

BEFORE

By David H. Fisher, Jr.

Introduction

I have tried to record the events in this paper as accurately as I can recall hoping to enable the reader to understand the events over many years that led me to my conclusion. While focusing on two landmarks that are a part of our city's history, I have also attempted to give the reader some insight on what it was like to be a boy growing up in Topeka, Kansas, in the 1940's and 1950's.

BEFORE

I've always been fascinated with "height and distance and time" and how they all fit together. When I was a young boy, growing up in Topeka, Kansas, my mother didn't have a car. In fact, she didn't even drive. This was the same for most of my friend's mothers. When we wanted to go somewhere we walked, rode our bicycles or took the bus.

When we were in our later years of grade school, on weekdays during the summer months one of my best friends and I would have our mothers make us peanut butter and olive sandwiches. These were made by putting peanut butter on a slice of bread and then cutting green olives with pimento so they looked like Os with the red pimento in the middle. They would then put the olive slices on top of the peanut butter and then another slice of bread on top to complete the sandwich. We would put these sandwiches in our saddle bags along with a bottle of pop and ride our bikes downtown and park them unlocked outside of the State Capitol building.

We would go up to the 5th floor and wait on the chairs just inside the door that leads to the steps which ascend to the dome. The door was guarded by a nice one-armed man. He felt we were too young to climb to the top of the dome by ourselves so when tourists would arrive at the door the guard would ask if we could accompany them. I don't remember anyone ever saying no.

We would climb the 296 steps, including the ones that seemed to hang in mid air that lead to the circular stairs near the top. When we reached the top we would open the heavy metal door, go outside and look out over the

railing. From there I could see all over Topeka. We didn't have to look very far in any direction until we could see the countryside. Often I would try to see our house but could never find it because of all of the large elm trees in our neighborhood. I was always amazed at how far I could see and often pondered how long it took us to ride from one part of town to another and yet from our height I could see from one place to another in an instant. And I was fascinated with "height and distance and time."

When our tourist chaperones were ready to leave we would climb down the steps, go outside, get on our bicycles and ride out west for about 45 minutes until we arrived at SBL Hill. We would then wheel our bikes up on the side of the hill, take out our peanut and olive sandwiches and bottle of pop and sit on the grass while we ate our lunch in the warm, Kansas summer sun. From the side of the hill we couldn't see the State Capitol Building but we had a wonderful view of the southwest part of the city. As I looked around I was always fascinated with "height and distance and time."

After we ate our lunch we carefully put our trash in our saddle bags and rode home. When we arrived home we usually took the city bus, with one transfer downtown, to the Shawnee Country Club where we went swimming. Then after work one of our fathers would pick us up and take us home.

One summer evening at the dinner table my father ask me if I would go with him the following day to Lyndon, Kansas, and watch him represent a client in a courtroom setting. My father was an attorney and his father was also an attorney so I think he was trying to interest me in following in their footsteps. That evening I called my friends and told them I would not be able to play the next day as I was going out of town with my dad.

The following day my dad came home in the middle of the morning and picked me up. We drove south on a narrow 2 lane road called Highway 75 and headed for Lyndon, Kansas. When we arrived I observed my dad representing his client in the courtroom.

After about an hour it was time to head back to Topeka. We traveled north on highway 75. As we neared the city I noticed a large hill to our left way off in the distance. I asked my dad what it was and he told me it was Burnett's Mound. Being fascinated with views from high places I asked him how I could find this Burnett's Mound. He said, "You go to Gage Boulevard, which is a narrow two lane road, and then go south. You cross 21st Street and

then Gage Boulevard turns into a dirt road and you will be out in the country. Off to the right in the distance you will see the mound. Eventually you will cross a short narrow stone bridge with wooden planks for a floor and soon the road will turn slightly to the right. You will then arrive at 29th Street which is another dirt road. The mound will be to your right in the middle of a farmer's pasture.”

When we got back to Topeka my dad dropped me off at our house and headed back to his office. After I made a few phone calls, I discovered that my friends were all out playing with others. My mother was taking a nap so I decided I would go for a bike ride.

