

# OSU/NASA Education Projects: Aerospace Education Services Program (AESP) Archive

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

**How It Was, Early in the Spacemobile Program by Wendall N. Spreadbury. Written 2001.**

HOW IT WAS, EARLY IN THE SPACEMOBILE PROGRAM

By Wendall N. Spreadbury

Being hired on as a Spacemobile lecturer, more than six year before a man landed on the moon, was the highlight my 1960's career in education. The Spacemobile program provided me with the opportunity to meet a myriad of un-forgettable and inspiring people such as Dr. Werner Von Braun, John Sims, Ev Collins, Dr. Ken Wiggins, and astronauts Deke Slaten and Alan Shepard. Those human experiences were in large part a catalyst that brought together my science/educational background into a focus that would promote the space program for the benefit of the general citizens and especially the youth of our great country. It was scintillating to be a part of such a magnificent project that would by 1969 accomplish a manned landing on the moon.

While World War II, in the early 1940's, raged on, my mother took me to the Hayden Planetarium in New York City. I was awed by the spectacle. But, then in June of 1963 on my first Spacemobile assignment, I found myself lecturing in the Copernican Oraary at the Hayden Planetarium. It was fantasy come true. If memory serves me correctly, I took over that dream assignment from Spacemobile lecturer Don Frondre. Don had found an unusual housing arrangement for a Spacemobiler in that he was subleasing an apartment at 143rd street and Morning-side drive across from the Columbia University Campus. However, Herman Weinstein was transferring him to California and fortunately Don was able to do us both a favor by letting me rent the place. Boy was I living high! I was only thirty years old had my own apartment in New York City, a good salary, and a \$16.00 per diem! The regular three-a-day lecture schedule at the planetarium was interspersed with a lecture-demonstration to the "brass" at Grumman Aircraft at Beth Paige on Long Island, frequent opportunities to visit my relatives on the west bank of the Hudson river, trips to most of the great plays and restaurants in NYC, appearances in the Westchester Schools just north of the Big Apple, and the fun of getting up at 2:30 in the morning and moving the Spacemobile to the opposite side of the street in order to comply with NYC parking restrictions!

There was also an assignment to do a lecture-demonstration on the down -town square of Westchester at 5pm on one weekday. To demonstrate the solar cells all I needed to do was hold them up to the June sunshine. For me to be heard above the noise of the buses, cars and people required the full volume the old Spacemobile AT&T P.A. system. While I was struggling under these most adverse conditions, a distinguished gentleman with long white hair standing a few feet away was watching intently. A few weeks later when I was a participating in a Space-mobile Training Session in Washington D.C., that same distinguished gentleman with the long white hair was the main speaker of a technical session on how to address an audience and ...he was a congressman who was a member of the House Space Committee! At the close of the session, he said that he had seen a Spacemobile lecturer working in a particularly tough environment and that he was very favorably impressed. I didn't realize at the time that was talking about me in Westchester. He asked me to stand for recognition! To me, that was better than a raise in pay. After that incident, almost all of my assignments were plums. Not the least of which was lecturing at the planetariums in Chapel Hill, NC, Chicago, and Denver. Later, I was assigned to do Teacher Workshops in Denver and at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Another plum assignment was with the University of Nebraska Television Station. I wrote television scripts about some of the NASA rockets and satellites. The scripts divulged not so much about space technology but were designed to enlighten the viewe

r of the Greek and Roman Mythology involved with the names that had been given to the NASA hardware. Scattered within the interstellar speed of movements between NASA assignments, motels, cities, villages, schools, and NASA Centers that required lecturers to travel many miles in airplanes and endless hours at the wheel of Spacemobiles there were moments of distress, anxiety, and of course great humor. One instance of great humor was rendered by the wittiest lecturer that I ever knew, George Lewis. George was a genuine "B" movie actor (he said that he had acted in several low budget Hollywood films) turned educator. While at a meeting of all NASA lecturers held at the old Breakers Hotel, Herman Weinstein was pondering how he could distribute a small pay raise that was tempered with consideration that some lecturers had been with the program longer than had others. One lecturer who was only about five feet tall, who shall go unnamed, had greater service tenure than most. He of course demanded that those lecturers with more service should get more of the raise than those with lesser service. George stood up and with a deep and commanding voice said, "I think that the raises should be distributed according to height!" Another instance of the many hilarious remarks delivered by George Lewis occurred at the end of a particularly tiring day aboard a bus loaded with Spacemobilers that was stranded in heavy downtown Washington, D.C. traffic. While stopped at crosswalk, a young and beautiful woman pedestrian crossed in front of the bus. All heads slowly moved from left to right never breaking the gaze as she walked by. George said in his baritone voice, "GENTLEMEN, PLEASE, WE ARE LECTURERS NOT LEACHERERS!"

Being single, I was delighted to be able to roam around the country at NASA's expense and after working out of several NASA Centers was sent to work out of Houston. From an Austin, Texas television station, I did a weekly segment on the "Uncle Jay Show" about various topics in the space program that would be of interest to little kids. Part way through that series the TV station, which was owned by Lady Bird Johnson, purchased something that was very new at the time, a video tape machine. After that, we could do several shows in one session and at odd times because it was no longer necessary to do "live" shows. All tapes were then sent to Houston for review. While in Huntsville, Texas doing a regular program for the public school, I met a previous acquaintance who was at that time a student at Sam Houston College in Huntsville, and he insisted on getting me a blind date.....a girl I later married! That was thirty-six years ago and I am still married to that same co-ed!

Before being part of the Spacemobile program, I had the privilege of being an Atomic Energy Commission/Oklahoma State University Traveling Science Teacher and after about a year and half as a Spacemobile lecturer, I decided it was time to begin working on a doctorate in science education. I was very fortunate in that Dr. Ken Wiggins was gracious and generous enough to be my doctoral committee chairman and on completion of the degree in summer of 1967, I was still in contact with the people at the NASA Center in Houston. Early in September of 1967 Dr. Story, Director of Educational programs in the Houston center, called me at Stephen F. Austin State College where I had just joined the faculty. He was searching for a new contractor for the Spacemobile operations and for political reasons, that contractor would have to be outside of Houston. I recommended Dr. Wiggins at OSU and then called Ken immediately and the rest is history!

I have a lot of gratitude to the Spacemobile program. It was instrumental in finding my wife of 36 years, rocket boosting my career in education, supplying me with an unlimited source of experience and material during my 27 \_ years as a university professor, and now with this reunion that gives me great pleasure in my years of retirement. And for at least two Spacemobile Lecturers who are no longer with us, Ernie Gibson and George Lewis, and borrowing from a somewhat older contemporary, Bob Hope, let's say ..... THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES!