

Chapter 6

Free at Last

I was quite proud of myself when I returned to New York City. Despite being malnourished, intestinally challenged by the food, and getting ripped off by Indian Customs officials, I had not only survived India and Nepal, I actually enjoyed it. This was a milestone in my maturation as a traveler. I would never be a world traveler – the filth and stench were too much and I liked my amenities. But I learned that, despite the many inconveniences one faced when traveling, foreign places and cultures were intriguing for reasons I was learning to appreciate. What I particularly liked was the undeserved status that westerners enjoyed in the developing world. Even if you had no money, no achievements, no talents, no ambition, and no principles like me, for some indiscernible reason people in developing countries still revered Americans and Europeans. It was like you were a sahib in the era of the British Raj. This was fine by me. I didn't get any of that in the US of A.

I certainly didn't get any respect at Columbia University Dental School, where I was considered an unreformed troublemaker with questionable skills who had nothing but disdain for the traditional hierarchies in the dental profession. Columbia's faculty didn't like the Back of the Room Gang in general, and Stan Robertson and me in particular; and assigned our faculty nemesis, Fritz Pandopo, to torture us in our final year. His hidden agenda was to get us to quit. As our senior year commenced, Pandopo pulled Stan and me aside saying, "You two are on my shit list. I will do everything in my power to hound you, nag you, terrorize you, and make your lives miserable in the next year. If you cross me, there will be hell to pay."

I was shaking in my boots after this encounter. Normally, I would have dispatched the diminutive runt with a swift kick to the balls and be done with him. Pandopo was six inches shorter and twenty pounds lighter than me and, while I disdain violence, there is a time and place for that when the opponent is a dwarf. But in this situation, Pandopo was holding all the cards. He could harass us with impunity. Stan and I wanted to get through our final year, get our degrees, and get the hell out of there, but now Pandopo, all five feet six inches of him, was standing in our way breathing fire and brimstone with threats of retribution.

When faced with a challenge like this, serious students would pull themselves up by their bootstraps, buckle down, and face the challenge head on. Stan and I were not serious students. Our response was more pragmatic – we freaked out. After three weeks of Pandopo's relentless abuse, we were on the verge of a nervous breakdown. When he saw our weakness, Pandopo intensified his reign of terror.

"You two have to pull yourselves together," Sabrina advised. She knew both of us too well, particularly what spineless cowards we were. "You're letting Pandopo get the best of you. Why don't you go to Columbia's Student Health Clinic and get some help." This was not a bad idea. My anxiety level was so high I was ready to bail. No way could I tolerate another year of this.



Cashman's doctor at Columbia's Student Health Clinic

The Student Health Clinic at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center was a laid back place. The physicians working there were not the *crème de la crème* of the medical profession. They were slackers and rascals who wanted to get by with the least amount of work. Sound familiar? They only worked a six hour day. Their patients were mostly alcohol and drug overdoses, and students with the clap who didn't get the condom on in time. When I walked in looking distraught and apprehensive, the doctor's first reaction was "What drugs have you been taking?" When I told him about the runt Pandopo and

his reign of terror, the doctor was totally empathetic.

"I know exactly how you feel. When I was in medical school, I faced similar situations with jerks like Pandopo. They despise nonconformity. If you're not the typical student who sucks up to them and plays their game, they want to run you out of school." I had found a kindred spirit, someone who not only understood my dilemma but had been there himself.

"We are not going to let Pandopo get the best of you. It is clear that you are under extreme stress and suffering from severe anxiety, so I am prescribing an anti-anxiety medication that will relax you so you can treat your patients better. I want you to take one tablet of Valium in the morning before you go into the clinic, and another tablet before your clinic session in the afternoon. He handed me a medicine bottle with 100 tablets of Valium. "Start today. Take one tablet before your clinic session this afternoon. When you've finished these, come back and get more."

"Thanks, Doc. How will I feel when I take the Valium?" I had never tried Valium before. I was mostly a pot and alcohol guy.

"You will feel relaxed, with a sense of well-being and equanimity. You won't have any cognitive or motor impairment so it won't affect how you treat your patients. Most of all, you won't be an apprehensive wreck like you are now." I liked what I was hearing. With a big smile on my face, I picked up the bottle of Valium and was on my way.