I climbed on my bicycle and headed west to Gage Boulevard. Then I headed south on Gage. As I neared 21st Street I looked off to the right and got my first view of Burnett's Mound way off in the distance. I crossed 21st and soon the road did turn to dirt and I was out in the country.

As I continued down Gage I kept seeing Burnett's Mound in the distance. It looked higher than I had expected. After I crossed the little narrow stone bridge the road turned slightly to the right and I reached 29th Street which was another dirt road. I looked around and didn't see anyone so I crossed 29th and started walking my bike across the farm pasture towards the mound. Soon I was in tall, uncut grass that was about waist high.

After a few minutes I decided it was too difficult to wheel my bike in the tall grass so I laid it down on the ground where it would be less conspicuous and continued walking. Soon I reached the base of the mound and started a gradual climb. From time to time I would glance over my left shoulder to see if anyone was around and to see if my bicycle was still safe. As I continued my ascent, to my surprise when I looked back I discovered I could see the top of the State Capitol dome. With this realization I paused every few yards to discover how much more of the city I could see.

When I finally got to the top it was almost like music in my ears as I discovered I was not on the top of Burnett's Mound. There was another higher part straight ahead. With renewed enthusiasm I walked along a flat area and began climbing again. This time the climb was much steeper and I had to push on my thighs with my hands to get enough leverage to continue climbing. When I finally got to the top I was tired but amazed with the view of the countryside in all directions.

There was one small tree on the southeast side of the mound. The rest was covered with prairie grass along with some flat rocks. I remember sitting down on the top of the mound and looking out over the city. I could see the State Capitol dome, SBL Hill and the whole city off in the distance. As the warm summer sun shone down on my shoulders I picked up some blades of grass and let the gentle wind slowly float them away and I was fascinated with “height and distance and time.”

I must have enjoyed my view of the world for almost an hour and then it was time to head home for dinner. I carefully started down the steep mound and with some difficulty located my bicycle and rode home.

That evening at the dinner table I told my dad all about my new discovery and he just smiled. Following dinner I was on the telephone telling all of my friends about my adventure. Since there was no daylight savings time it was too late for us to go for a long ride that evening so we decided to wait until the next day.

After breakfast the following morning bicycles began arriving in our front yard. Soon my friends and I were headed west towards Gage Boulevard. When we reached Gage we headed south. As we neared 21st Street everyone could see the mound and their excitement began to build. We crossed 21st and soon the surface turned from concrete to dirt. We rode until we crossed the narrow stone bridge and reached 29th Street and then got off our bikes and wheeled them across the farm pasture towards the mound.

Soon the grass was waist deep and we all laid our bikes down on the ground in a massive pile of chrome that couldn't be seen from the road and continued walking. We walked along the gradual slope for some time and then the terrain began to get steeper. As we continued to climb I would often have everyone stop and look back towards Topeka. They were all amazed at the view.

When we reached the top of the first hill they too were surprised when they realized we were not at the top. Everyone began to run along the flat area and then began to climb again. This time they found the climb was much steeper and eventually we were all pressing our hands on our thighs to get enough leverage to keep climbing. When we finally reached the top we all

stood around catching our breath and enjoying the fantastic view in all directions. And, I was again fascinated with “height and distance and time.”

We made many more trips to the mound that summer and continued to visit the mound several times each summer for many years. One Thanksgiving I told my grandfather, who was my mother’s father and lived in Kansas City, all about Burnett’s Mound. My grandfather was very interested in just about everything and asked me if I would show him this Burnett’s Mound. He drove me out near the mound and we climbed it together.

When we got to the top he began to look out all around and then he told me how at one time the land was all covered by water. He explained how the glaciers receded and left land deposits, one of which was Burnett’s Mound. He then explained if we dug down deep enough we would probably find sea shells. He told me how the Indians used to roam the area and again if we got a shovel and dug around we would probably also find arrowheads. I remember clinging to his every word as we looked out over the countryside from our lofty perch. I later found out Burnett’s Mound is an erosional remnant of the Kansan Glacier.

