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## **New Orleans: The Palette along the Gulf (1984)**

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*May 8, 1983, New York, N.Y.: (Journal, copy to Dad)*—I will have to learn the balance between Field and HQ. This came in bold relief Friday when I commented to one of the wiser sages in the department that people in HQ have bigger titles and make more money, but everything I had seen in structure the previous week wasn't so unfamiliar at all.

"This is like one big field office," I said.

"This is HQ, buddy, and don't you forget it."

Huh?

"People here tell the field what to do. You don't make points around here carrying the field flag. This is headquarters."

The fact that HQ may not know what it is doing is irrelevant. The message was that to survive, you adopt the form of the HQ mentality, but maneuver in such a way that you let the field do what it can.



*May 16, 1983, New York, N.Y.: (Journal, copy to Dad)*—We'll be former Illinoisans shortly. I had no idea I would grow so fond of the place. Chicago and environs turned out to be a great place to live and work. The children thrived, the world was rich, and the family was left intact. I learned a lot about myself and how to make a living and how the world works. Sun Oak and I were able to have our equity nearly double, and we now return to a fine house in a fine town, an absolutely outrageous mortgage and deep debt, but on a path in the corporation that could lead to considerable authority in a decade or so. All in all, not bad. In fact, damn good.

My travel itinerary is going to broaden out a bit, it seems. My scope is widening. I used to think in terms of a few states in the Midwest. Now it's all the countries we do business in. I am sitting in on the management meetings of the division on Monday mornings, where the brass tell each other what is happening. I learn about background negotiations with partners and governments over acreage and partnerships. I learn about ongoing wells. I heard something about China last week in a meeting and five days later read about it in the *New York Times*. Hmmm. Like you had said, I am beginning to learn where the news comes from.



*June 13, 1983, New York, N.Y.: (Journal, copy to Dad)*—The move east went well, notwithstanding the frustrating details needing doing and the rest at work (speech rewrite, brochure edit) learning how to get to and from work on time, filling in expense forms, learning new names, jobs, functions, areas of interest, E&P Division politics, dynamics, what flies and what

won't. And doing all that while appearing in control, which I of course am not despite my effort to appear so. Calm? Forget it. I act calm. But I'm not. It will be six months before I can relax.

The travel started. The trip to New Orleans was hot, steamy and informative. The timing was good. Mobil's E&P office there has just paid \$300 million to the U.S. government for permission to drill offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. That is the amount the management authorized to bid on the "blocks" of offshore acreage being offered at a least sale by the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service. The MMS lease sale was a very big deal. Mobil's trip to that auction cost shareholders \$300 million—and that is to be paid to the feds and deposited into the federal treasury before Mobil spends a nickel on a well.

One parcel E&P bid \$90 million on, with the next highest bid at \$800,000! Oops. Mobil won the bid, duh. But there were an awful lot of questions inside the division, the corporation and the industry about how come Mobil spent \$89 million more than necessary for the block? The reason, of course, is that our guys have done the seismic work on the site and calculate there is oil there. Or, put another way, the E&P explorationists believe there is and were able to convince the Executive Committee to risk \$90 million on their belief. You can imagine the reaction when no other company, which runs the same surveys we do, thought there was oil there. Lots of Monday morning quarterbacking.

I met the planning manager in New Orleans who recommended the bid. He was completely unfazed by the political swirl his action had caused. "Hey, that's what I'm in this job to do," he said.

New Orleans is a strange town. Creole (mix of French and Spanish) and Cajuns (the French Acadians banished from Nova Scotia in the early 18th century) chose the biggest swamps in North America to make a city. It is flooded at the moment, owing to weather. The levees are near breaking point from the water. Morgan City, the oil patch town and haven to Mobil's base camp and also lots of ne'er-do-well drifters, is about to be put under water by the Army Corp of Engineers, which would rather flood Morgan City than Baton Rouge.

Louisiana is a state divided in the middle, north and south. South are the Cajuns and Creoles. North are the regular Americans, hill people, planters, Scotch-Irish, English, etc., that look to Shreveport and environs for cultural support and direction. There is no North-South highway in Louisiana. The Northern folks don't like the Southern (New Orleans and its works) and vice versa. The French Quarter in New Orleans is a tourist, honky tonk, porno kind of place with a few good restaurants with seafood and the rest clip joints. One of the dirtiest cities I've ever seen. Except this place had humidity and moss growing on trees and buildings that are believed to be quaint. I don't think I liked it. But Mobil E&P has some 1,400 employees there, and New Orleans is an oil industry powerhouse.

