

Frequent Flyer

By Tom Feller

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Anita had her first experience of flying since 9/11, when I had to make a business trip to Saint Simons Island, Georgia. For those of you who attended either or both of the Jekyll Island DeepSouth-Cons, it is the next island to the north. She likes to accompany me to that destination, but not to places like Hattiesburg, Mississippi, or Port Allen, Louisiana. She noted that she had to show ID four times each way rather than just once. Since I rented a car, I had to show ID five times. She was also impressed by the sight of National Guardsmen wearing camouflage fatigues and carrying assault rifles.

Her knee injury from her automobile accident is still bothering her, so she took one crutch with her

and accepted the offer of a wheel chair when she saw the line at security checkpoint at the Nashville airport. It was the longest I have ever seen. (The following week I returned at the same time of day and the same day of the week and found a much shorter line.) Otherwise, we had no difficulties.

We were in the historic section of our hotel, which has lots of stairs and ramps. We stayed in what is called a Cabana Suite, which was on the first floor and had a patio on the beach. Although it was cold, Anita could sit by the window and look out on the ocean. The picture above was from a trip there last year, when we stayed one floor higher in ocean front rooms with a balcony.

Chattacon—

This convention moved back to the Read House this year for the first time since I have been attending. Most of the convention activities were on the mezzanine level. Unfortunately, that level has steps and ramps, like most historic hotels, so Anita had trouble getting around. Another problem for us was that cigarette smoke returned to this convention and forced us to avoid public areas. We sat down near a coffee table on the mezzanine level Saturday afternoon, and some well-meaning person brought us an ashtray with smoldering cigarette butts. The dealer's room was exceptionally cold, so we didn't spend much time there.

Anita camped herself in the con suite for most of the weekend. She did venture out for Opening Ceremonies followed by a wine and cheese reception. She especially liked the Brie. We also attended the Masquerade on Saturday night, which was followed by a dance. Anita was not quite up to dancing, so I got to dance with *femme fatale* Julie Wall. The dances alternated between fast and very fast. Anita thought it was influenced by the Rave concept.

I attended two panels. In the first, Jack McDewitt brought notes, but the other panelists forced him to throw them away. The second concerned *The Lord of the Rings* movie and the overall judgment was positive.

The parties were numerous. The highlights, as usual, were the Xerps in 2010 Worldcon bid party and the party for this year's DeepSouthCon.

The Letterman and the Nashville Symphony—

This concert at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) was our Saint Valentine's Day date. TPAC does not have an elevator to the balcony level, so we sat in the orchestra level to protect Anita's back. This was the first time for me, although years ago Anita bought orchestra tickets in order to see Yul Brynner up close and personal in *The King and I*. Ironically, one of the Lettermen, Donovan Tea, went up to the balcony for one song. We don't recall that ever happening when we attended concerts there before.

Another disadvantage of TPAC is that there are no restaurants close by, so we had an early dinner at the Gersthaus, a German restaurant on the east bank of the Cumberland River, before driving over the river to find a parking place. Nashville's downtown is on the west bank of the river.

Guest conductor Jeffrey Steinberg, a local composer, arranged all the music for the first part of the concert. He began with a "Romantic Overture", which consisted of music from the movies *An Affair to Remember*, *The Goldwyn Follies* (George Gershwin), and *Casablanca*. The orchestra then played Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust" before local singer/actor/songwriter Mike Eldred came on and sang songs by Richard Rodgers with lyrics by his collaborators Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein II, including "My Funny Valentine" (Hart). The symphony ended the first part with the theme from the movie *Laura*.

The Lettermen came on after intermission. They don't wear letter sweaters anymore, and only one member, founder Tony Butala, has been with the group since day one in 1960. However, they sound exactly as they did 30 years ago and sang "Going out of My Head/Can't Take My Eyes Off You". This is because Butala has always insisted that members of the group sing in the high baritone range and be capable of both harmonizing and soloing. Tea, who lives in Gallatin, Tennessee, has been with the group for 18 years and Darren Dowler for 7. Dowler also does musical impressions, including Michael Bolton, Elvis Presley, and Louis Armstrong. It may be for an excellent Saint Valentine's Day date.

