

MOVING TO THE WEST BANK, OF THE MISSISSIPPI / PLANTING ROOTS IN DUBUQUE

Q: What grade were you in when you went to Dubuque?

QUINN: I had just finished eighth grade.

Q: Which put you in your first year of high school?

QUINN: First year, yes. I was a freshman in high school, and I didn't know a soul. I had kind of established myself with the little Catholic school in Bloomington. I was going to be moving into the Catholic high school where I would be somebody. I was a good -- one of the two really good basketball players in my class. So I was looking forward to playing sports at Trinity High School and being known and identified even if it was just a small school. As I told you, I had my first serious girl-friend; my first kiss was with Mary Shanks in Bloomington. And then, boom, we were up and gone and with it all of my dreams when unexpectedly in the summer of 1956 we moved to Dubuque, Iowa. There I would essentially be beginning all over again.

From Third Grade to Eighth Grade [between 1951 and 1956], I had lived in seven different dwellings, in six different neighborhoods, in five different cities, in four different states.

Coming to Dubuque had now added one more to each of those numbers. However, like transplanted rice, my roots would sink deep in Iowa soil as over the next eight years, we lived in the same house in the same neighborhood. I would attend high school and college in Dubuque all while living at home. To this day, if someone asks me where I am from, I say Dubuque Iowa.

So, as we got to Dubuque in August, 1956, my Dad had a job and my Mom was stable. Dubuque was a hugely Catholic town. I mean like 60% were Catholics. We lived in a parish--St. Columbkille's--that had a Catholic high school, but there was also an all-boys Catholic school called Loras Academy, which was taught by priests and the students wore military uniforms. My Mom thought that a military school, that looked so prestigious and taught by the priests, was just what Kenny needed. So they figured they would come up with the additional tuition and I would go Loras Academy.

So I showed up at Loras Academy on the first day of school. My Dad dropped me off in his car. I went in. I did not know a single person. I didn't even know how to get home, but my Dad was going to come to pick me up after school. Well, they let school out early. It was the first day and just orientation. I walked out the door, and didn't know where to go. I didn't know how to phone my Dad. I knew my address. I had memorized that, but no idea where it was or even in what

direction. I was standing there looking lost. One boy sort of looked at me and said, "Do you know where you are going?"

And I replied, "No, I don't know. But I need to get home."

And he then asked, "Where do you live?"

And I told him the address and he said, "Well, I go that way. Come on, I'll show you the way." His name was Bob Holz and he's still my oldest and dearest friend. He lives in Des Moines now. Anyway, he walked me to his house and from there he pointed me in the right direction and I got home.

Q: Well, what was Dubuque like in those days?

QUINN: Dubuque was about 50,000 people, a little bigger than Bloomington, and was built on those beautiful hills created by the glacier that gauged out the Mississippi River. It was a very Catholic town; it was a river town; it was the western-most extension of the Industrial Revolution. So there were all these factories along the Mississippi river. It was a union town and heavily Democratic, unlike any other place in Iowa. There were packing plants and woodworking companies and a molasses company and businesses that had blue collar workers. It was a hardworking place with a lot of ethnic Germans and Irish. The Irish and the Germans each had their own Catholic church, their own Catholic grade school, whether it was Dubuque or even little towns around Dubuque. It was a hugely religious place. There were five Catholic high schools and several seminaries for training young men for the priesthood. There were mother houses for the training of nuns. There was a Catholic hospital, a Catholic sanitarium, a Catholic men's college (Loras College) and a Catholic women's college, (Clarke College).

There was no hard liquor to drink in Iowa in those days, but you could buy beer if you were 21. Dubuque was filled with taverns. It had to have one of the highest per capita array of taverns in America. It had a tavern culture of going out to your neighborhood tap to have a beer. It's where you socialized, where you played shuffleboard games and in a few instances, where you bought a pizza, which was just becoming a thing. Pizza was just coming on the scene in '56 and '57. Euchre was the local card game of Dubuque, a sort of working man's bridge that was played in almost every tavern. I recall playing Euchre and eating pizza from Don's Tap in the basement of Bob Holz's house. Others in our posse included Ron "Red" Mc Dermott, John Jensen, Bill Reilly and John "Fingers" Delaney. When we were 21, the game moved to college bars such as the Holiday Inn [no relation to the hotel chain] and the Cavalier. If you got very far from Dubuque, no one had ever heard of Euchre. I taught my wife from Vietnam and our three children to play Euchre and we still have fun playing it when our family is together.

