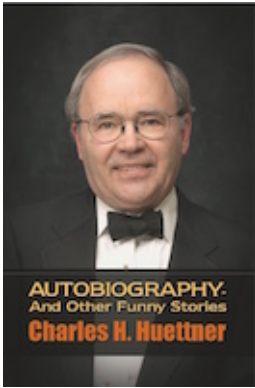


**AUTOBIOGRAPHY-**  
And Other Funny Stories  
**Charles H. Huettner**



*What do locking neighbors in their house on trick night, chicken farming, the first Zippy, a dark room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, transforming airline pilot training, improving GPS, owing a B&B, and Aviation Advisor at the White House on 9/11 have in common? They are all part of a long history of fascinating and often humorous stories in the life of author Charles Huettner. Laugh and experience vignettes of his amazing life and learn a bit about how God and the government work from behind the scenes. You will get a glimpse of the humor and intrigue he experienced during 33 years in the USAF, FAA, NASA, and the White House. You will read of his adventures while at Mt. Lebanon High School, the University of Akron, and Harvard. He piloted a supersonic T-38 jet to 50,000 feet, flew a hot air balloon at 700 feet over Atlanta Hartsfield Airport during airline rush hour, experienced the transition between the Clinton and Bush Administrations in the*

*White House, and toured the world with astronaut Buzz Aldrin, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, and former Congressman Bob Walker. Come along to laugh and experience the amazing life of Charles Huettner.*

## **Autobiography – And Other Funny Stories**

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# **Autobiography - And Other Funny Stories**

**Charles H. Huettner**

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## Chapter 1: Mt. Lebanon

The old joke, I was born at an early age, was especially true for me. I was born very premature. I have had a rich life of experiences that have to some degree been formed from my being small, a 5'7" guy at my peak, and looking young for my age. In grade school, I was bullied, but made up for my lack of fighting ability by being bright, innovative, and energetic. My draft card at age 18 read 5 foot 75 pounds. There are hundreds of funny and amazing stories of things that have happened to me from my youth to working at the White House and beyond. I look forward to sharing some of them with you. I'll begin by telling you the story of "Cop Catching".

**Cop Catching:** Premie-Infant care wasn't too advanced in 1946 when I was born. I am told that if it weren't for my nurse, Shirley Brown, feeding me with an eyedropper I would not have survived. I grew up at an idyllic time in history, the 1950s, in an idyllic place, Mt. Lebanon, a suburb of Pittsburgh, PA. The experience was right out of "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It To Beaver". Sure we had to worry about the USSR, and nuclear war, but the rest of the world was more or less at peace and prosperity had come to America after World War II. We were a middle class family living in an upper middle class community. My father, Henry, was an engineer and my mother, Ruth, was a homemaker. I am an only child, but there were lots of kids of all ages on our block.

My mother didn't drive until she was nearly 50 but we could walk two blocks to a little strip of local stores that included two drug stores, an A&P grocery store, an Isaly's ice cream parlor, Whitman's 5&10, Burt's gift shop, a gas station and Lincoln elementary school. Lincoln was one of those schools that look

like a school should look, three story white brick with huge double hung windows.



My mother, Ruth, and my father, Henry

My folks were the best. They gave me unconditional love and on my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday my dad bought me a used 1960 Volkswagen Beetle. It was a financial stretch for him, but he told me, “my dad bought me a car when I was 16 and you should have one too”. It was a goal for him and I was in heaven. I bought a Whitney catalogue to see what chrome attachments I could add. My next-door neighbor, Ben, was three years younger than me, but he enthusiastically helped me spruce up my car. It was faded salmon colored with a soft sunroof. The only gauges on the dashboard were a speedometer and an odometer, no fuel gauge. If the car started to sputter from a lack of gas, the driver needed to reach down to the floor near the gas pedal and turn a

lever that gave the car an extra gallon of gas that could be used to go to a gas station. That happened to me once in the middle of Pittsburgh's Liberty Tunnel, an experience that convinced me to keep the gas tank full.