*March 20, 1984, Stamford, Conn.: (Journal, copy to Dad)*—It's spring finally. The bulbs are poking up with energy and we are waiting for a bloom or two. We brought a bunch from Chicago and I got a few in Holland last fall. We have our fingers crossed.

The homestead looks a bit tired after the pounding from the winter of '83-'84, which from my experience was about average, except for the ice storm or two. One time in early February I was driving very slowly down Sky Meadow toward High Ridge in Stamford on a sheet of ice. I had traction, I thought, until there it went—the car simply went its own way, sideways first, then the other way next. I was going about 5 mph toward a stone wall and, wham, I hit it! Luckily there was a snow and ice pack in front of the wall, so damage was even less than slight. But what a scare!

The green paint on the cedar shingle siding we have is aging and awful, pure and simple. Not just from a color standpoint. Its peeling and we're going to have to figure out what to do. I plan serious yard sculpture this spring, at Sun Oak's suggestion, cutting back some overgrown shrubs and opening up the land around the base of the house. It should improve the place's looks.



*June 14, 1984, Stamford, Conn.: (Journal)*—Been hot this way for about a week—whew! In the 90s, with same high number of humidity. Feel like I'm on some Calcutta commuter train, rather than Metro North. I spent two evenings cutting the lawn last weekend. It was so hot, I waited until after dinner to start, but the heat was still so intense, I could only spend 90 minutes at a stretch. It being a 180-minute lawn, it took two evenings.

Sun Oak got a compliment about her garden work from a neighbor the other day. Made her week. We were out moseying around, along with the whole neighborhood, because the electric power had failed. There was too much demand load, and some switch somewhere controlling North Stamford blew, leaving all without air conditioning (and other electrical essentials) for a few hours. Remember that tree near the patio? The one I complained about blocking the view of the yard? It's gone. Cut it down two weeks ago, spent six hours on the job, the cutting down of the tree being the easy part, as the cutting into small pieces and then hauling those pieces the time-consumer. Also, I did a bit of pruning of the pine on the other side of the patio. The place looks tip-top.

## **5. NEW ORLEANS**

*August 21, 1984, New Orleans, La.: (Journal, copy to Dad)*—I was sprung from the velvet cage that is Room 653 at 150 East 42nd St. for a few weeks to fill in at the E&P office in New Orleans. The fact that the World's

Fair was going on had nothing to do it, and would occupy only part of my duties as Mobil has paid \$1.3 million as its part of the Energy Pavilion, which is a very neat exhibit that is made to look like a bona fide offshore exploration platform. The family is being good about my enforced absence. I felt sorry for myself at being away from them. I'm the father of an 8- and a 10-year-old, and a husband of 13 years; I am wedded to the notion that I am a family man and my place is with them, not off in some corporate development assignment that will permit me to come home just once in six weeks. But I'm taking your advice about it. It helps that Sun Oak and the kids are being good soldiers. I won't make a scene at work, no incidents. Corporate soldiers, that's us. Flexible and eager for more.



You notice the difference right off. You get out of the airplane and the first color you see is purple. These colored rugs are thick, dark and wide and bold. That's what you see and it gets more and more offbeat from there.

The central fact of life in New Orleans is water—the Mississippi River water to be more precise, but also the water of Lake Pontchartrain to the north, which is about the size of Rhode Island, and still 50 miles of river before you get to the Gulf of Mexico, too.

But it is water everywhere that determines the place.

New Orleans exists 1) Because of water—owing to the control of land and water traffic desired by the French in 1705); 2) In spite of water—the city is built below the banks of the Mississippi and the lake; 3) Despite the yellow fever—which mosquitoes brought from swamp waters to cut the early populations in half every decade or so for a century; 4) and forever contending with water—for example, cemeteries are built on top of the land, as burials below ground impossible as gravediggers find water two feet down.

It rained every day I was in town; big rain—the kind that after a moment or two soaks you like a fall into a pond. Not to worry if you get caught in it, though, because surer than hell, if you were outside already, it will end in a half-hour and you won't have to worry any water from the clouds, as the water that is soaking you now is coming from the pores of your skin as your perspiration soaks your clothes from the inside this time.