"One more thing," he added. "Don't let Pandopo get under your skin. When he harasses you, just smile back and say nice things to him. It will be easier with the Valium. He will know it's gratuitous flattery and it will piss him off. "

As instructed, I took my first dose of Valium about thirty minutes before my clinic session that afternoon. As I entered the clinic, I had not felt so relaxed and composed since Pandopo's reign of terror began. About one hour later Pandopo approached my patient for his first foray of abuse. "Get out of the way, Cashman. I want to see what a mess you've made in this patient's mouth."

Instead of being intimidated, I was feeling tranquil and unperturbed. "Hi Dr. Pandopo. You look very chipper today. And if I'm not mistaken, you look like you've grown an inch or two." Pandopo almost fell off his seat when he heard this. He was expecting me to cower, and here I was

complimenting him. “It even looks like you’re growing some hair in that bald spot on the back of your head.” This was the *piece’ de resistance*. There goes the neural connection between my brain and my mouth again, I thought. But I was on a roll now and enjoying it.

As predicted, this pissed Pandopo off to no end. But what could he do? I had just complimented him, although it was a left-handed compliment to be sure. With only a perfunctory examination of my patient, he launched into his usual tirade about my ineptitude and sloppy work. “I couldn’t agree with you more,” I responded, with a big, shit-eating grin on my face. “You are an astute observer of unquestioned clinical insight. Had you worn your reading glasses and could actually see what you were examining, your criticism could have been even more incisive.” Pandopo was furious. But the more he criticized me, the more I agreed with him, even suggesting that he shouldn’t spare his criticism. After a while, he couldn’t wait to be rid of me.

And so it went for the remainder of my senior year. As the doctor ordered, I took Valium before each clinic session. With my anxiety under control and my composure restored, I actually started doing some very decent clinical work. I still didn’t like dentistry and I hated seeing patients, mind you, but I did it. And other faculty began to notice the improvement in my performance. When Pandopo came to dish out the abuse, I killed him with kindness. Even when he wasn’t my clinical instructor, I would seek him out and give him gratuitous, left-handed compliments. “Dr. Pandopo, you look very dapper today.” “Dr. Pandopo, that’s a stunning shade of brown you used to dye your hair.” “Dr. Pandopo, with those wrinkled, baggy pants, you could be a rock and roll star.” After a while, he started to avoid me, which suited me just fine. I hated the little cretin.

This didn’t mean that there weren’t occasional setbacks. Stan Robertson, who was also the object of Pandopo’s wrath, was on a steady dose of Valium as well. Like me, he was killing Pandopo with kindness. But Stan hated dentistry even more than I did, and sometimes he would get flustered. On one occasion Stan was working on a patient and Pandopo was looking over his shoulder and breathing down his neck. Sensing Stan’s anxiety, Pandopo pounced. “What a sloppy job, Robertson. My butcher could do it better. In fact, why don’t I get my butcher in here to treat this patient and you can be my butcher,” Pandopo sneered sarcastically. Stan disregarded the little shrimp, but despite the Valium he was clearly getting flustered by the constant verbal barrage. Pandopo kept up the badgering. “Aren’t you finished yet, Robertson? You’ve been at it for two hours and the only thing you’ve accomplished is to partially asphyxiate that patient.”

Stan was getting frazzled. There were so many things to keep track of, and with Pandopo lingering in the background, he was overwhelmed. When he drilled the tooth, his field of vision became obscured. Forsaking the air syringe, he took a deep breath and blew in the patient’s mount to clear the water and debris. Sure enough, the residue disappeared and his field of vision was clear. Unfortunately, blowing in a patient’s mouth was neither a recognized nor acceptable clinical practice. When Pandopo saw Stan’s maneuver, he went ballistic. “Disgusting,” “repulsive,” and “loathsome” were a few of the choice adjectives he used to describe Stan’s technique. “Bum,” “slob,” and “derelict” were a few of the words he used to describe Stan. For his part, Stan couldn’t figure out what the fuss was about. After all,

with all the commotion and hectoring, one could easily forget that there was a human being attached to those teeth. Blowing on them just seemed a natural thing to do under the circumstances.

With the help of Valium, Stan and I finished the remainder of our senior year successfully, despite Pandopo's best efforts to derail us. We completed all of our clinical requirements and passed all of our national board and licensing exams. This did not diminish our hatred for Pandopo. We decided that, when the opportunity arose, we would exact our revenge.