At age 16, I was in High School and was able to drive the mile and a half to school from my house rather than walk. This also gave me a feeling of independence. On weekends, Ben and I would go for drives to explore and to see what we could see. There was just one problem. I looked very young. This resulted in my being stopped by the police for driving under age. The combination of my youthfulness and my friend being three years younger than me presented a picture to the police that was irresistible. It was so annoying. We would be driving along and next thing we knew we would see the flashing red lights in the rear view mirror. (Police lights were red at that time.) What would follow was, "Ok sonny, get out of the car you aren't old enough to drive". I would then explain that I am. This resulted in the typical,



“show me your license” followed by disbelief and the assumption that the license was falsified. After much ado I would be allowed to continue.



Then, an idea came to Ben and me. Rather than being annoyed and interrupted we could actually turn this into a game that we called Cop Catching. The idea of the game was to drive into an area where we were not known to the local police (most of the police in our area now knew me), and we would look for squad cars. When we saw a likely candidate, we would drive up beside the car. When the cop looked over at me I would look at him then snap my head straight ahead and slow down. This combination of my appearance and guilty reaction would catch them every time. They would pull me over; go through the routine just described, and eventually let me go. Before they left, however, we would record their badge number in a little red book in my glove compartment. As I recall, we had documented over a

hundred badge numbers before we ended our spree of cop catching.

Oddly, about ten years later I had a flashback of my cop catching days while I was commanding a U.S. Air Force airdrop in Germany. One weekend my airdrop crew and I rented a car and drove to Luxemburg to see the sights. I was the designated driver.

As I was driving through the city, I stopped at a traffic light. As I waited for the light to change, I heard a whistle and looking out my left window I saw a police officer running toward me loudly blowing his whistle. He approached the car shouting in several different languages. Finally he said something I understood, "Shut off your car". He asked me for my driver's license. I had both a NJ driver's license and an international drivers license from AAA. I had no idea what I had done wrong, but thought I must have violated one of the international signs on the road. After a long pregnant pause he said, "You look young to drive". I was an Air Force Captain and the senior officer of my crew. Imagine the peals of laughter I had to live through from my Lieutenant and sergeant after we drove away. Somehow, cop-catching at age 26 isn't as much fun as at age 16.

**Trick Night:** Ben and I had lots of fun together. We would go out the night before Halloween to see what innocent trouble we could get into. They called it "Trick Night" in Pittsburgh. The best prank we ever pulled was on our friends and neighbors the Barnes. I lived in the house on the corner of the block; Ben lived next to me, and the Barnes were two houses up the block from Ben.

Ben was actually more of a troublemaker than I was, but I added a sense of civility and moderation to his enthusiasm that made us a good combination. Ben loosened me up and I straightened him up. His parents would often lock Ben in his

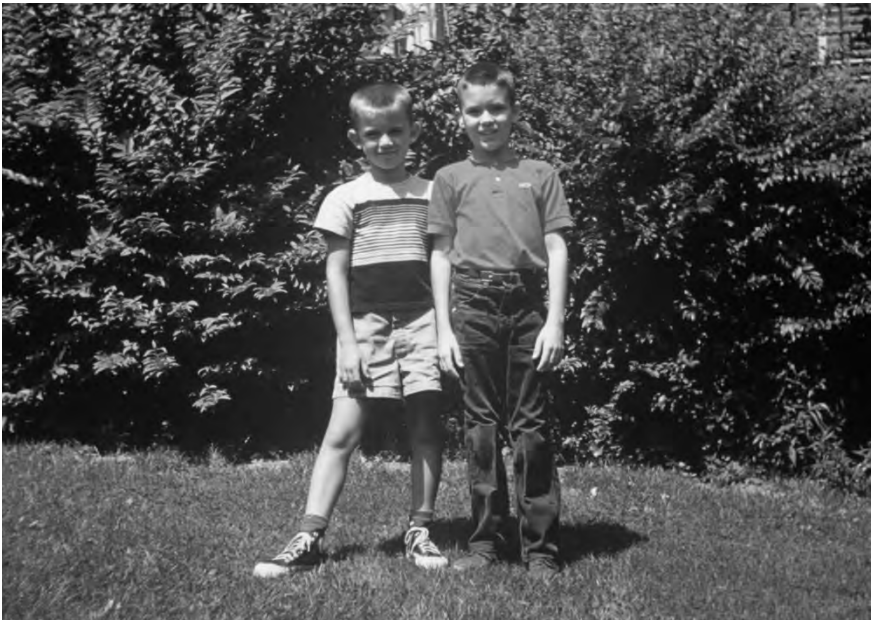
room as punishment for what they considered to be mischief. Our street was a tree-lined hill with brick single-family homes that were all built in the 40s. The houses were closely spaced, that had deep yards running halfway through the block. The architecture of each house was different. My room was on the third floor of our house and it was directly across from Ben's room on his second floor. One day, when his parents were out, Ben and I rigged up an intercom and a clothesline pulley between our rooms. In this way we could continue to communicate when he was in lock-up and I could send him over potato chips and soda to ease his stay.



