

May 2011

My daughter Anne flew in from Johannesburg last week to celebrate her mother's – that would be my spouse Joan's – birthday number 75. Joan and I met her flight, and drove to Ocean Springs.

The original plan was to drive the ninety miles from Ocean Springs to the French Quarter for the birthday dinner on Friday, but Anne was only staying for a couple of days, and in the interest of saving time, we instead decided to drive the six miles across Biloxi Bay for dinner at the Beau Rivage. There are benefits to having casinos for those of us who only use them for the good restaurants, and the even better golf courses. I still play most of my golf in Atlanta, but also, lots at the Palace Casino's Preserve in Ocean Springs. It's a Jerry Pate design – you old golfers remember him hitting the 185 yard six iron to the last hole at the Atlanta Athletic Club to win the 1976 US Open. It's in great shape, generally un-crowded, and best of all, the greens fees are reasonable.

The Beau is upscale, and all of us thought the dinner was the best we have had on the coast. Of course, that excludes all the home cooked meals. As we walked in, I remarked to Anne that from the looks of the crowd every trailer park in Mississippi must be empty. Without hesitation, she replied; "Dad, that's great, if a tornado comes through Mississippi tonight, there will be no fatalities." To us, that's a little dark humor, because we lost our house in Katrina. I have been watching Fox report on the Mississippi River flood as I peck away, and I hurt for those thousands of people who are losing their homes. Most of them probably don't have flood insurance, and many of them will never recover financially. Even if they are able to rebuild, they will find the Federal Government regulations much different in flood zones, and rebuilding will be much more difficult than they expect.

Enough of that, because this is about non-reving, at least that was my intention. Anne was here for her mother's birthday, and also to go through the storage room where she left furniture and belongings when she moved to South Africa a couple of years ago. Since she was going to have a huge duffle bag to take back home, and ASA flies those mini jets into Gulfport/Biloxi Airport and Massage Parlor, we determined it would be better for her to drive back to Atlanta, and check the duffle bag on the 777 to JNB. I do my best thinking at around three in the morning, and it occurred to me that a woman really should not be driving 390 miles by herself in a Tahoe with 130,000 miles on it, particularly if she is my daughter. I would drive with her – what a great dad - she could drop me off at Hartsfield, and I would fly back. I checked the flights back to GPT and MOB. MOB is my preferred airport because they don't have the see everything scanner yet, and I don't get a massage there. Even though it's 50 miles to MOB, and only half that to GPT, I have found that I don't dread the trip when I depart from MOB.

The Gulfport/Biloxi Airport and Massage Parlor not only has one, they send everyone through it unless they are very busy. I have flown out of there seven times since November, and I have had six massages. They touch places on your body that would

cause an oriental massage parlor to be closed down in most US jurisdictions. I have had 88 days of radiation, plus numerous full body PET Scans, chest X-Rays, etc. during the last two years, and I am not accepting additional radiation, no matter how little it is. I am pretty certain that the TSA masseur doesn't enjoy the process anymore than I. He doesn't laugh much at my comments like "rub just a little higher there, oh could you rub a little harder, etc.

Well it was Sunday, and there was a 5:30 PM ATL-MOB that wasn't oversold, so I dropped my wife's car off at MOB on the way so Joan wouldn't have to pick me up, and I could fly back to MOB, and be home before dark. I calculated that we could make one pit stop, drive 10 mph above the speed limit, and be at ATL 30 minutes before flight time. I printed the boarding pass out on Delta.com before leaving, but of course I left it lying on the table at home. Everything else was like clock work. I was at the employee check in exactly 30 minutes before flight time. The agent in employee check in told me there were seats available, and I made it through security – even though I have a white beanie on my head that I am told makes me look like a Muslim Imam – in near record time, and I was at C-42 fifteen minutes before departure. One non-rev made it, and three of us didn't. Oh well, there was another MOB flight at 7:25. I don't mind standing by for the next flight since non-revs have access to the Sky Clubs, plus the last food had been the Arby's roast beef sandwich six hours earlier, and there was plenty of time for dinner.

One Flew South is a restaurant in E concourse, and it has been written up in some national publications as one of the best airport restaurants in the US. I stopped in the E Sky Club, and had a before dinner beverage before going to the restaurant. Tom, an airman on his way back to Afghanistan was at the next table. It's good that I don't dine in airport restaurants often because there always seems to be a soldier, or soldiers going to or coming from war. I can't stop myself from picking up their checks. I dine at the fast food restaurants of the world often, and it's pretty economical to pick up the checks. Tom had enjoyed the lamb chops for \$63. I certainly would go bankrupt if I hung out there very much. My \$43 dinner was excellent, and I checked the flight on my brand spanking new iPad 11, which I bought online and received the Delta discount which amounted to \$29 – on the \$800 model. Incidentally some of those discounts are worthwhile – 21% off AT&T bills for instance.

