

Forks in the Road and My Travel Through Life

Chapter 11 The Motel Search 1995

Early Retirement

LaRue retired from US Bank in the fall of 1994.

Lockheed Martin took over the INEL contract from EG&G, Idaho beginning the new fiscal year starting November 1, 1994. An early retirement option was offered. I accepted and retired on January 25, 1995 at age 59.

After a couple of weeks being retired we decided we needed something to do.

Motel Search

My folks bought the Motel Deluxe in Salmon, Idaho at about the same stage of their life. It treated them well.

When they decided to sell in 1978, they wanted us to take over. Being gainfully employed we declined.

It was always in the back of my mind that maybe we should have done it. We began thinking of going into the motel business.

When it looked like I would be laid off in 1993 I looked at the Overton Motel in Overton, Nevada. It was in an area we liked when we lived in Las Vegas. It had a lot going for it. There was a marina on Lake Meade and Overton was adjacent to the Valley of Fire Recreation Area. An 80+ year old lady was the owner/operator and looking to sell. However, she backed out.

We decided to look at the Overton Motel again. I called the realtor who was her son. He said she was now ready to sell. We decided to drive down and see if we

could make a deal. We checked into the Overton Motel for a couple of days to fully evaluate the place.

The motel was 25 units with two rental office spaces. It had a large 2 bedroom living quarters attached to the motel office. The exterior was white stucco southwestern style. It had good curb appeal and good parking. The rooms would take a lot of work. The \$180,000 price was affordable, and we decided we would go for it. She had to go to Las Vegas for the day, so we killed time until she got back. She was late getting back that evening and the next morning her son said she decided not to sell. That was the end of that.

We looked at the other motel in Overton. It was too small and too many problems. We returned to Idaho Falls.

The trip was good for us. We committed to finding a motel. We would need serious money and decided to sell our house. We listed it in early February for \$99,900. We began packing our stuff and putting it in storage units.

After a few days we went to Salmon to see mom. She thought we were crazy looking at motels.

We checked with the owners of the Motel Deluxe, my folks former place. They might sell for the right price., but only if their son operating the motel agreed.

They were thinking in the range of \$700-\$800 thousand! That was way above our thinking. The son did not want to sell anyway.

(Note-After we sold our motel a new hospital replaced the old hospital near the Motel Deluxe. Later they needed more parking and purchased the Motel Deluxe, demolished it, and paved the lot for parking. I would guess the owners got around a million dollars cash. The huge neon sign that was atop a scaffolding was salvaged. It showed up on the internet later. I remember the sign being installed when I was a Freshman in high school. It was visible from all over Salmon.)

We got an offer on our house February 28 for \$99,000 and accepted. We would have 2 months before closing.

In the meantime we looked at a motel in Eureka, Nevada on remote Highway 50. It was not what we wanted.

We then went on to Ely, Nevada to spend the night and look around. We checked into the Desert-Rest Motel and I asked the owner if they were interested in selling. Turns out he was. We discussed the \$265,000 asking price which was firm. The next day we went home to continue packing.

It was a big job packing as we had a house that had lots of storage space. Every day I would haul loads to our storage units.

We ended up with 5 storage units. I organized them as short term, medium term, and long term storage. I made a map of where I put things in each unit to facilitate finding things we would need later.

A week or so later the owner of the Desert-Rest Motel called and wanted to get serious. We decided to go down and give it another look. It had fair curb appeal, but the beds and room interiors were tired. They would need a lot of work. There also was too much competition in Ely.

We saw an ad for the K-Bar Motel in Greybull, Wyoming and went to take a look. The appearance of the K-Bar was good. We spent a night in one of the rooms. The owner had no books or data to justify his asking price of \$269,000. It was 19 units, small living quarters, and a large shop. We liked the place but decided against it.

From Greybull we went north to Malta, Montana to look at the Maltana Motel. This was a well maintained popular motel with a large home. It was way above our price range at \$450,00 for 20 units. We made our way back to Idaho Falls through Havre and Great Falls, Montana. We kept a lookout for motels and RV parks.

Our packing was going well. We decided to take time to run over to the Oregon coast and look around. We stopped to have lunch in Baker City, Oregon. I picked up a free paper that had business listings in it. Staring me in the eye was a listing for the DK Motel in Arco, Idaho. We both laughed and I remarked, "Who would want a motel in Arco"!

The trip to the Oregon Coast did not turn up anything affordable and we returned to Idaho Falls.

We decided we should look at the DK Motel since it is only 70 miles from Idaho Falls. The listed price was \$350,000 for the 20 unit motel, a separate 20 unit storage unit, and a small old house being used for storage. The owners, Mike and Diane Beitz, would sell each separately, and carry the note with a down payment of \$80,000. We were only interested in the motel which would be \$295,000.

The curb appeal was not too good. The 3 buildings and office/living quarters were of different construction and material. However, the property was neat and tidy. The Beitz's had worked hard on the rooms, and they were in good shape. A plus was that it was the best of four motels in Arco. The Craters of the Moon was a great tourist attraction. We looked and expressed no interest since Arco was not a place we wanted to live. I never liked Arco.