As our senior year progressed, I began to think about finding meaningful employment after graduation. Sabrina and I were desperate to get out of New York and begin our journey to the tropics. Perhaps I could find a position that would be a stepping stone to get us there. I looked at all the options, and they were not good. The Nerds were going on to internships in prestigious hospitals in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut where they could kiss more asses and suck up to more faculty on their inexorable journey to mediocrity and ignominy. This was out of the question for me. I had enough of stuffy, highbrow institutions with their hierarchies and codes of conduct. The Pragmatists were enrolling in the US military. They would be taking positions all over the country. Joining the military would satisfy our desire to get out of New York. But this was 1974, and the US military was despised as a monolithic, authoritarian, bunch of fascists pissing away the nation's wealth on unnecessary wars in Southeast Asia. Plus, I would suffocate in a stifling hierarchy like the military. The deal breaker for me was the funny looking costumes and hats military personnel wore. No way would I dress in a ridiculous uniform every day just to go to work.

This didn't leave many options for the Back of the Room Gang. Pablo Teitelbaum was going to Florida to smoke pot and take Quaaludes. Mike Laverne was taking a position in a Medicaid practice in the Bronx that swindled the government by overcharging for its dodgy services. Aaron Waterman became an associate in a private practice on Long Island where he could flirt with buxom young lovelies. Ian Spader quit dentistry to play professional Lacrosse. None of this would do for me. Then Stan Robertson and I stumbled upon the Indian Health Service.

The Indian Health Service, a division of the US Public Health Service (USPHS), had been established to provide health services to federally-recognized Native American tribes. It grew out of the special relationship between the US Federal government and the tribes, which could be described as follows – the US government decimated the tribes through war, pestilence and broken promises, and relocated them to isolated reservations far from their original habitats; in return for this largesse it provided the tribes with health services delivered by novice health professionals who wanted to gain experience on indigenous populations in remote settings before opening lucrative private practices serving rich, white people. The Indian Health Service - or IHS for short - managed clinics and hospitals in

nine states¹ for Native American tribes such as the Navajo, Apache, Sioux, Cherokee, Chippewa, Chickasaw, and Blackfeet. One thing I knew for sure - none of these states were near New York. When I looked on a map, the IHS operated in some states where the weather might be warmer than New York. Very few people wanted to go to these remote locations for three years, so the IHS was not too choosy about whom they recruited. The IHS was sounding pretty good to Larry Cashman.

There was one problem. The IHS was part of the US Public Health Service, one of the seven commissioned officer corps services in the US government, like the army, navy, air force, marines etc. To join the IHS you had to become a commissioned officer with a navy rank. I checked out their brochure, and Public Health Service officers were dressed in white uniforms that made them look like the Good Humor Man, the social misfits and derelicts who sold ice cream to one and sundry on the streets of New York City in the 1950s and 1960s. Costumes were a deal breaker for me. I called a recruiter to discuss the uniform thing. "Yes, the USPHS has a uniform dress code. But those guys in the IHS never wear uniforms. They're just a bunch of cowboys and hippies." That was enough for me. I filled out my application, embellished it with accolades and laurels, dissembled about my rectitude and uprightness, and sent it to the Indian Health Service.

Within one month I received my first job offer from the IHS. Either they were desperate to find dentists or they bought all the bullshit I put in that application. The job offer was in Philadelphia, Mississippi. I didn't know much about Mississippi other than it was populated by racists and rednecks, its white supremacist governor, Ross Barnett, stood in the doorway of the University of Mississippi to prevent the first black student from enrolling there, and the Ku Klux Klan murdered three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi in 1963. It sounded like Mississippi was no place for a swarthy Italian boy from New York City like Larry Cashman. To put it bluntly, Larry Cashman could get killed in Mississippi. I turned down the first job offer.



**Memorial for three civil rights workers
killed in Philadelphia, Mississippi in
1963**

The second job offer was in Cheyenne, Oklahoma, right in the middle of the Midwest. The only thing I knew about Oklahoma was that it had a good college football team. When I checked it out on a map, Cheyenne was in the middle of nowhere. Even worse, it was near the Texas border. New Yorkers have a jaundiced view of Texas – the people are a bunch of gun-slinging cowboys and rednecks, and there is nothing but cattle, oil, and dust storms in Texas. In addition, Texans didn't like swarthy Italians from New York either, and Texas purportedly required a visa for US citizens to enter the state. This job had few redeeming qualities. I turned down the second job offer.