My house is on the left, Ben's house on the right.  
His bedroom is the lower window in the picture.

One year, Ben and I hatched a plan to hit the Barnes' for trick night. Tom senior was a great guy. He was a manufacturers representative who sold candy to candy stores. He would occasionally generously donate some of his candy samples to us to sell on the sidewalk in the summer. It was great. When other

kids were selling lemonade, we were selling Milky Way bars. He had a heart of gold. He coached our little league team and was a scoutmaster. He was also an extrovert who did things with gusto. We would play basketball in their yard and when a basket was made you could hear it all over the neighborhood. So Ben and I knew that it would be a real event to see his reaction to a good trick.



Ben on the left, I'm on the right.

The plan worked flawlessly. All we needed was a screwdriver and a small wire with an alligator clip on each end. We waited until about 8 pm when it was dark. We crept up to the Barnes' house and could see through their glass front and storm doors that they were watching TV in the living room. They were facing opposite the door. Their house was a beige and orange brick two-story house with a front porch about two feet wider on each side of the door. Once we determined that the Barnes' were all concentrating on the TV we went around to the back

door. The garage was detached so there were only two ways out of the house, the front glass door and the back door. Both doors had wooden storm doors with glass inserts. We quietly opened the back storm door and removed the door handle and the rod that went through the door with the other handle attached and laid them on the cement porch outside the door. When we closed the door it latched. There was no way to open the latched door without inserting something into the hole where the handle rod had been removed. We then went around to the front door. This was the tricky part. We quietly did the same thing to the front storm door as well, fortunately without them seeing us. This essentially locked them in their house.

Now to spring the trap: I unscrewed the doorbell button by the door and connected the two contact points with the alligator clip wire. This set the doorbell ringing continuously. Ben and I ran across the street to hide in the bushes to watch the fun. The result was incredible.

The Barnes' knew it was trick night so the first reaction was young Tom (who is my age) yanking open the interior door with a yell to catch the person pushing the button. But he saw no one. After some confusion, Tom senior came to the door and tried to go outside. That is when he discovered that the door handles were laying on the concrete in front of the door. He yelled to young Tom to go around back. This was followed by more yelps when they discovered that the back door was in the same condition. Of course all this time the doorbell was buzzing loudly. Things hit a feverish pitch as they tried to open the front door with a screwdriver. After many expletives and considerable scrambling their efforts eventually paid off and they were able to quickly disarm the buzzer and reassemble their doorknobs. It was quite a challenge to restrain our laughter and sneak away unnoticed. I suppose there was no doubt in the Barnes' minds who did it, however Ben and I counted this a 10 out of 10 for trick night success. We were also glad that Ben didn't go to lock-up

or need the soda and chip lifeline as a result of our trick night actions.

If you think this was a bit immature, it was, but I was young and it was also a time of innocence. Of all the crazy things I did as a kid, my going in objective was that no one and no one's property would be hurt. Being destructive is not a challenge or the right thing to do.