We made a trip to Hamilton and Missoula, Montana to no avail and a trip to Bozeman, Montana. The only good prospect was a mobile home park in Manhattan a few miles from Bozeman, which we decided against. Many years later I saw it featured on a crime show involving a murder.

We also made a trip to Boise to check out the 7K Motel. The asking price was too high and it was rather sleazy. Not long ago I saw a tv show about a missing Nevada ranch owner that was last seen there.

Then it was a trip to Roosevelt, Utah to check out the Western Hills Motel. It was interesting. The owners had restored it from the dead. It also had a restaurant. Too many problems to consider. We went back again and decided against it.

We made a 2nd trip to Arco to take a closer look at the DK Motel. We found the owners had a decent set of books. We did not see the husband, Mike, on our first visit and he was not present for this visit. He did a lot of traveling checking out business deals while his wife ran the motel. He tinkered in all kinds of things.

When we finished at the DK Motel the realtor took us to the Lost River Motel across the street and up the hill. It was closed for the winter and the owner was still in Nebraska, which was his home. It was 12 units and the rooms were tiny. It was not a place we would want to stay in or own.

Brian and Tina had moved from Portland, Oregon to Denver, Colorado for a new opportunity for Brian. Their new home was in a suburb south of Denver called Highland Ranch. They were planning a week vacation in Hawaii in mid May. They asked if we could come over and stay with Haley and Nick. Closing was the end of April on our house. It would work for us, and we could check out Colorado for motels.

We had everything out of our house on April 25. We stayed in our Alpenlite fifth wheel in the driveway for two nights while we cleaned the house. The trailer and truck were packed with what we would need for the weeks ahead.

We closed on the house April 27 and moved to the KOA campground for the night. The water pump on the trailer failed and I got a new one for \$96. Not a good start on our journey.

The next day we went to Matt and Julies in Lehi, Utah and parked in front of their place. I replaced the water pump the next day and we headed south to Moab and a KOA at \$18.75 per night.

A lot of motels in Moab, but nothing affordable. We did some sightseeing and moved on to Grand Junction, Colorado on May 1.

We met with a realtor and scouted the area the next day. We didn't find any possibilities.

It was on to Denver via the Eisenhower pass/tunnel on I70 in a snow storm arriving at Brian and Tinas on May 3. We parked the fifth wheel on the street in front of their place, which was against the covenants. They left for Hawaii a couple of days later.

I talked to a realtor. and we took the kids and scouted the area down to Colorado Springs. We also visited the Air Force Academy. Nothing to get excited about.

The realtor had a listing for the Blue Spruce Motel in Lamar on the eastern border of Colorado. We agreed to meet him in Lamar on April 14.

Brian and Tina returned. They had a letter from the homeowner's association to remove the trailer. We were gone when the letter arrived.

We traveled across the state to Lamar and a KOA campground at \$16 per night. Lamar was a nice city and the Blue Spruce Motel had good curb appeal. The price was \$455,000. It had 28 units, fair living quarters, nice office, and a swimming pool. The downside was large chain hotels moving in. It was on the plains and tornado country. We elected to not pursue it.

We went back across southern Colorado 145 miles to check out the Western Inn in Walsenburg, Colorado. We stayed at the Country Host campground at \$13.50. The Western Inn was not to our liking.

We proceeded 215 miles to Durango, Colorado. Durango was really nice. Everything was upscale and too expensive.

We then proceeded 70 miles to Cortez, Colorado and parked at a KOA. Nothing listed for sale. We walked in and talked to motel owners to see if they were selling.

A lady invited us in and gave us motel advice. She stressed keeping an accurate set of books. The selling price of motels is based on a multiple of the average annual gross. We got a good education on how to buy, operate, and sell a motel. The information served us well in the future.

The Farmington, New Mexico area looked interesting. The route took us through Monticello, Utah where our son-in-law Matt Redd was raised. There was a nice motel that an older couple owned that was available. We checked it out and a grandson had taken it over.

We proceeded on to Farmington and parked at Mom and Pops RV Park for \$12.72. We found a realtor and looked around, but came up with nothing.

I saw an advertisement for a motel in Globe, Arizona. We headed there by way of Show Low, Arizona. We parked at the Camptown RV Park in Show Low and found that the owners were from Idaho Falls.

The next day it was mountain roads all the way to Globe where we parked at the Apache Trails CG for two days. The motel we were going to look at had sold, so we found a realtor.

Hearing we were from Idaho she said her husband was from a small town in Idaho. We queried her as to where, and she said near Challis. We pinned her down some more and it was Goldberg, which is about 10 miles south of Patterson where I grew up. At that time there was just the Goldberg school and ranches. Now it is just a ranch or two. Small world.

Kennecott Copper put Globe on the map with the huge open pit mining operation. It had just shut down. Globe was not a place to buy a motel.

On May 21 we headed north and stopped in Flagstaff, Arizona and looked around. Too many mom and pop motels, and chain motels for us to consider.

Continued on to Kanab, Utah to look at the K Motel, a Budget Host Motel, an RV park, and all too pricey. Headed north surveying motels along the way to no avail.