The next thing you notice about New Orleans is that you have absolutely lost your sense of direction. North is the hardest thing to figure out. You get to understand why locals refuse to discuss points on the compass. They say Uptown, Downtown, Lake and River. West Bank is to the south, actually. The Mississippi River, a body of water the entire world knows flows north to south, in New Orleans actually runs south, east and then north in a crescent around the city. It is called Crescent City. Get it? To the North, where you know there is supposed to be land, say, like the state

of Mississippi or Louisiana, there is a vast body of water, Lake Pontchartrain, which has across it the longest bridge I've ever seen, stretching to the horizon, where it disappears.

The problem with directions is only somewhat compounded because the city is a quilt of neighborhoods, the most famous being the French Quarter, but there are others—Garden District, Central Business District, Irish Quarter, Warehouse District, Treme, Marigny. Each is different and come up on wham—new turf, different rules.

Then there are the accents. This is the South. They have Brooklyn accents. Except for those who don't, say like the Cajuns, who don't speak English much anyway, more of an Old French, which even the French don't speak anymore. I haven't heard a Southern drawl yet.

New Orleans has mold on it. It's old, brazen, silly. That Mardi Gras stuff, for example. I mean that is the craziest, most ostentatious stunt going. But here it is very serious, in the sense that New Orleans takes being silly, sexual, musical, lazy, different, sensual and visual seriously. Particularly in these days of tourism dollars. Silliness is big business. The place revels in its dark past. After all, the place was settled, populated and otherwise put together by the flotsam, jetsam and rejects of the world. There were the original French in 1705 of Bienville, etc; not the swells, counts and such. The people they brought with them are of interest. They were from every gutter in France. The French had to import boatloads of Germans to get things working right. That's the truth.

Then there were the Acadians, those of French descent who were expelled from Nova Scotia by the English at some battle point in the mid 18th century. These folks were originally from the Acadia section of France and they were shipped out en masse on boats and dumped on the coast of Louisiana. They survived in the swamps, isolated, marrying into each other's families until they were all related and speaking some unique French lingo. These Acadians became 'Cadians, and finally Cajuns of the bayous.

After these came the Spanish, real high-tone. The French Quarter in New Orleans became Spanish, which it was for 30 years before it was be French before it was American finally, after President Thomas Jefferson bought it illegally, or rather Napoleon sold it illegally, and Jefferson spent 700 percent more than he was authorized to in 1803. He set out only to buy New Orleans the city. But Napoleon wanted money to fight the English. He knew he couldn't defend the entire Mississippi River basin, anyway, so he sold one-third of the Continent to the U.S., which at the time was a modest group of English-speaking republicans holding domain to a sliver of land along the east coast of the North American continent, owing to an improbable string of good luck and French aid. It was the biggest purchase of land ever, and probably the most important thing Jefferson did. The Louisiana

Purchase had more to do with U.S. development than just about anything. It would end European influence for good, though there were a few hits and starts to go.

It became home port to slavery, of course, and to loose rocks and river rats from Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and various spots in Yankeedom. It was home to hookers and pirates. Swamp bait. They eat crabs and something called crawfish here, but they spell it crayfish, which look like baby lobsters or big shrimp.

Today New Orleans is a city of color. I walked back to the Hyatt Regency one Sunday afternoon and there were a whole bunch of folks walking around waiting to check in, dressed nice, going to and from banquets, church do's, conventions, et al. Then I noticed I was seeing an entire population without a white person. I should say traditional, old fashioned, white person, like say up North. Here white people are very few. The folks of New Orleans are so mixed up racially, have so many blends of genes, they are shades of color. Then you hear the accent and you realize that this is a new kind of people.

I noticed all this because my old city instincts didn't work. My street sense of what was what didn't compute as I walked around town. This, of course, is the New Orleans rule. Take Spain's first governor in French New Orleans in 1769. His name was Alexander O'Reilly. Say what? O'Reilly was no doubt a son of the so-called Wild Geese who fled Ireland for Europe in the mid-century and found employment in the armies of England's Catholic enemies—France and Spain. The details of this particular O'Reilly stayed a mystery to me on this trip. But there you have a spud named O'Reilly in the service of Spain in New Orleans in 1769 facing a rebellion of his own from some high-minded French who don't want people who talk different telling them what's what. They rebelled. O'Reilly ordered a few of them shot. For this he is forever known as Bloody O'Reilly. It was his sorry fate, as in fact he was one of New Orleans' most skilled administrators who over a decade did what colonial governors are supposed to do—help everybody get rich. Not only that, he helped provide capital to the Yankee rebels led by Washington to his North, who went to war with England a few years later.