Tom Barnes and his younger brother Fred

**Boy Scouts:** In spite of the trick night joke I just described, young Tom Barnes and I were good lifelong friends. We went to school together, went to the same church, and were in the Boy Scouts together. He took things a bit more seriously than I did, but we both enjoyed camping and being out in the woods. Tom

became an Eagle Scout. I didn't, but I am sure that every Boy Scout has stories of a memorable camping trip. Here is mine.

On one camping trip our troop went to the Fort Necessity campground. We arrived Friday evening and set up our campsite, lit fires from wood that was provided by the park service, and cooked dinner. In the middle of the night it started to rain. Boy, did it rain. Tom and I were in the same army surplus waxed-cotton tent. We tried to sleep through the maelstrom outside and finally did fall asleep. About 4 AM I woke to see Tom floating out of the tent. I guess I was slightly up hill from Tom because I was still on the ground. The water was rushing so fast around and through our tent that his air mattress had begun to float and he was heading down stream. By then we were both awake and I was scrambling to pull him back into the tent.



Tom is third from the left and I am third from the right

When the sun came up we emerged to find the campground awash in mud. We all jumped to and split logs to make a boardwalk between the tents and somehow started a fire. We had to have things right, because all of our parents were to visit

about lunchtime. Everyone wanted to impress his parents with what great scouts we were. My job was to stir the soup that was in a big kettle over the fire. When my parents arrived I was stirring with great gusto and they were proud to see me at work and the campground we had all made.

Suddenly there was a shout, "FIRE". I looked down and saw that I had been standing with the toes of my rubber boots in the fire and they had started to blaze. They were the old style rubber boots with the metal latches that held them tight around your pant legs over your shoes. My parents looked shocked as I began running around with my toes on fire. I doused them with water only to discover that the boots had burnt open and bonded to my shoes underneath. As a result, I was pouring water into my shoes soaking my feet. All I can say is that I certainly did impress my parents, and all the others as well, but not as I had hoped. I don't think that there is a burning shoe merit badge, but if so, I earned it that day.

**Jim Brennan:** One of my best friends growing up was Jim Brennan. Jim's family and mine would get together at each other's houses and at Jim's grandparents farm outside of Pittsburgh. The farm was a wonderful place with a big man-made lake where we would swim and chase frogs. Jim was my best man, and I was his, when we each were married.

When we were very young the kids in our neighborhood played a game of tag. Of course as kids do, one would tag the other and say, "you're it, I quit" leaving the other player no options. Jim and I decided that that wasn't fair so we agreed that the game should never be over...and it still isn't. From that time on whenever we get together the parting action is to reactivate the game leaving one of us "it" until our next time together. Here is a picture of the final scene at Jim's wedding many years later. (By the way Jim, if you are reading this, you are "it".)





**City & Country:** My great grandfather on my father's side came from Germany in 1869 at age 14. He started as a grocery clerk in NJ and eventually owned a department store in Hicksville, Long Island, NY. His store furnished the supplies to the Vanderbilt's, Roosevelt's, and other estates on the north shore of Long Island. My father moved to Pittsburgh to attend Carnegie Tech University where he met my mother. Her family were farmers. The result for me as a boy growing up, was a life that included all that the city and country had to offer.

**City.** My folks belonged to the University Club of Pittsburgh and went there Tuesday nights to bowl and Saturday nights for dinner and to dance. By the time I was about thirteen years old,

they would occasionally take me and I would dance with my mother to the big band sounds. I had been prepared for this by attending Genevieve Jones dancing class when I was in junior high school. It was one of those awkward experiences where all the boys stood on one side of the room and the girls on the other until we were compelled to count off and go meet our partner. I will say, however, I did learn how to dance and got to dance with a girl even though I looked like I was 10 years old, which did not impress most girls at the time.

I had an important role to play when my parents took me to the club when I was in grade school. They would go to the cocktail lounge for a drink with their friends and I was stationed with Chirp the bartender. I was responsible for fruit. For example, someone would order an “old fashioned”, Chirp would mix the drink, and I would install the slice of orange and cherry. I guess that was all right it being a private club, and it sure entertained me. I still like a cherry in my drink to this day.