¹ The nine states were Arizona, New Mexico, South Dakota, Montana, Oklahoma, California, Mississippi, Oregon, and Tennessee

I have neglected to mention another reason why I had rejected both offers. Sabrina was planning our third overseas trip when I graduated. This would be a big one, three months in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. We planned to leave in July 1974, so I didn't want to start working until October or November. The IHS was desperate and needed someone to begin immediately. They couldn't wait until October, and I wasn't going to forego our South America trip to work in Mississippi or Oklahoma. The result - two jobs offered, two jobs rejected.

Three weeks later, right before graduation, I received the IHS' third job offer, in Window Rock, Arizona. Situated in the Four Corners area – where the states of Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico converge – Window Rock was the capital of the Navajo Indian Reservation. Arizona was in the



The road to Window Rock, Arizona circa 1975

southwestern US, with its beautiful canyons, valleys, buttes, and mesas. Because it was in the Southwest, Arizona has a more agreeable climate than places like Oklahoma, Texas, and most importantly, New York. The job offer in Window Rock was attractive and very tempting. However, like the previous offers, they wanted me to begin as soon as I graduated. Sabrina and I considered this offer seriously, but she had her heart set on

our trip to South America, so I rejected the IHS' third offer. When my brother Mitchell heard I turned down this third offer, he was speechless. "This is your chance to escape New York, you moron. That's what you and Sabrina always wanted. If you pass up this job, you may rot here." Who listens to their older brother? In the space of four weeks, the IHS had offered me three jobs and I had turned them all down.

When I graduated from Columbia, it was one of the happiest days of my life. The four year nightmare was over. I had completed all of my academic and clinical requirements. I had passed all of my academic board and licensing exams. Jerks like Fritz Pandopo no longer had any power over me. I could say what I wanted and do what I wanted with no fear of retribution. I didn't need to take Valium any more. I was free at last.

Several days after graduation, Stan Robertson and I were in the lab at Columbia clearing out our lockers. Some people saved their instruments and tools, but Stan and I threw it all in the garbage. It brought back too many bad memories. As we disposed of our equipment and rejoiced in the process, who should walk into the lab but Fritz Pandopo? He had this stern look on his face, reminiscent of his demeanor in the clinic before he flayed us verbally. We ignored the little runt and continued in our revelry, exaggerated now for Pandopo's benefit.

“This old hand drill is archaic. I can’t believe our Neanderthal faculty made us use this antiquated junk,” Stan bellowed so Pandopo could hear it clearly. And he emphatically tossed it in the garbage.

“Can you believe those idiots had us using these obsolete materials and supplies?” I added for effect. “No one has used this junk since the 1940s, when those old farts on Columbia’s faculty were in their prime.” And I unceremoniously swept it into the trash.

Clearly agitated by our theatrics, Pandopo approached us. “You two think you’re so clever with your wisecracks. I want you both to know that you’re still on my shit list.” That’s when I lost it. I grabbed Pandopo by his shirt, lifted him right off the ground, and slammed him up against the wall. “Listen, you little piece of shit. You’re lucky I don’t stick this drill up your ass.” Pandopo was trembling like a baby. He didn’t know that Stan and I had stopped taking our Valium.

Suddenly, Stan came over to intercede. “Let me handle this.” His visage was transformed, from intense hatred to contented equanimity, like he knew exactly what to do next. “I’ll be on your shit list for the rest of my life and frankly, I don’t give a damn,” he intoned as he approached Pandopo. “But here’s something so you remember us for a while.” With Pandopo cowering against the wall like the coward that he was, Stan walked up to him and kicked him in the balls. As Pandopo doubled over, we delivered our parting riposte. “You haven’t heard the last of us, Pandopo. We are dedicating ourselves to seeing that you are removed from the faculty at Columbia’s dental school. Sociopaths like you shouldn’t be allowed to torture unsuspecting dental students.”

We later learned that the kick in the balls did Pandopo no lasting damage because, as it turned out, he had no balls. Bullies usually don’t.

When we boarded our flight for Bogota, Colombia in July 1974, I had no job and no prospects for finding one when I returned. Sabrina worked until the day we left, so we had ample resources. There was one additional complication. Sabrina was pregnant. Although it was planned, the pregnancy happened a bit sooner than anticipated. Those Pennsylvania women are extraordinarily fecund. Her doctor gave her the green light to travel, so we got on that plane and headed for Bogota. We arrived at 3 AM with no hotel reservation. We took a cab to the city center and walked around looking for a hotel. Some things never change.