Overnighted at the Redd's in Lehi, Utah and continued to Pocatello for a short look, and found nothing.

We continued on to Challis to look around then through Stanley to McCall. McCall was nice but nothing for us.

We moved on to Caldwell, Idaho then on to Twin Falls and parked at the Slettes.

The next day we went to look at Sullivan's Country Inn in Fairfield. There was no living quarters or office. The owners lived at home and rented rooms from their restaurant.

We went on to Bellevue to look at the High Country Inn. It only had 10 rooms and was pricey.

We had been evaluating motels for four months and on the road the last month. We looked at many motels and had a lot of time to think.

The more we thought about the DK Motel in Arco it looked to be the best possibility. It would be an easy move from Idaho Falls, close to family, was priced ok, had good books, and a proven track record.

We decided to pay a visit on May 31. The realtor, Don Cain, was surprised when we called. He and the owners had given up on us. Mike, the husband, was traveling in Colorado.

This was our third trip to look at the motel and Mike was never there. We spent the day with his wife, Dianne. We drove off to think about it.

We consulted with Gary Slette and decided to submit an offer of \$250,000, with \$80,000 down, and closing in two weeks. The asking price was \$295,000. We thought they would reject the offer or possibly counter.

The next day Don Cain called and said, "You bought a motel. Close on June 16, 1995". WOW!!

We think Diane was sick of running the motel by herself while Mike ran around the country. They had a big job to be out of there in two weeks, and got right after it.

We had things to do in Idaho Falls and departed the next day.

Phone calls needed to be made to the State for workman's compensation and obtain a tax ID, so we got a cell phone. We were told the signal was weak in Arco and would need the large bag phone. It cost a lot more than the small flip phones.

We got our business done in Idaho Falls and departed for Salmon to spend some time and relax at moms.

Total miles driven from when we departed Idaho Falls for our motel search was 5,086 miles. Towed the fifth wheel 3,955 miles.

The following is a partial list of the motels that we looked at.

Overton Motel, Overton, Nevada

Plaza Motel, Overton, Nevada

K-Bar Motel, Greybull, Wyoming

Yellowstone Motel, Greybull Wyoming
Wagon Wheel Motel, Pinedale, Wyoming City
Center Motel, Hamilton, Montana
Deffy's Motel, Hamilton, Montana
K Motel, Kanab, Utah
7-K Motel, Boise, Idaho
Sullivans Country Inn Motel, Fairfield, Idaho
High Country Inn, Bellevue, Idaho
Marianna Motel, Panguitch, Utah
Maltana Motel, Malta, Montana
Desert Rest, Ely, Nevada
Blue Spruce Motel, Lamar, Colorado

History of the DK Motel

The following was provided by friends in Arco.

In the early 1940's Al Blodgett owned a Shamrock service station and 6 tourist cabins behind it. On July 19, 1946 he sold to Willard Brown, the Sinclair oil man in Blackfoot. Mr. and Mrs. Leavitt operated the business. On September 3, 1948 the business sold to Mr. DeKay "to update".

The following article is taken from the February 4, 1949 Arco Advertiser.

NEW DEKAY MOTEL OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Arco now boasts one of the finest cabin camps in this Northwest, as DeKay's Motel opened for business this week.

The new establishment is owned and operated by Roy S. DeKay, who came to Arco six months ago. He has been busy in constructing the eight new units. The new units are located adjoining the former Shamrock station and cabins on highway 93, which Mr. DeKay also purchased.

The new units include all the luxuriousness of the Waldorf Astoria and the privacy of home. Accommodations in this strictly modern Motel include butane heaters, tub baths and kitchenettes with butane ranges.

This new enterprise has been enthusiastically declared a great asset to this area

The original 6 units of the “motor court” were parallel to the highway and set back behind the service station/office. The rooms were small and the exterior was a log looking veneer painted dark brown.

The 8 unit building that DeKay built was perpendicular to the highway on the north side of the office/living quarters. The exterior was a reddish looking roman brick veneer.

The office/living quarters was the original service station office augmented with a small house butted up against the rear of that structure. It was sided with tog looking veneer painted dark brown.

Monte Dick bought the motel from DeKay. He had the motel a long time and raised his family there. He built the 6 unit building perpendicular to the highway on the south side of the office/living quarters. It was a pinkish red block structure with a flat roof. The reason for the flat roof is that he planned to add a second story in the future. Each unit had 2 rooms making it a small apartment with a kitchen between the two rooms.

Dick Starnes from Idaho Falls then bought the motel and was an absentee owner.

It doesn't show in the history. We know that a retired Navy guy operated the motel for a couple of years. From what we heard he ran it down and Starnes took it back.

He later sold it to Mike and Diane Beitz from American Falls in 1992. They did a good job in bringing it back to life and a good reputation. They had it three years when they sold to us.

Monte Dick lived across the highway and would stop by now and then. He was proud of the motel and his addition of the south building. He was interested in the changes we were making and liked it.

Dick Starnes lived in Idaho Falls and stopped by once to visit.

End of chapter 11