Tonight outside the window of my hotel room, which is 22 stories above Poydras, there is a thunder and lightning show you wouldn't believe possible to exist with you alive at the same time. Weather! Here it has a new meaning. Rain every day. Yesterday I was in the Mobil complex next door, this time only on the 10th floor, and I saw out the window across the sky, moving across the city like a dark gray woolen blanket favored by Maine campers, is a cloud cover that blocked out the light from the sun. Ominous is the only way to describe it. Within minutes the air is full of water, thunderous noise, booming flashes of lightning to make you wish for sunglasses

and think of camera strobe lights. Tonight the flashes illuminate the dark streets. Yet now, a few minutes later, the storm is gone.

The air clears after these storms that roll in each day this time of year. They bring with them the fear of God—wondrous glory and power. After you feel a bit of gaiety, a surge of clarity, as you are still a half-hour before the true humid heat will return. Every day. When the moisture returns to hang in the air like a warm sticky cloud, even then, it is, you know, only a temporary thing, as the roiling storms will return.

For all the talk up Northeast and Midwest about the awful Gulf of Mexico in the summer, the humidity, as bad as it is, and it is, still isn't that bad. You can get used to it. It warms the bones, gives soul—down deep. There is a feeling to it as you have when you are perhaps in a steam bath and enjoying the feeling, not forever, but for a while. There is air conditioning, after all; all one need do is go inside somewhere, which you of course do. But after breathing the compressed, processed, manufactured and purified dry air inside these huge modern glass and steel towers, you can go outside and get real. Seductive and steaming, like a raw kiss given and taken when you mean it.



After I was here two weeks, a pal came from HQ to do a story for the company newspaper and stayed a few nights. The Thursday he was here we went to the French Quarter and I got a sense of how New Orleans works on your senses. We went down to Bourbon Street, complete with black shoeshine boys, white college students, cops, dopers and hookers. Bourbon Street is a galaxy of temptation. That is the lure New Orleans has projected to the world for generations and it is still true, only in a very commercial, legal and packaged sort of way these days.

There is a quality, though, to the place. Sex, frolic, the dark side. It is sold in the stores, it has commercial value. There are the tawdry stores, porn, peep and massage parlors; same as Times Square but hidden away. Here in Bourbon Street the sexual haunts of yesterday—once called Storyville—are packaged and sold as the dark side of nostalgia. Storyville, the red light district of the turn of the century, is now sold as a quaint notion, an interesting municipal peccadillo, now with time more acceptable, a tourist attraction. One saloon, seeking high-power tourist money, was just renovated two years ago. The windows to the place were doorways along the sidewalk and opened around the corner so that all walking by can easily see in. Rock 'n' roll blared through the place. Yuppies with designer blue jeans and polo shirts stood at the bar. On the wall behind the bar were antique photographs taken by a Storyville voyeur of yesteryear, a poet, of the naked hookers of that era. It is all so innocent. The women of Storyville. A tourist attraction,

like sea gulls flying in the wind above a Cape Cod coastal dune.

Can you imagine what the sons and daughters raised in the country villages on the inland rivers of the past century must have thought when they got to New Orleans then? Painted women; fire water; lust. It had to blow them away. Brain fire! These visitors either stayed and were overwhelmed or escaped after a dance with the devil, to swear off the city of sin and build the town in the country's mind as the sensuous seductive locale with the weather that matches what you feel here anyway. Now that was a tourist attraction.



The four weeks I was resident at the Hyatt Regency/Poydras next to the Superdome, the hotel has been occupied by as many black people as I have been with under one roof, big roof too. Now not to make a race deal out of this, mind you, just an observation. It occurred to me yesterday at breakfast that much of my view in New Orleans is that it was inhabited by citizens one might call in old times colored, and that so was my hotel.

The waitress, who was white, who came over to me yesterday morning to serve coffee, asked pleasantly: "Are you with the Chrysler group?"

"No," said I, teasing. "Do I look like a Chrysler guy?"

