

I grew up in a town of 800 people and discovered early on that I like two things enormously: small town life and going to school. I got good at school, so eventually I headed to college in another small town. It was expensive, and we had no money, but with grants, scholarships, loans and lots of part-time work, I made it, even planning to go to law school. But during my junior year, I realized that, although I liked the idea of more school, I didn't want to be a lawyer. I made plans to work on a shrimp boat down in Corpus Christi, but a professor of mine took it on himself to apply to something he called "grad school" for me, and one day they called me up and offered me a full ride. Now this was *interesting*. Instead of paying to go to school, instead of taking out loans and getting part-time jobs, I was going to get paid to go to school. That's when the penny dropped.

I got together with a few friends who were also headed to grad school and who also grew up in farm communities with little money. We decided that we would get our degrees and work on starting a college for people like us. We'd charge no tuition, but all the students would have jobs on campus. And we'd have a big old farm so we could grow our own food. And on and on.

By spring of 1981, I was Ph.D. Candidate at Indiana University, and the Midwest Political Science Association was holding its annual meeting in Cincinnati, just a couple of hours away. My brother-in-law lived there, and the Reds were in town, so Becky and I and another couple decided we would make a long weekend of it and enjoy ourselves, using the convention as our excuse. We saw some great games, but, sadly, somehow missed most of the meetings.

I don't like to lie to people, so to be sure I could answer honestly when asked if I had "attended the conference," I dropped by the hotel, wandered around a bit, then ducked into the pub for a beer. There were two other guys sitting at the bar, so I sat next to them and got the conversation going by asking where they were from. Berea College. Never heard of it. So they began telling me about it. It's a school for good students without much money. They have never charged tuition. All students have labor positions. And they have a big old farm.

I said you stole my idea. They said they were up here in Cincinnati looking for someone to replace one of them who was going on leave for the next year. I said I'll do it. And I did. And that one-year job turned into three, then five, and now almost 40.

So the lesson here I suppose is to always remember to wander into bars and talk to strangers. Your dreams might come true.