For my Dad’s vacation every summer we would visit my grandfather on Long Island and sometimes go into Manhattan. It was there that I developed my taste for seafood, the ocean, and perhaps women. My Grandfather’s house was two blocks from the main street in Hicksville, Long Island. No, I am not making this up. Hicksville was named after the Hicks family and was certainly not a hick town. His house was on a block with two churches.

When I was about eight years old, I was playing in the back yard and I remember distinctly a little girl who came into the yard and we played games together. She told me that her mother was attending a meeting at the Church. After some time she had to go. Fast forward to 1971. I am a First Lieutenant in the Air Force and on an American Express alpine tour on vacation. The first stop on the tour was the castle in Heidelberg, Germany. They had a “meet the others on the tour” event in the wine cellar. I met

a girl named Kathie in the wine cellar. We started talking and discovered that she was from Long Island. After further discussion she related a story to me of her mother going to a church meeting and her remembering playing with a little boy who was visiting for the summer. She is now my wife.

**Country.** On weekends and holidays we would often visit relatives. My grandmother was a chicken farmer. She had five acres with a beautiful grass meadow in front of her mission style stone farmhouse. Behind the house was the vegetable garden leading to the two buildings housing the chickens. The big building was for the chickens that were laying the eggs and a smaller building for the adolescent birds and what we called the peepers. The peepers were the fuzzy yellow newborns. They ran around a circular enclosure with a heat lamp over them to stay warm. As they got older and began to grow feathers, the enclosure would be opened and they would join the adolescents. The tricky part was when the adolescents were to be moved to the adult chicken coop. I was invited to assist during one of these moves. What an experience!

The move was scheduled after sunset. Chicken crates were pre-positioned outside the adolescent coop. We suited up. After all the chickens were asleep and all was quiet in the coop we made our move. Each of us had a crate and we began picking up the chickens and putting them into the crates. Then all hell broke loose. The chickens didn't like being awakened and they didn't want to go into the crates. Chickens squawking...feathers flying...family members darting to and fro in the near dark. It was unforgettable. Then we had to carry the chicken laden crates to the main coop. Well, the older chickens weren't happy to be woken up and have the new chickens in their territory so the whole fracas began again. This, of course, had to be repeated until all the chickens had been transferred. What the new chickens didn't know was how nice their new accommodations would be. The walls of the main coop and rows of shelves 5 feet

high in the center of the building were covered with square boxes facing out into the room. Each box had fresh straw in the bottom. Each chicken had it's own box, and in the morning, after the eggs were collected, the doors were opened and the chickens would go out into the chicken yard to eat and mingle. It was amazing to me that chickens need to eat stones as well as corn to grind up the corn in their gullet.

My grandmother sold eggs and chicken potpies. I didn't like to watch the potpie process, but the eggs were another matter. Each morning she would take the eggs to the cellar to the candling machine. She would load the eggs into a big hopper then sit in front of the machine. There was a trough from the hopper down to a viewing station with a bright light shining through the egg to the viewer. She would look at each egg to make sure that there were no chicken embryo's present and then step on a foot peddle. The next egg would then roll into view. She would then sort them for size and box them for sale. People would drive up the long entry drive all day long and come to the house to buy eggs and potpies.

My Aunt Net and Uncle Lyle lived on another farm about 30 miles away. Uncle Lyle raised cattle and Christmas trees, but was primarily the head of maintenance for a coalmine near where they lived. He was a Swede and a mountain of a man with a heart of gold. He was the kind of guy who repaired and reconfigured his own farm equipment and bulldozer. Walking into his barn was like stepping into a machine shop. He loved nature and he loved to hunt. When deer season opened he would go to his camp in the mountains. He would fill three freezers with venison and that is what his family would live on all year long. He was also a good taxidermist. There were deer heads over the fireplace, a pheasant or two here and there, and other assorted animals around the house. My first memories of their house are that it was cozy and warm with a big fireplace, no TV, and a party line phone on the wall. You only picked up the phone

receiver when you heard two short rings and one long one. Many years later when my wife, Kathie, was there, he asked her to get something out of the freezer. She was surprised to discover that it was a huge frozen white owl that was waiting for his next taxidermy effort. He laughed, but she was not so amused.