When my friends and I entered junior high school our trips became far less frequent. One summer when we were in our later years of high school several of us decided to spend the night on top of the mound. After a typical summer evening, we had a friend who could drive, take us to the mound’s east side and we climbed up with our sleeping bags over our shoulders. It was a completely different experience since we ascended the mound from the east and it was dark. The only sound I can remember hearing in the night was the sound of the tall grass brushing against our clothes.

When we reached the top we looked up at the stars and the twinkling lights of a few farm houses and lights of Topeka in the distance. After enjoying our first experience of seeing the view at night and after talking about all the things teenage boys talk about we went to sleep. Around three o’clock in the morning I felt something wet on my cheek. I opened my eyes and discovered it was beginning to drizzle. Everyone else was awake too. No one wanted a little drizzle to keep us from spending the entire night so we ducked our heads deep into our sleeping bags and went back to sleep.

Early the following morning we woke up to a hazy, foggy day. Before we were discovered we rolled up our sleeping bags and walked down Gage

Boulevard all the way to Huntoon Street and then headed east to the Westboro Mart. This was several miles from the mound. We then ate breakfast at Harrison Drugs before heading for our individual homes.

When I entered college the visits to the mound ended except for an occasional trip during the summers. Then on July 7, 1960, my friend who had ridden his bicycle with me so many times to the State Capital and Burnett's Mound and I went on a double date. I drove my mother's new black 1960 Impala convertible.

That summer I was the swimming coach and assistant life guard at the Shawnee Country Club and had a second date with a girl named Kathy who was on the swimming team. My friend was in the back seat with his date. It was a beautiful, clear and warm summer night. Before we took our dates home we decided to go for a drive with the top down.

They were building Interstate 470 which ran along the side of the mound and something very large just above it. We decided to drive up to look over the construction. I turned onto the dirt road that was to become the Interstate and stopped. We were on the side of the mound about 50 feet below the lower hill. We were just high enough to see the State Capitol and some of Topeka's skyline.

On that magical evening, as we looked up I could see the wonders that only a night sky full of bright stars can reveal. I'll never forget the sounds of the summer insects singing in the night and the gentle summer breeze. I must admit that the idea of "height and distance and time" didn't even occur to me at that moment. Three years later Kathy and I were married. We waited until I graduated from college and was about to begin a life insurance sales career.

During the next few years Burnett's Mound was made into a park with a road called Skyline Drive leading to the backside of the mound and steps were built that led to the summit. You didn't have a view of the State Capitol and the buildings in downtown Topeka until you reached the very top.

Over the seven years following our marriage our three children were born. As an insurance salesman I was my own boss and conducted most of my appointments out of my office. Occasionally I would have my last appointment of the day near Burnett's Mound. If I had time before dinner I would drive up Skyline Drive and climb the steps to the top. As I enjoyed

the view I continued to be fascinated with the concept of “height and distance and time.”

One day there were extremely low, thick clouds all over the city. It was as if there was a ceiling over the whole area. I had a little time before I was to be home so I made a special trip to the mound to see how close the clouds were to the top. When I got to the summit I looked out at the amazing view. The air was extremely clear but there was this very low cloud ceiling as far as I could see in every direction.

As I looked out at this incredible sight I was so inspired that I bowed my head and thanked God for the view and all the beauty around me. I then said, "The world is so confusing; please show me a sign that you are really here." Then I looked out at the view again.

Just as I was about to turn around to start for home I heard it. I knew what it was but I just couldn't see it. It got closer and closer until it was so loud I covered my ears. Then about 100 feet above me the tip of a wing dipped below the cloud bank and then disappeared. It dipped down and back up several times before slowly dropping below the clouds. I watched the Kansas Air National Guard B-57 Canberra jet aircraft all the way until it landed at Forbes Air Force Base. As the goose bumps began to go away it occurred to me, God may be all around us, but just like the airplane, we can't see Him. With this idea I walked down the mound and went home and had dinner with my family.

One summer day I finished an appointment near the mound early. It had been a long time since I had been to the top so I decided to climb up and enjoy the view. It was a beautiful late afternoon. As I looked out I once again thought about “height, and distance and time” and wondered how they all fit together. After several minutes, inspired by the view, I closed my eyes and thanked God for my wonderful wife and our three healthy children; for my job; for our home; and for the opportunity to be the volunteer Topeka YMCA swimming team coach. Then I said, "God, if there is ever anything I can do for you just ask and I will do my best to do it." A few minutes later I headed home for dinner.

