

Dick Jones' Second Class Summer Plebe Detail Hitchhiking Adventures

Got a laugh today in reading Dirck Praeger's article about hitchhiking on our USNA '63 website. Made me think of my own similar experiences. They may also give someone a laugh. During our second class summer (summer of 1961), I was selected for the "Plebe Detail" for that summer. Back then, the plebe summer experience for incoming fourth classmen was totally run by second classmen midshipmen for the entire summer. Those of us who worked the plebe detail for the summer did not go to Pensacola for aviation summer, nor did we participate with the Marines. We simply worked the plebe detail for the entire summer. At any rate, the love of my life, even back then, was at home from college in our hometown, Greensburg, PA, for the summer. Those of us on the "Plebe Detail" were free from Friday afternoon at about 1600 until Monday morning at 0700 when we were required to be back in Bancroft Hall and ready to go back to work for another week on the plebe detail. On Friday afternoon, I would put on our summer dress khaki uniform, set off walking through gate 8 and across the old Severn River bridge and get myself set up on Ritchie Highway northbound. That is MD route #2. It was the beginning of what was usually a 6-7 hour hitchhiking journey to the Pittsburgh, PA area mainly to see Kay for a small portion of the weekend. My Mom never seemed to want to understand why I came home that way and tried to convince me that it would be a good opportunity to spend some "family time" there in Greensburg. Remember that back in those days, we did not have the extensive federal highway system that we would find between Baltimore, MD and Greensburg, PA in making that trip today. I set the USNA navy blue gym

bag on the ground in front of me with the large gold USNA logo facing the approaching traffic, and up went the thumb. It was north on MD route #2, Ritchie Highway. Then I went west on MD route #40 through Frederick, MD, on through Hagerstown, MD, westward to Hancock, MD. At Hancock, I turned northward on what I think was MD route #26 to Breezewood, PA. Once in Breezewood, I could make some real time, for it was there that I got to the entrance of the Pennsylvania turnpike. I stood at that turnpike entrance with my thumb in the air until I was able to pick up a ride westbound. In doing so, I really hit the mother lode and was off westbound at 65+ miles per hour. Here I come Katie! I left the turnpike at New Stanton, PA and usually hitchhiked the final 9-10 miles to Greensburg. This process usually got me home to Greensburg at about midnight Friday. Time for a quick shower and then off in my Dad's car to be with my Katie and possibly our high school friends involved in some nefarious activity. Poor Mom! Kay and I usually had a beautiful Saturday together and then a glorious Sunday together until the appointed hour at 1900 on Sunday evening. Kay would then drop me off at the New Stanton interchange of the Pennsylvania turnpike clad in my USNA summer dress khakis and burdened with my navy blue USNA gym bag, now loaded with Mom's chow for the upcoming week. Up went the thumb as I began begging for a driver who now was PA turnpike eastbound. The return trip to Annapolis went one of two ways. Eastbound drivers were going to either the Baltimore area or would leave the MD route #40/US route #70 eastbound at Frederick, MD and turn southward toward Washington, DC. If to Baltimore, it was into the center of the city and then on to St Paul street, southbound. In Baltimore, St Paul was one way southbound while Charles St was one way northbound. I would usually

hit Baltimore and St Paul St southbound at about midnight on Sunday night. Not a great deal of traffic moving. I walked so many miles through the middle of Sunday nights going southbound through Baltimore. After Baltimore, it was back onto Ritchie Highway, this time southbound, and back to Annapolis. If my travels took me southbound at Frederick, MD, I usually hit the middle of DC at about midnight. Remember again, in those days there were limited federal highways and no beltways around either Baltimore or DC. It was into the middle of DC. I then usually walked eastward on East Capitol Street, Route #50, through DC in the middle of the night until I reached the outskirts of DC on route #50 eastbound to Annapolis. I never missed or was late for a Monday morning muster with the plebes at USNA.

This all made for some interesting experiences. I can remember crawling up under a bridge overpass in the middle of the night outside Frederick, MD to get shelter from a driving rainstorm. I only ever experienced one male driver who was sure that he was in love with a young USNA midshipmen. I rode in many a tractor of a tractor/trailer combo rig with drivers who were "highballing" the PA turnpike between the East and West Coast. One particular experience carrying long term implications. While westbound on Route #40 out of Frederick, MD one Friday evening, a big white Cadillac sedan screeched to a halt and the driver said "hop in." We got to know one another a bit. The driver was one "Zim Zimarel." Mr Zimarel was a Baltimore musician who was up and coming on the Baltimore music scene at the time with his big band style orchestra. He was originally from the town of Turtle Creek, PA, a town not far from my destination of Greensburg, PA. He frequently traveled the route on weekends to visit his mother

who still occupied their family homestead in Turtle Creek, PA. I probably made that trip with "Zim," as he became known to me, a total of 3-4 times during that summer of 1961. None of those trips were prearranged. Each time I rode with him, it was simply a random pickup somewhere on the route to Greensburg when he came along, saw the USNA gym bag up ahead, and picked up the kid from Greensburg. Zim Zimarel became a Baltimore musical icon over the years and died in Baltimore in 1999 at the age of 82. Great guy! And what a homerun for me when he came along and I made the rest of the trip with him.

So, no nights in jail or anything quite as exotic as described by Dirck. But still interesting and a great time so long ago. Incidentally, that love of my life married me in our USNA chapel on 6/06/1963. Kay McSteen Jones' memorial service was held in our USNA chapel on 12/05/2012. She is buried in our USNA cemetery in a common vault with our first child, Brian Richard Jones. Columbarium location is panel 35-1B. Kay will always be my best girl from Greensburg High School. What a guy does when he is in love! I would pay a lot of money if it would enable me to do it again! Go Navy. Be well. Blessings.