

# Alamogordo

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Excerpt from *Life Lessons for My Daughters* by James Parker

I loved motorcycles when I was young and still do. I would recommend them to only the mature.

It didn't seem like a very long drive from Big Spring to Alamogordo because it was the first time for us to take a trip there. Everything was drier than West Texas. There were a few long stretches of boring road around Hobbs. It was exciting because we were moving and I didn't know what to expect. We were going out to buy a house and check the town out. I still remember looking down on the Tularosa Basin from Cloudcroft. You could see a white haze toward the west. There was little humidity, which made the sky seem much brighter than the hazy Texas sky.

We drove down the mountain from Cloudcroft to High Rolls then finally we arrived in Alamogordo. I could barely open my eyes it was so bright. The thing that really got my attention was the motorcycles and scooters. Holloman Air Force Base had lots of young airmen who came into Alamogordo on their motorcycles. Even though there was an AFB in Big Spring, there were very few motorcycles. Alamogordo was just full of motorcycles. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw a girl on a Sears motorcycle. A girl! This town was going to be great.

We drove to the house that we were planning to buy just to see it one more time. Marilyn and I sat in the car while Mother and Daddy went in for one more look. The house was a three bedroom, one bath. It had a one-car carport. The trim was turquoise. It was right across the street from a grade school. The economy was slow, and this house and many others like it required little or no down payment. Usually a buyer could just take over the payments.

We headed back home and moved to Alamogordo in October. I left Runnels Junior High School and enrolled in Chaparral Junior High School. My grades at Runnels had been pretty good. They were mostly A's and B's. Unfortunately, the change in schools didn't help my grades. I lost my mojo after we moved.

The old Central JHS was unable to handle the large number of kids, so Chaparral JHS was in the works. Until the new building was complete, the students would have split days. Central would go in the mornings, and Chaparral would go to school in the afternoon. This was October, and I loved the weather. It was 5 p.m. when school was out, and the weather was nice. I would walk out to my Cushman motor scooter and prepare for the short drive home. That was great. Since the legal age to drive a scooter was thirteen years old, the school had scooter parking. There were a fairly large number of scooters in the lot. At Runnels JHS, I was the only one who illegally drove a scooter to school. I didn't have a license, but I needed to go to the Big Spring Daily Herald and pick up my newspapers. The thing that bugged me about Runnels was that high school kids would come and drive my scooter around during their lunch hour. I reported it to my teacher, and her response was, "You're not supposed to drive a scooter to school." I didn't report it again.

I had my aircraft helmet from Big Spring, so I would ride with a helmet. Webb AFB was a training base. That meant there were several salvage yards that had helmets for sale, and they were cheap. I bought a nice pilot helmet for twenty dollars. It had hookups for oxygen and radio communications if I needed it, but it might have been a bit dangerous to install liquid oxygen on a scooter. My nickname quickly became Steve Canyon. I was quite a sight I'm sure. I was a skinny kid with a huge jet pilot helmet over my head. Finally, the ridicule ended when I parked my scooter at the school for some function like a basketball game. When I came back out to go home, the helmet had been crushed. Someone in a car had removed the helmet from the scooter and driven over it. At first, I was mad. The more I thought about it, the better I liked not having a helmet and not being called Steve Canyon. Yay!