"Well, you have that blue suit, you know, conservative..." She was a bit embarrassed and quickly walked off after pouring the coffee. A few minutes later, she came back. "Well, to be truthful, you kind of stuck out. The groups here for the last few months have all been, well, you know, black..."

She wasn't whispering particularly, but she was being discreet. The guys on both sides of me were, well, you know... They took no notice at all.

Then it hit me, why damn, she's right. First week it was some black fraternity group, like Delta Alpha Epsilon, fellows in their 20s and 30s. They wore white shorts, and blue T-shirts with the fraternity's name on them. They talked to each in other—brother this and brother that. One fellow complained about the money he was spending and how expensive it was here and how boring it was too.

The next group the following week was the Knights of something or other, with fancy badges, head gear and sashes. Andrew Young, Atlanta's mayor, and a Congregationalist minister grad from the Hartford Seminary was a guest speaker one day. They were dressed very formally—the women in white formal dresses and the men in conservative black suits. This week is was International Brotherhood of the Elks, with the fez hats, and fancy necklaces. They were prosperous, middle-aged, middle-class. And there you are. There were 25,000 Elks in New Orleans that week. Parades, speeches, election of officers. The whole deal. The elevator is where I was impressed; I was just the only white guy in the hotel. These folks were as rich and complex in humanity as any group, of course. End of observation. No lesson.

Only this was the first city where I experienced this; a varied world.



The weather and terrain is clear in my senses here owing to the five hours of helicopter riding I've taken in two chumps to and from Mobil offshore oil and gas production platforms about 50 miles out in the Gulf. My job was to work on some publicity material that we'd use when the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service honors the New Orleans guys for superior offshore operations.

Both trips began in the parking lot below, in the shadow of the Superdome next door. The buildings are so tall and large at this end of the city's Central Business District that the Superdome, which is a super and a dome (right outside my window at the hotel too) is in fact the next building to me here. Choppers of the VIP industry/politico variety can land in a portion of the parking lot on the other side, right near the marquee with the Miller beer sign on it. The Mobil choppers are piloted by Vietnam War vets, who these years later, have grown older and thicker with a bit of gray at the temples. Their Smilin' Jack expressions of cool remove give the rider the sense of security that these guys have done it before under conditions when pension plans were not the primary concern of your quiet evenings at home with the family.

They fly the whirling, gawky birds straight, nothing fancy. You elevate to, say, 1,000 feet and hang up there going 140 mph. I sat in front next to the pilot, and the glass enclosure was like a clear bubble around us. In this way you can feel you are completely suspended—look, Ma, no hands. At times, in a kind of vertigo, you feel as though you are standing still, except for the incredible noise inside the bell and the slow movement of the water and swamp and land below.

"I'm from Oklahoma," said the pilot, named B.J., after he adjusted my head gear and microphone and showed me how to work the button at my left foot. After a few tries, I was able to manipulate my foot, ears and mouth in a sequence so we could carry on a conversation through the headphones. B.J. used the trigger finger at his joystick to activate the conversation, not machine guns. The only thing we were shooting today was the bull.

I asked how he got to Louisiana. "I married me a Coon-ass," he said, using the local term of endearment for Cajun, though to earn the name one need only be near Coon-asses, say like in Southern Louisiana where I heard Sen. Bennett Johnston (D-La.), a red faced Scotch-Irish, assure a group of Mobil employees he was the real deal as he was a "Cajun in my heart."

B.J. proceeded to show me what you should look for from 1,000 feet up. At first, all I could think of was that there was light below my feet, as the glass bell enclosed us nearly completely. At first, we saw the buildings in the

city, of course, and cars and streets, but soon they were gone. Below now were swamps. They were deceptively soft looking, the way pines look from a low flying airplane, as though you could reach out and move your hand across the soft green felt. Only like the pines, with branches and spines and cones and twigs that could cut into your skin like a skipping stone cuts into water, these swamps below were at the edge of a jungle that would engulf you and never let you up. The swamps then become land, or seem like land, as B.J. told me they in fact were floating islands of swamp and land, say five to six feet deep and then in a moment under water again. If you tried to walk on them you'd struggle in growth up to mid-thigh and be unable to move. There are spots of high ground here and there, which have strips of road atop them and modest homes alongside built feel off the ground on piles or blocks, with boats where the family car should be. Cattle will come into view now and again, walking on what look like these swamps.