I was the president of the Briarwood Swim Club and that evening we were hosting the board meeting at our house. After dinner I told Kathy I would get the chairs set up while she was preparing the cookies and coffee. I told her if

I got any telephone calls just tell them I would call them back after the meeting. Soon the board members began to arrive.

About five minutes before I was to call the board meeting to order the phone rang. Kathy came in and said it was for me. I told her I would call them back after the meeting but she insisted that I take the call. I excused myself and went into the kitchen. The person on the phone was from our church and said, "Dave, would you give the lay sermon at the First United Methodist Church on Lay Sunday?" My heart dropped down into my feet and back up into my head several times as I had never done anything like that before. To collect my thoughts as to how to decline I asked if it would be the 8:30 AM service or the larger 11:00 AM service that was broadcast on WIBW radio and could be heard for hundreds of miles. I was told it was for the 11:00 AM service.

As I was about to say no, my heart began to beat hard again as I remembered what I had told God just an hour earlier on top of Burnett's Mound; "If there is ever anything I can do for you just ask and I will do my best to do it." With that realization, and my heart still pounding, I said, "Yes." With what must have been a bewildered look on my face I went back and called the board meeting to order.

Over the next few weeks I was amazed how ideas for the sermon came to me and on October 17, 1971, I gave the sermon titled, "Try It, It's Exciting." Before the sermon I looked out over the congregation from the raised pulpit. I could see our minister and the people seated below me and those seated in the balcony high above and I thought how the sermon would be heard all over the Midwest. And as usual I was fascinated with "height and distance and time."

One beautiful fall day just after daylight savings time had ended I decided to go to the top of the mound and see if I could watch the sunset. I ran up the steps and reached the top just in time. To the west the sun was a huge orange ball just above the horizon. I watched it slowly begin to sink below the earth. I could almost hear a sound as it suddenly disappeared. It had seemed so close and yet I knew it was millions of miles away. This increased my fascination with "height, and distance and time." I decided I should also experience winter and a spring sunrise from the top of the mound.

During the winter I watched the weather closely. Then one morning it happened. Just before I was to leave for my office we started to have a blizzard. Since the snow hadn't had a chance to accumulate, instead of going directly to my office I headed for the mound. By the time I arrived the blowing snow was so heavy I could only see about three steps above me as I began my climb. Fortunately I had on heavy winter clothing or I would not have made it to the top.

When I reached the summit I looked out and could see absolutely nothing through the blizzard. It seemed like I was in a white room in the middle of nowhere. I knew there was a whole world out there but I just couldn't see it. "Height, and distance and time" seemed to have a whole new meaning.

Though I wanted to stay longer I couldn't because of the cold. By the time I got back down the steps and into my car I could hardly move. Fortunately the car was still warm and after a few minutes I was able to drive to my office.

The next spring, on a clear morning just after daylight savings arrived, I once again headed for Burnett's Mound. This time I wanted to experience a sunrise. By the time I made it to the top the sky in the east was already bright. Then I saw a huge ball of fire begin to appear. It slowly rose until it was all above the horizon. Then I had to look away as it was so bright.

It is amazing how different a sunrise is from a sunset. I looked out at the cars moving along Interstate 470 and along the city streets and thought how I was the only one to experience the sunrise that day from the top of the mound and how we get so caught up with the problems of daily living that we miss the wonders of the world in which we live.

As we continue to learn more about this planet we are inhabiting that is racing through time and space we continue to wonder how it all began. In all parts of the United States educators are debating whether we should teach the theory of evolution, intelligent design or both in our schools.

There are two types of evolution; macro evolution and micro evolution. Macro evolution is where one species changes into another species. There is no evidence this has ever happened. Micro evolution is where small changes occur such as man gradually getting taller.

There is no question micro evolution is real. People evolve, animals evolve, plants evolve, bodies of water evolve, towns and cities evolve, and countries evolve. The whole world is evolving. Most scientists agree that there was a big bang that started it all. They can observe through telescopes that objects are moving away by their reddish color. Also, the farther the objects are the faster they are moving.