Unfortunately Uncle Lyle did not live to see his granddaughter get married, but he was there in spirit. He had put away a shotgun for her years before as a gift for her wedding day because he knew that she also loved to hunt and shoot. After the ceremony, all the wedding party took turns shooting the gun in the air as a memorial to him and celebration for her.

My Uncle Harold also had a farm. He was my father's brother. After my Grandfather died and the department store was sold, Harold sold his farm on Long Island to a developer and bought a 100-acre farm near Gettysburg, PA. It was a beautiful place. The restored red brick 1700s farmhouse had an old wooden school building attached. It still had its bell. The barn was several stories high with stalls for cattle underneath and hay and farm equipment above. There was also a calf barn, pigpen, chicken coop, equipment building, and a tenant house. Harold raised cattle and had a couple of horses among other animals. Tennessee Walking Horses were his favorites. He had horse drawn buggies that he had restored that we could ride. As an only child, I enjoyed being with my cousins, Russ, Dan, and Jim, and feeling part of a big family. As kids, we used to like to go to the Gettysburg Battlefield and play Civil War soldiers. We would hide in Devil's Den, a rocky part of the battlefield with caves and outcroppings. It was there that we would plan our attack on imaginary armies.



Uncle Harold and cousin Jim in front of their house  
Note bell on schoolhouse.

One day we went to a local town fair near Harold's farm. We were having great fun trying our luck at the various games of skill when we heard a large commotion. People were muttering and pointing, and there he was, President Eisenhower! Eisenhower's farm was nearby and he had stopped by to see the fair and greet the people there. No fanfare, no speeches, just the President walking around talking to people. My father came up to me to ensure that I realized the magnitude of this event. As we were talking, we noticed that people were still shooting at the shooting gallery. This seemed very surprising because the shooters were using real rifles shooting 22 shorts at metal targets that marched across the gallery and which spun when you hit them. We couldn't believe that they would let the shooting continue while the President was there. We got our answer. When the President left so did the people at the shooting gallery. All the shooters were secret service agents. Presidential security certainly has changed a lot since those days.

In looking back, I realize how blessed I was as a child to know the joys of both the City and the Country in such an intimate way while living in the suburbs.

**Mt. Lebanon High School:** So there I was in the cafeteria lunch line at the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> grade when a teacher with a white streak in his black hair came up to me and asked me to talk to him. We sat and he asked me if I had considered joining the wrestling team. It turned out that he was George Lamprinakos, the school wrestling coach.

Not being much of a fighter, I told Coach Lamp, as we called him, that I hadn't. He told me that he wanted to recruit me for the 88-pound weight class. There were no boys in the school that weighed that little so I was it. If I accepted, I would get a varsity letter in my first year in high school, become part of a great team, and receive recognition from my school and my parents. I accepted. What followed were workouts every day after school and efforts by coach and teammates to turn me into a wrestler.

For me, wrestling started back at the cafeteria where the school paid for me to have milkshakes and desserts at lunch to fatten me up. I only weighed 75 pounds and I would be wrestling opponents who were struggling to get down to 88, a 15% weight advantage. Learning the basic moves was easy for me, but implementing them was a different story. There was no one near my weight with whom I could practice with in preparation for my first match. I had never been to a wrestling match before. As it turned out matches started with the lightest weight class, so I was first up at my very first match. My opponent and I came out onto the mat and faced each other at a circle in the center of the mat. He was a black kid from Westinghouse High School near the steel mills. His arms were as big as my legs. I stared from him to the referee to my parents sitting in the bleachers to my coach and then I heard the whistle. We lunged toward each other and I spun to get out of my opponents way. We then

circled each other and he went for my legs. Bam, my face hit the mat. I turned to try a maneuver called a switch, but he kept slamming me forward. The ref had held up two fingers indicating that he had earned two points for the takedown. The rest of the match is a blur to me now, but to make a long story short, he won. The good news is that I did not get pinned and our team didn't lose as much as it would have if I had not been on the team.

