

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

Oklahoma State University-Stillwater, Oklahoma

Reflections on 7 Years as an AESP Specialist by Ellen Hardwick. Written 2001.

Reflections on 7 years as an AESP Specialist
by Ellen Hardwick

My first day on the job with AESP was at the Professional Development Conference at Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, AL. I actually came to the meeting two days before my official start date, in order to attend the entire meeting. The first evening, before I had been officially introduced to the group, I met several of the specialists in the hotel lounge. It was interesting to me that the first people I met that night continued to be my closest friends, especially when the group gathered for conferences. We were even described as a "clique" by some.

At another conference, in California, this group of friends decided to take a day-trip to Big Sur and Carmel. We took a picnic, and drove down Rt. 1, through Pebble Beach, and on down the coast. We stopped and walked on the beach, ate lunch, drove on down to Big Sur and walked among ancient redwoods, had dinner in Carmel, and had a memorable day. But the day got long, the sun went down, and suddenly Wil Robertson got very agitated. It seems he was expecting the "day trip" to end at sundown. He was going to miss his plane to Waukegan! We didn't get back to the hotel until nearly midnight. Since that day, Wil has never forgiven us, and never gone on another "day-trip" with us!

That same group, whenever we got together for a social drink, would tease among ourselves about whether the toilet lid should be left down or up. Finally we arrived at a solution: whoever used the toilet would leave the lid in a different position than they found it. If it was up and you were male, you would use the toilet, and then put it down. If it was up and you were female, you would put it down to use the toilet, and leave it down. That seemed to work pretty well, and we went on to solve more lofty problems.

The first summer, I traveled with Lisa McLeod, whose position I was filling, and with other Goddard specialists. One time I rode with Dennis Christopher over to Wallops. Mildred Gilbert was following us in her van. She stayed right behind us all the way to Annapolis, and we started to cross the Bay Bridge. About halfway across, suddenly she whizzed by us, leaving us behind in her dust. When we caught up with her later, we discovered that she had a sort of phobia of bridges, and felt compelled to pass us in order to get across as quickly as she could. Another funny occasion on that trip was when Dennis, Mildred and I went to Ocean City for an evening. Mildred had just moved from Puerto Rico, and hadn't used an ATM before. But she had joined the NASA Credit Union, and had her card, and when Dennis used the ATM, she wanted to know about it, so she tried it. When she realized she could put the card in the machine and get a handful of money, she was delighted. That night she bought gifts for every one of her family members back home!

The focus of AESP toward the "West", started at Marshall. I had hardly learned to do student programs before we began to be trained to speak the jargon of "Systemic Reform". One of the things I've enjoyed most about my "retirement" is that I never hear any of that jargon now. The job changed so much in the seven years I was there, that it was totally different by the time I left. Sometimes I miss my van. And I miss the fun of enlightening children about the space program and NASA.

But I never miss the politics and pretense of trying to schmooze with state-level education "experts". I was proud to represent NASA. I am grateful for the science I learned. I'll always watch the progress of the space program with fascination and admiration. Now, where I live, I can watch launches from my front lawn.