But what was the size of the mass at the point of the big bang or the big swish that would make up the universe and everything that is in it? Was it the size of all of the matter in the universe or was it smaller, maybe even smaller than the point of a needle?

Then I thought about the miracle of a microscopic sperm and a tiny little egg coming together. Within a very short period of time they divide and grow. Soon a body and a head begin to take shape. Then little arms and little legs begin to appear along with eyes, ears and a nose. Around nine months later a living breathing human being is born that will have an impact on this incredible world.

Likewise a tiny little seed grows into a giant oak tree. So I wouldn't be surprised, when the so called big bang occurred, that the matter was smaller than the point of a needle.

How long did it take to create this universe we live in? By carbon dating scientists can tell the universe is millions or perhaps billions of years old. Just think how long it took just for our natural resources to evolve? The only place I could find that addresses how long it took is in the Bible where it says in Genesis that God created the universe and everything that's in it in six days and on the seventh day he rested. But how could this be?

Then I thought, if we put a hand grenade in the middle of a gymnasium and had people make a big circle around the walls and then the pin on the hand grenade was pulled, in a couple of seconds there would be an explosion and the shrapnel would fly off at tremendous speed and kill or seriously wound almost everyone in the gym.

But if we put the same hand grenade in the middle of a field and had people stand at just the right distance all around it and then pulled the pin, soon the shrapnel would fly off at tremendous speed. But as time and distance passed it would slow down and eventually fall harmlessly at the observer's feet.

With the tremendous force that must have started the big bang maybe time moved much faster than it does now. So a million years may have happened in a nanosecond in the way we measure and experience time today.

What if we could reverse time and watch as the universe came back together. What would we find “BEFORE” the big bang? Most scientists say we will never know. Some say one day we might.

I kept thinking about this question and looking for the answer that would unlock the mystery but could not find anything that made sense. Then I watched a DVD called “The Privileged Planet.” Here a group of scientists expressed two ideas that interested me. The first idea was that the odds of all of the things that had to come together to make our planet work were so great that they concluded it could never have happened by accident.

Second, our planet is designed so we can look out and observe the universe. This exposes us to all of the wonders of our existence and stretches our imagination. I wondered, could this have been an accident or was it intentional?

With this in mind, I kept searching. One day I heard something that I had heard and read many times before. Most people have read it and heard it. It is so simple that we just skip over it with little or no thought. This time I decided to examine it more closely to see if it held any clues to what we might find “BEFORE” the big bang.

I looked it up and read it very slowly but I still didn't understand. Finally I decided to memorize it much like a mathematician learns a new mathematical rule. After several days I had it memorized. On June 2, 2005, I finally began to get an idea as to what we might find on the “BEFORE” side of the big bang.

As you would probably expect, since no human was alive at the time to record the information, it's found in only one place and that is in the Bible. It is at the beginning of 1st chapter in the Gospel according to St John. Again you have undoubtedly read it and heard it many times. What I'd like to do is go over it slowly so you can understand how I reached my conclusion as to what we might find “BEFORE” the big bang.

Here it is. "In the beginning was the Word." As I examined this closely, I thought why was the word "Word" used? Well it appears to be the only thing we as humans can understand. Have you noticed once a word is spoken it never goes away. When we say a word to someone either good or bad it is always there. It never does goes away! A person seems to respond to the words we have said to them even though it may be many years later.

The text continues, "And the Word was with God. And the Word was God." Now this puts a whole new meaning to the word "Word". The Word IS God. It continues, "The same was in the beginning with God."

"All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." This was stated twice just in a slightly different way and is self explanatory. So if he made everything, then this would include the entire universe and everything that is in it. It would even include thoughts and possibilities.

The writer continues, "In Him was life and the life was the light of men." In other words it seems we all have this light or life of the Word inside of us. The light may be the mystery of life. Therefore, everyone who is alive today must have this light of the Word inside of them. Likewise everyone who ever lived must have had the light of the Word inside of them. This would include Abraham Lincoln and Adolph Hitler.