Other members of the team were great athletes like Drew Bachman who went on to win state championships. Several times I would win because the other team couldn't find anyone as small as me so I would win by default, but on the whole my wrestling career was not stellar. What was stellar was being on the team. It was physically, mentally, and emotionally tough, but it taught me valuable lessons that came in handy later in life as I faced Air Force pilot training and the war in Vietnam. I look back at my coach and teammates with great love and affection for what they did for me. I would have never experienced being on an athletic team if it were not for Coach Lamp pulling me out of the cafeteria line.

Wrestling was not my only avocation in high school. One of the many activities I was involved with was stage crew. Our school was fortunate to have a stage that could host professional theatre as well as school productions. Mr. Ramsay was my off-the-mat coach teaching me the art of stage productions from lighting to set design and curtain pulling. I worked my way up the seniority list to the point where I was running the spotlight from my own little room in the back of the auditorium. We had a carbon arc spotlight. The light was created when two carbon rods about the thickness of a pencil came together. That created a spark of light as bright as a welder's arc behind lenses that magnified and focused the light on the subject on the other side of the auditorium. I would mount the rods and turn the crank until they touched. When the spark ignited I would back them apart



slightly and turn on the motor. The motor would feed the rods continuously within a 1/16 of an inch from each other creating a continuous arc light. I could look into the lamp from the side through a green lens to adjust the spacing if necessary. The most memorable time was when I spotlighted Helen Hayes. She came to perform and I was able to work with professionals from the union.

While working on stage crew I met Bruce Chriswell. He was on the sound squad and a year behind me in school. We hit it off and became good friends. His sound squad duties became important to me personally on my graduation day. There were about 625 students in my graduating class. The graduation ceremony was to be held in the football stadium. The faculty decided that the most impressive way to hold the ceremony was for the class in full cap and gown to march from the school building down a long flight of stairs around the walkway and into the stadium. We were to be organized by height as we marched in, then wind through the seats and sit in alphabetical order, quite a logistical feat. The day of commencement we all lined up and guess who was in the front of the line. We were to march by twos with a male on one side and a female beside.

So there I was next to the shortest girl in the class at the front of the procession. I had never met my commencement partner until the practice session. It was the two of us then about 75 females until another male showed up in the line. One good thing was that my parents didn't need to struggle to find me in line. The other good news was that I was able to get a movie of the grand event. As it turned out my friend Bruce was responsible running the sound system for the commencement. He was hiding in the ferns in front of the platform where the Principal was handing out the diplomas. I provided him with a 8mm movie camera and he filmed the entire event capturing my participation. It really pays to know the people working events.



Graduation

My time in high school was a wonderful phase of my life with two exceptions. The first was being in physics class when my teacher announced that President Kennedy had been shot. I am sure that if you were alive when this tragic event occurred you remember where you were. I was in Mr. Ruth's physics class. The second exception was my grades. Not up to my ability as they told me, a perfect 2.0. Fortunately, all ended up well in two respects. The first is that I got into the perfect college for me, the University of Akron. The second was a bolt from the blue. Thirty-five years after I graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School, my childhood friend, Tom Barnes, was a reporter for the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. Tom saw what I was doing at NASA in a note in my Christmas card and thought my career might be an interesting "local boy makes good" story. It was the same Tom Barnes whose house Ben and I played the prank on so many years before. Obviously he didn't hold that against me. Tom sent a photographer and a reporter to interview me. The story was

published in an almost full-page article on page two of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. The High School picked up on the Mt. Lebanon connection in the article. They invited me back to school to give the keynote presentation before the Cum Laude Society-- the society for high school scholars. You need a perfect 4.0 average to get into the society.