The flight didn't look promising. It was over by a couple, and the same couple of non-revs who didn't make the 5:30 were ahead of me. It was departing from the C concourse, and I arrived there about twenty minutes before departure. The agent had already boarded the flight, and the TV screen showed one seat remaining, and no standbys cleared. I asked the agent if any seats were left – mistake, even new employees learn quickly that you wait till the flight is closed before asking, or giving up. She said there was one empty seat, and she thought a revenue passenger was on the way. I was back in a comfortable seat in the C Sky Club when I looked at the flight on the net. Both non revs made it, and they went out with one vacant seat - mine.

Oh, by the way, the C Sky Club was formally an Eastern Airlines lonosphere Lounge. I was flying on Eastern half fare tickets often in the 70's, and they were selling lifetime lonosphere Club memberships for what seemed like a bargain price. It's a nice plastic card which I would be willing to part with for the right price.

I have had lots of happenings lately to make me realize how weak short term memories become in old age. Joan walked into the living room one day last week, and said; "Honey, I can't find my silver sandals....oh, they're on my feet." I only use her as an example because my forgetfulness is only because there is just so much material packed into my brain. I can access the names of most of my old friends - if there is no hurry.

So far, it's a pretty good day. I have only forgotten to bring my boarding pass to the airport - no damage - and watched as the MOB flight taxied out with my seat empty - damage. The Braves are playing the Phillies. I can watch the game in the Sky Club, the same as I would be doing at home. The 10:10 PM to GPT is a Delta MD-88 with plenty of room. Of course Joan will have to pick me up, and one car is in the employee lot at MOB. I rehearse what I will say to her in the morning; "Honey, lets go to Mobile for lunch today. We can go by Sam's Club and check out their great prices on wine, and oh yeah, we can stop by the airport on the way back, and pick up the car."

Billy was sitting next to me, and the Braves were beating the Phillies, and we entered into conversation. He had just taken a new job as CFO of an international corporation, and would no longer be traveling five days every week as a consultant. He told me about his family, and he was a great conversationalist because he had never heard any of my old airline stories, and he laughed at all of them.

We said goodbye, and it was about thirty minutes before my GPT flight. I moved up to the bar, pulled my brand new iPad 11 out of the briefcase and checked the standby list. All the standbys had been assigned seats except me. I suddenly remembered that I had listed, but had not checked in. I ran - maybe jogged - actually I walked briskly to the kiosk, it was inop. There was another one there, and it was in Japanese. I was so desperate that I tried to use it - to no avail. The two agents weren't busy as it was now only fifteen minutes before the club would close, and they checked me in. It's now about 25 minutes before flight time. That club is down around gate C 37, and this time I did semi run to the escalator to catch the train to A concourse - yep, you guessed it, the GPT flight was at gate A-31. The escalator was full of bodies, and about half way down, I realized that I had left my brand spanking new \$800 iPad 11 that I had purchased online, taking advantage of the \$29 Delta discount, on the bar in the Sky Club. Panic City! I contemplated going over the side of the down escalator to get on the up escalator, but then I remembered my unsuccessful leap over a small creek on a golf course last summer - one that I had stepped over easily in the past- and landing in the middle of the stream. Good judgment prevailed, and I rode to the bottom on what seemed to be the world's slowest escalator. I took the up one two steps at a time, and wondered if I could get to the Sky Club, and back to A-31 without a heart attack. Luck! One of those golf carts was at the top. "Twenty bucks for a ride to the Sky Club, wait for

me, and bring me back here.” Deal, and we were back to the escalator 20 minutes before flight time. Run down the escalator, just miss the train. Get to concourse A 12 minutes before flight time. Luck again, another golf cart, \$20 for nonstop to A-31.

The gate house is empty, the door is closed, and I hang my head as I lean on the deserted counter. It’s 9 minutes before departure by my watch, but the gate agent is already closing the flight out. Despair, but then super woman who happen to be disguised as a golf cart driver enters the door code, opens the door and disappears. In about 20 seconds she was back, and said get on.

That may be the best \$20 I ever parted with. It seems ridiculous, but after leaving my boarding pass at home, not staying at the gate long enough to get on the flight to MOB, causing my long suffering wife to drive 50 miles roundtrip to pick me up at GPT, and 100 miles to retrieve her car the next day, forgetting my brand spanking new iPad.....and spending \$40 to make the flight to GPT, it was a great day.

I guess I caught the travel bug about the same time I caught the flying bug. In a couple of weeks, we are going to take our eight year old granddaughter to South Africa. I can’t help but wonder what kind of adventures dufus grandpa will create. Kids are okay, but grandkids are supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!