It was on this trip that I learned that I had one additional talent that would serve me well for the rest of my career. Until now I had only three discernible skills – I could bullshit with the best of them, I was very good at resting, and I was a basketball savant. In South America I learned that I was also skilled at languages. Spanish is the lingua franca in South America. Sabrina hated learning or speaking foreign languages and was not good at it. I had taken Spanish in high school ten years before. So I was designated as the translator/interpreter/interlocutor for this trip. I brushed up a bit on my Spanish prior to our departure, but ten years is a long time, and I had not been a particularly good student.

When we arrived in Bogota and I heard Spanish being spoken, it was as if the language receptors in my brain opened up and the words just poured in. I exalted in the rhythm of the language. At first I could only greet people, ask for directions, and order food at restaurants. Within a month I was constructing complex sentences. By the end of three months I was expounding, expostulating, and pontificating in Spanish with anyone who could bear to listen. Sabrina refused to believe I had a special skill. She said that I liked to bullshit so much, I just wouldn't let a language stand in my way. There's some truth to that.

It should be emphasized that a facility with languages should not be equated with innate intelligence. I didn't have much of the latter, but I sure had the former. During my career I observed brilliant people stumble, stutter, and squirm trying to speak a foreign language, even after months of instruction. I learned three more languages during the course of my career with hardly a lesson. While these really smart people bumbled along like rubes during discussions and negotiations with our host country colleagues, I would converse freely and fluently, even telling dirty jokes when the opportunity arose. The others were the smart ones, but I did all the talking.

But I digress. Our peregrinations through Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru were the most pleasant traveling I had experienced to date. There were few, if any, world travelers so my olfactory senses were not being constantly assaulted. South America is relatively civilized compared to Morocco, India and Nepal. In three months I never saw one person shit in the streets. A lot of men still pissed in the streets, though. Latino men



Sabrina and Cashman's itinerary in South America 1974

consider pulling their dick out and pissing in the street as an inalienable right. It was a macho thing. Accommodations were cheap and relatively clean. Transportation was antiquated but reliable. Lima, Quito, and Bogota were modern capital cities without hordes of people or cattle meandering in the streets like New Delhi and Katmandu. Provincial towns like Cuzco in Peru, Guayaquil in Ecuador, and Cartagena in Colombia retained their old world, colonial charm. The ancient city of Machu Picchu northwest of Cuzco had a mystical ambience and charm unchanged from its heyday in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Our favorite place was Cartagena on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. After two months of intensive overland travel starting in Peru and moving up through Ecuador and Colombia, we settled into this northern port city with its colonial walled fort, tropical weather, and beautiful beaches. We found a

comfortable hotel on Cartagena's Bocagrande Beach and settled in for the next month. It was easy to get comfortable in Cartagena. We started each day with a *café con leche* at a sidewalk bistro, and then



Bocagrande Beach in Cartagena, Colombia 1974

ventured out to explore the walled fort, the old colonial city, or the outlying islands and beaches. After a tasty lunch at a local restaurant, we took an afternoon siesta with the cool ocean breezes wafting through our room. Late afternoons were reserved for lounging on Bocagrande Beach, one of my favorite pastimes because of the bare Colombian breasts that could be seen tanning in the sun. My gawking frequently elicited a kick in the ass from Sabrina, who was now four months pregnant and not amused by her husband's inability to stop ogling all the

breasts. Dinner was enjoyed at one of Cartagena's excellent and inexpensive outdoor restaurants. The next day we did the same thing....and the next, and the next.

Another of Cartagena's endearing features was the copious amounts of readily available marijuana and cocaine. Cartagena was one of the transshipment points used by the Colombian drug cartels to send their wares to the US. Consequently, there were plenty of corrupt government officials who allowed the trade to proceed unobstructed. Weed and cocaine could be procured at the café in front of our hotel, where it could be smoked or snorted at one's leisure. Sabrina could not partake because of her pregnancy, so I abstained in solidarity. I met a local Colombian dealer named Carlito, who was tangentially associated with Pablo Escobar's drug cartel, and we became friends. Carlito and his girlfriend would often join us for dinner at a very nice restaurant, where Carlito would snort cocaine intermittently throughout the meal. One time Carlito was about to snort a line of cocaine when the waiter came to pick up his plate. Disturbed by the waiter's interruption, Carlito motioned him to back off while he snorted the cocaine. After the cocaine disappeared, he shook his entire body, cleared his nose, and then motioned for the waiter to pick up his plate, with the waiter not even batting an eye. This was life in Cartagena in 1974.

