I was not sure what would happen if my next grant didn’t come through. I started looking for jobs again and was offered a position as Assistant Professor of Chemistry at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, just south of the Twin Cities. I eagerly accepted and arranged to leave Dallas in August 1968. When I told one of my friends in the Civic Chorus, a young southern belle, that I was leaving, she asked me why I would leave the warm friendly South for the cold, unfriendly North. I didn’t answer her question.

We hired a mover to pick up all our expanding “stuff,” and hit the road in our 1966 Dodge station wagon, my wife and I, three kids, and two cats. The cats quickly disappeared (under the seats?) but informed us of their displeasure (meow! meow!) all the way up Interstate 35 to Northfield, Minnesota. Goodbye, Texas! Welcome, Minnesota!

I have no regrets about leaving Dallas and still consider it a good experience. It was a good start to my academic career and an interesting cultural experience.

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