John continues, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." In simple terms it seems we just don't get it. We don't understand! We don't realize or feel the light of the Word inside of us. We were all born into this world and begin to learn to use our brain and all of our senses but we really don't comprehend what gives us life.

It is then stated a little differently. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

History tells us as time passed the people living on this incredible planet were living lives that were evil and corrupted. They were destroying each other. So what could the Word do? Well, it seems to me the Word must have had four choices. First the Word could have decided to end the world. But that would have meant destroying his creation.

Secondly, the Word could just let the whole world destroy itself. But again that isn't a desired result. Third, the Word could reveal how the world was created and answer all the questions mankind could think of but then the mystery would be gone and life would be dull and boring.

Finally, the Word could give us hints to help us live as we should and that seems to be what the Word decided to do. So the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and that is why many people in the world celebrate Christmas.

Why didn't the Word become flesh today instead of over two thousand years ago? Possibility it was because there was too much misery to wait and secondly if the Word had become flesh today, with modern technology and television, everyone would have seen the miracles and there would be no need for faith.

It appears there were two main reasons the Word spent time on earth. Of course, the first reason was to die in our place for our individual sins and the evils of the world. And that is why many people celebrate Easter.

It seems the second reason the Word spent time on earth was to give us hints that help us comprehend the light. Passages like "Before Abraham was, I am." And, "I and my Father are one." And, "...seek, and ye shall find."

When we read about an event in history it is impossible to get the full experience of what really happened. For example, when students read about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy they learn many of the details but they can't experience the emotions.

When Kathy called me and told me the President had been shot I can't adequately relate my feelings of shock and disbelief. They were probably the same feelings experienced by most Americans. We just didn't feel like doing anything. We felt we had personally been violated.

The evening after the assassination Kathy and I, along with the couple who lived in the apartment next door, didn't know what to do so we got in our car and drove downtown. There were hundreds of other cars doing the same thing. Many of the store windows were draped in black with a picture of the slain President Kennedy in the middle. The whole city was lost and devastated.

When we go to a movie, a concert or hear a motivational speaker we can tell others about what we saw and heard but it is impossible to adequately relate the total experience. This can only be felt if you were there.

A long time ago the people that actually saw the Word made flesh and witnessed the miracles he preformed and understood his teachings had an entirely different experience than a person does today who just reads about the events.

The text tells us that those that were actually there asked Him how they should live their lives. His reply was very simple and seems to be one of the biggest hints of all.

He didn't say become a minister, a teacher or a doctor. But He didn't say don't become a minister, a teacher or a doctor. He didn't say go to a particular sporting event or don't go to the sporting event. It is recorded that he said, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." In other words this would mean believe in the Word that was made flesh and all of his teachings.

What does this all have to do with what we might find "BEFORE" the big bang? Well, picture for a moment a baseball resting in the hands of a fan in the center field stands with a big smile on his face. Suddenly with no effort the ball flies out of his hands and high up into the air and then its speed increases. In a few seconds it lands miraculously onto the hitter's bat. But it doesn't stop there. It darts right into the pitcher's bare hand and the pitcher always catches it. With modern video technology we can experience the reverse of an event in time.

Today time is constantly moving forward. The whole universe and everything that's in it is expanding and evolving and we are all a part of this evolution. If we could reverse time what would we see? Well the color around the distant stars and planets would probably change from red to blue as they began to come towards us.

If we focused our attention on Burnett's Mound we would see the steps begin to go away and the rocks on top vanish. We would see the concrete on Interstate 470 begin to disappear. We would see a black 1960 Impala convertible back down off the dirt road with its four teenage occupants. We

would see young boys climbing while their bicycles waited far below. We would see Chief Abram Burnett himself looking out at Topeka from his lofty vantage point. We would see the city of Topeka get smaller and smaller until it vanished. We would see the land become covered with glaciers followed by water. Then we might see time move more rapidly while the earth got hotter and hotter as the entire mass of the universe began to come back together.

Then with a swish it might compress until it was so small we couldn't see it as we arrived at the instant of the big bang or force. On the "BEFORE" side of the big bang what would we find? It appears we might find light. We might find life. We might find the Word. We might find God!

I've always been fascinated with height and distance and time.