Sabrina and I loved the tropical ambience and laid back lifestyle in Cartagena. It stiffened our resolve to get out of New York and head for the tropics. After one month, however, our funds were running low and it was clear that our Cartagena reverie would soon come to an end. Unfortunately, we had given little thought to what we would do when we returned to New York. Sabrina was now five months pregnant and not about to go back to work. This left only one alternative, unpleasant in the extreme – it was time for me to find a job as a dentist.

The first thing I did when I reached New York was to find Stan Robertson. His ineptitude and dislike for dentistry equaled mine. If he found a job he could tolerate, that might also do for me. I finally tracked him down in Many Farms, Arizona, where Stan was living with his girlfriend Marlene and working for the Indian Health Service on the Navajo Indian Reservation.

“How did you end up in Many Farms, Arizona?” I asked.

Stan replied, “Like you, I had turned down several positions with IHS. When this one came up, I decided to take it.

“How do you like it?” Stan seemed stoked so I wanted to hear more.

“This is the best gig ever. I am a commissioned officer in the US Public Health Service. I have a nice two bedroom house here. They shipped all of our personal belongings from New York. I can walk to the clinic where I work in five minutes. I get paid at the same level as a Captain in the Army. I get six weeks of vacation and an additional 12 days of personal leave because Many Farms is so remote that we need time to get to the nearest town to purchase food. To top it off, they’ll repay 85% of my student loans if I stay for a full tour of duty. I work a seven hour day, and I have four assistants who take care of all the excruciating details of patient care.” Stan was getting excited as he described his new gig.

“But the best part is living here. The Navajo Indian Reservation is very isolated but incredibly beautiful.² There is good hiking in the mesas behind my home. The reflection of the sun off the red sand and rocks on the mesa makes for stunning sunsets. The Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Zion and Bryce National Parks, Lake Powell, Havasupai Falls – these iconic landmarks are all within easy driving distance from Many Farms. I can be in Telluride and Durango in southern Colorado in three hours to go skiing. It is beautiful here and there is so much to do.”

This sounded pretty good to me. “Do you know if there are any positions available with the IHS on the Navajo Indian Reservation?”

“In fact, there is a job coming open at the Crownpoint Indian Hospital in Crownpoint, New Mexico. I told Dan Biggs, the head of dental services for the Navajo area, that you would be returning to the US soon, and would be perfect for that position. He knows who you are because they have your application on file. Biggs’ response was ‘he’s already turned down three jobs. Do you think he’ll be interested in this one?’ I told him I thought you would. Do you want me to discuss it with him?”

My response was immediate. “You bet your ass I do. Tell him I can start immediately.”

In a more serious tone, Stan added, “There’s one proviso. They want someone with experience in oral surgery. I told them about your oral surgery rotation at Roosevelt Hospital. Play that up when you speak with Biggs.”

² It is also huge. The Navajo Indian reservation has an area of 27,000 square miles covering large swathes of Northeast Arizona, Southeast Utah, and Northwest New Mexico. If it were a state, it would be the 41st largest state, larger than West Virginia and three times the size of states like Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and New Jersey.

There's always a catch, I thought. Fortunately, Stan did not mention my hatred for oral surgery nor my limited skill set. No matter. I wanted this job badly and was willing to overlook this impediment. When Dan Biggs called me to discuss the position at Crownpoint Indian Hospital, my description of my skills and fervor for oral surgery was at its disingenuous best. The ignoramus bought the whole thing, hook, line and sinker. Biggs offered me the job on the spot. This was another instance where running my big mouth would come back to haunt me.

Within two weeks I had received a firm offer from the Indian Health Service to work at the Crownpoint Indian Hospital. The terms of my employment were the same as Stan's. Sabrina was ecstatic about moving to New Mexico. Not only were we escaping New York City, but New Mexico would be a stepping stone on our inexorable journey to the tropics. We packed up all of our belongings, had them loaded on the moving van provided by the USPHS, and headed to Crownpoint, New Mexico.