"Guess they must have webbed feet or something," joked B.J., with a thin smile.

Then we flew over some land, long and narrow, that looked like a planted patch of Illinois or Iowa.

"Sugar cane," B.J. explained, "worth good money. Not to let any high ground go to waste."

Mostly you see nothing below, however, except more green swamp and the meandering snakes of the waterways below, separating those oddly shaped swamp patches. Then, as if out of nowhere, which of course is true, there is a one-room square shack, just large enough to contain a man and his companions, say wife and kids, or by himself, but that's it. Tied to a small floating front stoop is a row boat, no power, and large triangular metal rods with netting inside.

"Butterfly nets they call them," B.J. said, "good for crawfish, or what have you..."

I asked about who used them.

"Yeah, sometimes people live in them sure. Mostly, they're just Coon-ass camps; say to visit now and then when you want to get away."

"From what?" I asked

"Don't know," he said, smiling, "I hear Coon-asses don't travel much; kind of stay at home types. 'Why should I go anywhere?' asks a Coon-ass, 'I'm already here.' Get it?"

The shacks crop up every three to five miles; we spotted them here and there. They are a way of life. With the alligators, catfish, cotton mouths, egrets, wrens and terns.

After we'd flown about 50 miles we left the swamps behind, and were over the water. Small waves, like the ones on Long Island sound, on a regular day were evident with wind and beaches, but not enough so that you can sense surf.

“See the island over there,” B.J. said, indicating I should look over to the right at the barren slip of land below. It was shaped like the Nike sneaker swatch design. “Coon-asses built a resort hotel on it once.” The island below was completely without human construction as far as I could tell from up here at 1,000 feet. “Hurricane whipped it out. Coon-asses ain’t too smart.”

I thought the remark a bit sharp coming from such as who had married a Cajun. I turned to look over at B.J., who was now smiling like a kid who’d caught me in the joke. “Not smart like us Okies.”

This smart aleck remark had just the right amount of honest to goodness ethnic humor to put the lie to all pretensions. New Orleans and its environs nurture such tolerance.

My mind drifted off from the sound and sights; I gazed over the horizon, looking at the wonder of the earth. Stretched in front of us were marvelously beautiful cloud formations; some dramatic and high, others white and fluffy like cotton after the gin. Below the water stretched as far as the eye could see, the coastline now disappearing as we got deep into the Gulf. The water took on different colors; here under the direct sun a green blue; there, under a cloud, a hard iron blue-black.

Suddenly on the horizon, I began to make out the platforms, on stilts, like hotels combined with automatic computer driven and controlled pipe, heaters, coolers, pumps and other such wizardry, whose function, at root, is to generate the kind of fuel that keeps the machine, in which I was suspended, safely above it all.

Soon I see dozens of such platforms on the horizon, bunched together here and there, like patches of crab grass, poking above the lawn so you notice them, not enough particularly, but enough so you see them.

Ahead of us is a cloud, quite large, billowing well above us at about 8,500 feet or so. Beneath it is a cloud of fog, or dense moisture.

“Rain,” B.J. said, moving the chopper so that we passed the weather to our left, as if he was avoiding a pothole on the superhighway. We move alongside; sure enough, behind the cloud was clear sky. Just as easy as that, B.J. had taken just minutes to navigate us around a thunderstorm, dense rain that so bunched up you could avoid it easily. What a feeling.

“An inexperienced pilot will fly through that stuff—just once!”

A short time later, we approached a wall of white clouds, not dark or ominous, but cotton and light. The sunlight danced through the clouds. There was color, I thought at first, wondering if the flight was causing me to hallucinate. But it was there, very faint at first, and then clearer. It was a rainbow, just a slice of the arch but as we got closer the rainbow grew in clarity, and the arch extended higher and higher. We were nearly into the cloud now, and the sun was playing with the moisture ahead and the rainbow grew in clarity and

intensity, brighter and brighter. The arch was nearly a circle around us, as though we were flying through the center of color, then suddenly a second rainbow appeared. We flew into the cloud the color of a painter's palette. This was simple beauty beyond description, it was so glorious.

Just then, B.J.'s words came into my headset. "Something, eh?" I glanced over to him and there wasn't exactly a smile on his face; more like an expression of pure joy.