

A Short Biography

I grew up in northern Indiana on the south shore of Lake Michigan--the dunes and beach were my back yard. I spent time boating, fishing, swimming, skiing, sailing, walking on the beach, and sitting around fires with friends watching the stars and listening to the waves fall on the shore; open spaces and the ever-changing lake are deep in my soul. That is Chicago across the water in the picture, taken from the dunes in front of our house; we visited often as I was growing up; though I don't like living in cities, they have their allure.



Boating on Lake Michigan taught me self-reliance, responsibility, to always watch the weather, and to take care of myself and those with me against the always present dangers of boating on a large and dangerous lake; it took many years to actually realize that I had learned these lessons due to boating. Probably due to my attention to safety, I started wearing seat belts in cars when I first started driving and insisted my passengers did also, which may have saved several lives once during an unavoidable off-road excursion in 1965, which ended with only very minor damage to the car but could have been a major disa.

I was good at building things as a child and restored and painted my first boat, a small beat up outboard fishing boat, at 13 or so. After that the yearly upkeep of our wooden boat taught me many new skills, as did a restoration, with friends, of a C Scow sail boat. I started piano lessons at an early age and studied until high school, when I played flute and piccolo in the band and orchestra, and then guitar, playing mostly folk and blues with friends and in several groups. Just an odd little tidbit that popped into my head, at the high school King and Queen dance, I won Smile, of all things.

I went to college at University of Denver, where I studied Political Science, Economics and Philosophy, which was my favorite; I learned to enjoy the mountains, sunsets and far-reaching views across the plains and mountain valleys. I narrowly escaped going to Vietnam because of a shoulder that was badly dislocated in high school wrestling, but that would not have been enough without what I can only call Synchronicity, a concept used by Jung to deal with incidents that are so far beyond coincidence it is ridiculous to call them that, but that is another story. With this threat no longer looming, I took a year off and traveled the country, first off-road across the California Desert, then with a Formula A racing team from Denver to Canada, Seattle, San Francisco and back to Denver again.



My wandering ended as I landed in Bloomington, IN where I attended graduate school in Counseling at IU and became attached to the trees, hills, country and, eventually, the mother of my daughter Rachel. While in graduate school I helped build a log cabin that I then lived in; I learned a great deal about house building, a skill that came in very useful as I've designed and built four more houses since then.

I didn't pursue a career in counseling, but started making custom furniture, which I did for around 12 years; here are just a few pieces from that era. The set on the left includes the table, chairs and chandelier with handmade chain, designed to be at home in your usual large stone medieval castle.



In the middle of this period I paused to spend several years on the PCB pollution issue which became personal; it was, and still is, threatening the health of all the world's creatures. Then, partly to recover, I spent 3½ years living on a sailboat, traveling the southeast coast and Bahamas, and restoring large old wooden yachts. Again I returned to Indiana and lived in Brown County for 18 years, where I built my fourth house. Where were the others? The second was a cabin in the mountains in Colorado, the third was a two story log house in Bloomington and the fifth is my current one made of Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs) with walls that are 8" thick.

I continued making custom furniture and other wooden things, and as treasurer of the local craft gallery, where we kept track of our inventory on paper, I decided to get a computer to make it easier...I thought; I soon discovered that there was no software available to handle such a task, so I started writing a program myself and found that I enjoyed it; not only does it require logic and precision, but it required me to examine how I solve problems in my own brain, and understand the process thoroughly enough to teach a computer. It also started my brain growing in new, and sometimes painful, ways; it is something like learning a new language and having to become quickly fluent. I soon was writing other programs and started a business selling software mail order through magazine ads, and moved away from woodwork; I wrote financial programs, address books, large fonts for vision impaired users, and foreign language fonts and editors, none of which were available at the time; Russian, Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit, Arabic, Math symbols and others.

In here somewhere a friend from IU approached me to write a program to control production and inventory at a General Foods plant that made desserts, jello, pudding etc. This multi-year project not only made the plant, by far, the most efficient General Foods plant in the country (out of 13), but changed the management and plant workers from two groups that didn't talk with each other into a close knit family that cooperated with each other and enjoyed their jobs more. This plant in Terre Haute developed such a well balanced inventory they started having to send product to east and west coast plants that had run out. This was one of the more satisfying and moving jobs I've done, mostly because of the change in the employees' feelings of being an important part of the whole process and learning to work together. In a painful twist of fate familiar to those who watch bureaucracies, this plant was closed down by the company offices on the east coast, who apparently learned absolutely nothing from the experience.

After 12 years or so of writing and selling software, I found myself feeling isolated at home, and together with changes taking place in the computer industry that made it more difficult to compete I finally gave in to the requests of a friend to go work at IU to get an academic department's computer and networking needs together from the jumbled mess they were in. Though the transition of being self-employed was difficult, I found the faculty and students, who are from many different countries, to be informal and pleasant to be with and I'm still there.

With the advent of digital cameras I finally was able to learn more about photography and gained a new interest in photographing flowers, birds, animals, insects, architecture and landscapes. For me photography is a way to capture, and look closer at, the small, the fast moving, and the far away things that we don't usually get to see in such detail; the feathers on a hummingbird's neck, the little hairs on spiders, ants and so many other insects, the limestone carvings 30 or 40 ft in the air on 100 year old buildings that can barely be seen from the ground let alone appreciated for the detail they hold and the time it took to create them. I find all of this fascinating, and it is a challenge to improve my skills.



I have always been interested in learning things, and each new thing I learn expands my perceptions, as if turning on x-ray vision for some new part of the world around me. Among other things I have painted with acrylics, oils, and computer graphics, done metal work, wood work, designed and built houses, fixed my own cars, learned a bit about photography, and played piano, flute and guitar. My friends call me a Renaissance man, but I just do what I do; I don't claim to be expert at anything, but if I didn't try to be good at what I do it wouldn't be worth doing. I enjoy cooking, growing a vegetable garden, and being outside when I can; walking in the woods, boating on Lake Monroe, walking on the shore looking for fossils, flowers, bugs or whatever there is to find, and visiting museums to ponder art works made thousands of years ago that are as good as any made today. I have played guitar in Celtic music sessions with friends in local restaurants for many years and, on piano accordion, play music from all over the world.

Well, enough for now.

Ron Nehrig

