

The Uranium Adventure

By Susan E L Lake ©2022 SusanLake.net

The uranium stock certificates hang on the wall over my desk. They are a strange addition to the other things I choose to place around me as I work. Mostly there are family pictures all about with a single wall devoted to my past teaching. There are also a few writing-related mementos such as my first royalty check from Southwestern as well as the cover of my first “big” book. All of these items make sense. The stock certificates don’t.



It’s not that they don’t make an interesting series of images. They are really quite pretty with their gold seals and colored borders, but why are they clearly important enough to me to give up precious wall space?

They have a long history. For one, they hung in my father’s office for as long as I remember. They were as much a part of my memory of him as anything I can think of. I don’t know what they meant to him – perhaps a failed venture – perhaps a brave vision.

Looking at them now, you can see that they were all purchased in 1955. This was during a period of time when it looked like uranium was going to be a very important part of our world. While the bombing of Japan today seems like a horrible use of the power of the atom, in 1955 during the midst of the Cold War we didn’t see things as we do today. Uranium was needed to ensure our safety.

My father always had an interest in physics. He told a story about his graduation from college and entering the Marine Corps. He said that at the time he wanted to go on to get an advanced degree in physics, but thought he would be drafted. He said in hindsight that they would not have drafted anyone in that field, but he didn’t realize that at the time. So while he was overseas (the term always used for those fighting on other soil), he talked to those he served with about his belief that an atomic bomb was possible. One morning, someone came by to tell him that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. Initially he thought they were joshing him about his interest, but, of course, that was not the case.

So when uranium was discovered in Utah, he joined the “uranium rush” buying stock in several companies. Only three are mounted, but there are others. When my brother and I separated Dad’s possessions, we each took the ones we cherished the most. I took the stock certificates. My brother tried to dissuade me because he said, “In all fairness, I know these are worthless. There are countless ones out there selling for no more than a dollar or so.” But they had far greater value for me than that.

But my father didn’t just buy uranium stock, he also took us to search for it.

One winter my parents took us out of school for two weeks to vacation in Colorado. Living in deep South Texas (McAllen) we had never seen snow and this was to be our winter adventure. We saw not one flake of snow during the entire period, but that didn't turn out to be important for I saw many other things such as a real one-room schoolhouse (okay, actually two rooms) that I attended for a day. I still remember that classroom vividly.

I also remember the Geiger counter that went with us on the long trip from south to north. It wasn't until recently that I wondered where it had come from. My mother believes my father borrowed it from a friend. No matter. We played with it all the way to Colorado listening to its magic beeps.

My dad arranged to rent a Jeep while we were there and took it and us and the Geiger counter out to prospect for uranium. We rode over narrow mountain roads that still scare me as I remember back. We stopped often to pass the wand of the counter over areas hoping to hear the excited beep. We had no luck, but we did have an adventure. Looking back on the faded photographs, I can still remember the experience.



I've often said that children believe that whatever is happening in their lives happens in everyone else's. This is certainly true in this case. It never crossed my mind that no other person I've ever met has been prospecting for uranium. But we did. And the stock certificates on the wall will always remind me of that adventure.