There I was, dressed in Harvard Master's Degree robes that I had earned twenty years after graduating from high school, speaking of the adventures of my life and challenging the students who were being inducted into the society to grab life and be adventurous. They presented me with an honorary membership in the society. What an unexpected thrill. As I said in my interview with the reporter, "I got Cs in high school, Bs in college, and A's at Harvard. Mt. Lebanon must be one tough school".

**Pipe Grinding:** After graduation from High School, I had a summer free prior to going to college. My father was the Vice President of Operations for the National Valve Manufacturing Company. That summer, and for the next two, I was allowed by the union to work as a laborer in one of my father's plants. They didn't make valves. Instead they made piping for power plants. In power plants there is the need for an extensive array of custom made pipes that carry the hot and cold gas and liquids around the plant.

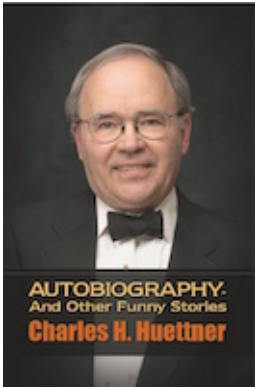
In 1964 National Valve was involved in providing piping for nuclear power plants. They required pipes that would withstand very high temperatures and pressures. Some of these were steel pipes that had wall thicknesses of up to ten inches. The pipes would be heated and bent into a shape required by the engineering drawings and then welded to straight lengths. Because of all the safety requirements for nuclear power plants, each weld had to be without flaws. To determine this, a nuclear engineer would tape film around the weld on the outside of the

pipe and thread a nuclear isotope into the pipe to take a picture of the weld somewhat like the dentist takes an x-ray of your teeth. If a flaw was detected the pipes would be ground down or cut apart and re-welded at great expense. To prepare for this process the welds had to be ground smooth both inside and out. The outside was a piece of cake. The inside was another story. Inside required a person to crawl inside the pipe to grind the weld. Guess who got that job? Yes, as the smallest guy around the job fell to me. It is quite a memorable experience.



I would suit up in a work suit like a flight suit with mask and gloves. One of the other guys would then lift me into the pipe and hand me a pneumatic grinder attached to a hose that supplied air pressure to operate the grinder. I would hold the grinder out in front of me as I inched into a pipe that was not much wider than me. Behind me they would shine a bright light and secure a huge fan to blow air from my feet toward my face. I would inch my way forward toward the weld like a worm until the grinding wheel was in line with the weld. I'd then hit the switch. The grinder would whirl into action. I could feel its torque in my outstretched arms. Sparks would fly...and smoke would shoot ahead of me... blown by the giant fan. When my arms became too tired to grind any more they would pull me out by pulling on the grinder's hose. When the weld seemed smooth to me, they would give me some dye to put on the weld that showed any imperfections that I had missed and I would go at it again. It was a heck of a summer job, but I was delighted to get the \$3.75 an hour, big money at the time.

It was a great experience working with the laborers and supervisors at the plant. It was the perfect experience for a guy going to the University of Akron to study engineering and industrial management.



*What do locking neighbors in their house on trick night, chicken farming, the first Zippy, a dark room in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, transforming airline pilot training, improving GPS, owing a B&B, and Aviation Advisor at the White House on 9/11 have in common? They are all part of a long history of fascinating and often humorous stories in the life of author Charles Huettner. Laugh and experience vignettes of his amazing life and learn a bit about how God and the government work from behind the scenes. You will get a glimpse of the humor and intrigue he experienced during 33 years in the USAF, FAA, NASA, and the White House. You will read of his adventures while at Mt. Lebanon High School, the University of Akron, and Harvard. He piloted a supersonic T-38 jet to 50,000 feet, flew a hot air balloon at 700 feet over Atlanta Hartsfield Airport during airline rush hour, experienced the transition between the Clinton and Bush Administrations in the*

*White House, and toured the world with astronaut Buzz Aldrin, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, and former Congressman Bob Walker. Come along to laugh and experience the amazing life of Charles Huettner.*

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