Concave—

As usual, we had a relaxing weekend at Concave. The motel has an indoor swimming pool, so I utilized it on both Saturday and Sunday mornings. We mostly hung around the lobby, which also function as the con suite.

The only programming is the Guest of Honor speech. Bill Francis mentioned that he has now taken up acting. It took place at the Bookstore Café in beautiful downtown Horsecave, Kentucky. The restaurant takes up half of the store and the books the other half.

Once again, parties were numerous (four on Friday night and four on Saturday night), the Xerps, SFC, and DSC ones.

Funny Money—

We had told Bill Francis that we would be in Saint Simons, where he lives, and he told us he would be appearing at a new local dinner theater, The Harrington Club. It was not far from our hotel, and we had no trouble finding it. The food was excellent. Anita had a filet while I had trout.

In this comedy by Ray Cooney, Bill plays a corrupt police officer. The main character, Henry Perkins, is a mild mannered accountant who finds a briefcase full of money. He decides to keep the money and complications ensue. It's a funny play.

Jammin' to Beat the Blues—

This was a concert to benefit the Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee. It utilizes local musicians so the music is good.

In previous years, it had taken place in a converted warehouse. This year it was at the Ryman Auditorium, long-time home the Grand Old Opry and originally a tabernacle. The seats are still pews, and our bottoms were sore after four hours. They have a small bar so you can get a drink if you so desire.

Although the musical emphasis was on rock and roll, my favorite group was the first one, which was a jazz band. One of the four songs was by Duke Ellington. Another highlight was the appearance of Ralph Stanley, who sang "O Death", which won a Grammy this year in the Country Male Vocal category. It originally appeared on the *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* Soundtrack. Unfortunately, the groups tend to blur together, especially since the program book was unreliable. Nonetheless, we enjoyed the music.

September 11 Aftermath—

The January 21 issue of Business Insurance reports that GMAC Commercial Credit Corporation is suing Silverstein Properties Inc., the leaseholder of the World Trade Center, for misusing insurance payouts. GMAC lent Silverstein the money to lease the WTC and says that Silverstein is improperly using the money to lobby federal, state, and city governments to limit liability. Insurers have advanced Silverstein \$150 million so far.

Southwest Airlines is going to hire 250 pilots, 1,200 flight attendants, and 2,600 other workers this year and take delivery on two Boeing 737 jets. They did lay off anyone after 9/11. In contrast, American Airlines fired 11,000 workers, although they recalled 3,100, United 19,000, and Northwest 10,000. However, Southwest also reported that the number of passengers they carried in January 2002 was down 4.9 percent from 2001. They still beat American, which is down 15.6 percent, and Continental down 9.5 percent for January.

The Marriott Financial Center has re-opened. Close to Ground Zero, falling debris hit the hotel, dust covered it, and 80 windows were broken. Furthermore, the building next door caught fire, and the firemen had to break down doors in the hotel to contain it. The hotel also suffered water damage from the fire hoses. This hotel is a different one from the Marriott World Trade Center, which collapsed.

Stadium Naming Rights—

PSINet and the Baltimore Ravens have come to an agreement to remove PSINet's name from their stadium. The bankrupt ISP will get a \$5.9 million refund from the team. I'm sure their creditors will appreciate it.

Work—

The March 4 issue of Hotel and Motel Management had a listing of independent management companies. They ranked us at #39 in terms of the number of rooms under our control.

Frequent Flyer Programs—

The only time I've ever flown US Airways was for our trip to Millennium Philcon last year. The airline has direct flights between Nashville and Philadelphia. However, I am intrigued by some of their rewards for the frequent flyer program. Here are the ones that caught my attention in an article in the March 13 issue of USA Today.

