

## Love at First Light

By Nathaniel "Dane" Sizemore

In 1997, I was finishing high school and dating a young lady that was doing an astronomy project using the 40 Foot telescope. She told me one day that she was doing an all-night observation of some source, changing something in the observation every 5-10 minutes—I can't recall if it was switching polarization, or between source and calibration signals. Since this before the 40 Foot had any automation, this switching had to be done manually—literally looking at the clock and throwing a toggle on one of the racks at the correct time. Every ten minutes, for several hours. It was going to be boring, tedious, tiring work in the middle of the night.

Eager to please this girl I fancied, I volunteered to help out. And, as promised, the night's work was dull, repetitive, and monotonous. But I got to hang out in the basement of the 40' talking with my girlfriend, so it wasn't all bad.

In the morning, both of us were exhausted, and my contact lenses were causing so much discomfort in my eyes that I took them out—but of course, I hadn't brought my glasses, so the world became very blurry. We got breakfast at the cafeteria, and then I drove home—still without my contacts in, trusting that I knew the road between the lab and my parent's house by heart. It was one of the dumbest things I've ever done in my life. Even if I'd had my glasses or contacts (things my driver's license listed as a requirement), I was so sleep-deprived that there was no way I was safe. In a just world, a police officer would have pulled me over and revoked my license on the spot.

But sometimes Fate smiles on us even when we don't deserve it, and I managed to slowly drive home to finally get some sleep without meeting a cop, hitting a deer, or meeting any other misfortune. My lady friend got her data (the chart for which was apparently hanging on Ron Maddelena's door until his retirement) and went on to earn a PhD in astrophysics and planetary science. I went on to become a software engineer and (more importantly) marry the girl.

Dr. Hanna G. Sizemore still works underground at Green Bank Observatory, and is currently setting up some planetary science experiments in the basement of the Jansky lab. As for me, I'm still helping astronomers make observations and record their data—thankfully, that now involves more software and fewer manual switches. Though they do still wake me up in the middle of the night from time to time.