There was a summer Holy Name Baseball League for teenagers in which each parish had a team and we played under the lights at Petrakis Park, down near the river front. I loved playing for St. Columbkille's team and was an outfielder and relief pitcher. I played football [for two years] in high school at Loras Academy and baseball and ran a little track, but basketball was my main sport. I was pretty competitive at basketball for a year or two and was a starter on the Freshman Team. My best memory was sinking the winning jump shot from the left side of the basket in overtime against Jefferson Jr. High, just as our coach yelled "Nooo!" imploring me not to shoot. It bounced once on the rim and went through to put us ahead right before the buzzer sounded. To which the Coach then yelled "Yessss!"

But, as other boys got bigger and better and I didn't grow any taller than I was in 8th grade, I dropped down significantly on my amount of playing time. Still, one of my biggest thrills was just making the team at Wahlert the new Catholic high school in my senior year.

I went to Loras Academy, a Catholic all-boys school, for the first three years of high school. There also were three girls' academies and then one mixed boys and girls coed Catholic high school, plus a public high school in Dubuque. In my senior year, a new central Catholic high school called Wahlert opened, replacing all of the other Catholic schools. It was named not after a bishop but rather Harry Wahlert, the man who founded the local meat packing company-- Dubuque Pack-- and who had given a significant amount of money for the construction of the school. As a result, they named it after him and his family. I worked one summer at "the Pack," including a memorable stint right after graduation from college in the "hide house" spreading skins of just slaughtered cattle still covered in blood and feces.

My other connection to food and agriculture came through my friend Ron McDermott, who lived up the street from me in Dubuque. We hung around together and played Holy Name baseball at St. Columbkille's, even though we went to different high schools. Ron's dad kept a small farm outside Dubuque near the towns of St. Catherine's and St. Donatus. They retained the old French names although most of the settlements now were German and Irish. He would take us out to work on some neighbor's farms so I learned to shock oats and throw bales of hay, clear brush and enjoy hearty "hired hand" lunches on Willie Knepper's farm.

One interesting thing about the little towns surrounding Dubuque, was that while they were all Catholic, there would be a clear separation between Irish Catholics and German Catholics. In Cascade, a town of just 2,000 people or so, there were two Catholic churches: St. Mary's for the Germans and St. Martin for the Irish. Each had its own grade school and its own separate high school.

Q: Who was running Wahlert high school?

QUINN: It was a diocesan school, with diocesan priests and nuns. There were nuns from several orders who taught there. There were also some lay teachers. At the time it opened in 1959, it was the largest high school in the state.

Q: Did you get any feel by this time for foreign affairs, foreign countries?

QUINN: No. What I did at in my one year at Wahlert was that I excelled in science. I won the Bausch and Lomb Science Award as the top science student. I took both biology and chemistry in my senior year. I got A's in both. I thought I was going to be a chemical engineer, which was what I started out to study in college.

I made the basketball team at Wahlert. I didn't play a lot but I was on the team, which was a big deal, as we were the biggest school in the state, ranked third in the state in basketball. We seemed destined to go to the state tournament and my grade school dream of stepping on the court during the state finals was about to come true --until we lost the first game of the tournament to cross town rival Dubuque Senior High. We were 14 and 4, and Senior's record was just the opposite. Plus we were playing on our home court where we had never lost. With a few seconds left, we were behind 57 to 55, when my close friend John "Fingers" Delaney launched a three quarter court length shot just as the buzzer sounded. The Wahlert crowd went crazy when the shot banked in believing he had tied the game and would send it into overtime. But when the referees turned to the official scorer, Professor Bob O'Connell a physics teacher at Wahlert, he waved it off as being too late. It was the right call and an amazing display of ethical behavior by Prof. O'Connell, but it is still a heartbreaking memory to this day.

Q: Oh yeah.

QUINN: I had a girlfriend in my senior year whom I met by asking her to attend the Military Ball, our biggest school dance of the year. Military training was a required part of our school curriculum for boys. We had had it all through high school at Loras Academy and it continued at Wahlert. It was high school ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps). We wore army uniforms to school three days a week. I did really well in ROTC and when I was a senior I was made the cadet commandant of the Battle Group, the entire brigade, with the rank of colonel. I was the top military student. A photo ran in the local paper of my date Carol Dolter pinning on my colonel's eagles.

I guess to the extent that military training prepared us for war, this training began to orient me internationally. But the thing that most got me intrigued in foreign affairs was that in 1956 John Kennedy, then Senator Kennedy, the young, Catholic junior Senator from Massachusetts, gave

the commencement address at Loras College. I wasn't there, but it was a big deal. After he became president, it was really significant, because I had been brought up being told by the nuns that I had to accept that I could never be president because I was Catholic.

Q: Yeah.