1. For 30,000 miles and \$650: A tour of the Kennedy Space Center and a seat in the VIP area to watch a shuttle launch.
2. For 250,000 miles and \$2,000, a flight in a Russian plane that simulates weightlessness.
3. For 275,000 and \$8,000, a flight in a MiG fighter plane to high altitude.
4. For 10,000,000 miles, a 30 to 90 minute ride in a spacecraft. This last one is tentative, because they don't have a spacecraft or a base yet. The airline has contracted with Space Adventures, a company based in Arlington, Virginia, who say the flights will be available in 2004 or 2005.

US Airways has two frequent flyer accounts over 10,000,000 miles, and several others that are close.

Comments on #225

SFPA sightings—

I saw Randy Cleary at Chattacon and Concave and Gary Robe at Concave.

Guy Lillian—

Fred Gwynne died in 1993.

BCS stands for Bowl Championship Series, which is an attempt match the number one and two college football teams at the end of the season. It rotates among several already-established bowl games. The controversy usually revolves over the issue of whether the top two teams are chosen to play.

Check out the web site at <http://www.eagles.org/challenger.html> for a photograph and information about Challenger the Eagle.

Smallville's portrait of Lex Luthor is sympathetic, but you can see how he will become Superman's nemesis at a later date. At this point in the story arc, he is friends with Clark Kent, despite Jonathan and Martha's disapproval, who saved Luthor's life after he and his car went off a bridge and fell into a river. As you know, in the Silver Age Superboy, he and Lex were friends until the accident in which Lex lost his hair.

George Wells—

Mae Wests were indeed two-part flotation vests for the front of the upper body that would inflate when you pulled a string.

Eve Ackerman—

I find Renee Zellweger to be very attractive in other roles, but I did not find her Bridget Jones character attractive because she smoked cigarettes. Smoking cigarettes is a big turn off for me.

Richard Dengrove—

The obvious way to determine the accuracy of Tarot readings would be to (1) write them down, (2) make a series of contrary predictions without the cards, and (3) compare them about a year later. However, I haven't seen anyone writing down predictions when we go to a Tarot party.

I believe I heard Dick Gregory claim the CIA had a crashed flying saucer in 1974. He spoke at my college, which I attended from 1972 to 1976.

The idea that one qualification of good ruler is that he or she does not want the job goes all the way back to Plato in *The Republic*.

Don Markstein—

I read *Mallard Fillmore* when I lived in Jackson, Mississippi. The Nashville paper doesn't carry it. I agree that the strip wasn't funny.

Steve Hughes—

At my company, we cannot buy company stock, inside or outside the 401K program. At times, I've felt deprived, but not when you consider Enron.

One bad element of the Enron 401K plan was that the company match was only in Enron stock, which the employees could not sell until they reached the age of 50. Of course, many of them also bought Enron stock with their own contributions, because top Enron management constantly told them that it was the best investment among their 20 choices. At the same time, those managers were selling the stock.

There's also the issue that Enron failed to provide the employees any notice that they were changing administrators. However, the period of time that employees could not trade funds was relatively short.

The March 11 issue of Business Insurance reports on a lawsuit between JPMorgan Chase Bank and two insurance companies over surety bonds. The bonds were supposed to protect the bank and two offshore companies when Enron defaulted on oil and gas deliveries worth \$1.36 billion. The insurance companies, Travelers Property/Casualty Corp. and Federal Insurance Co., are arguing that the deals were really disguised loans. According to the insurers, the scam worked like this:

1. A bank loans Company A the money to purchase oil and natural gas.
2. Company A prepays Enron for the oil and natural gas.
3. Enron contracts with Company B to buy the oil and natural gas to deliver to Company A. Enron pays more to Company B than it receives from Company A.
4. Companies A and B have the same directors and shareholders and therefore are effectively the same company.