

Letter to Buster

January 23, 2015

Buster,

The best thing about your emails is ... that they always leave me laughing. I use several of your "sayings" on the golf course, and I always give you credit. I have been blessed. I had a "Damascus Road experience," except mine was a "Stratford Road experience." It changed my life, as I was headed down a dead-end road. I just had a funny thought; in those days, Stratford was a through street, and it's dead end now.

As far as writing a book; I almost did. In 2008 the first Delta pilot that I ever flew copilot with died. Even though I hadn't seen him in over twenty years, I enjoyed flying with him so much that I wrote a letter of tribute to him. I mentioned what the airline was like in 1960, and I told some stories about the management and their relations with employees.

I was based in New Orleans, and I couldn't think of the almost perfect analogy until the movie MASH came out. I say almost perfect, because we had more girls than MASH. The letter went viral among retired airline folks. We know of mailing lists that published with more 5,000 people on them.

I started getting emails from some I knew, and many more that I had never met. They all encouraged me to write a book about the "glory days of the airlines," because the people are dying off, and soon nobody would know what it was really like." Airline books don't sell. In fact the best seller lists are crammed with the books of TV/radio hosts, who publicize their books on their shows.

I had one letter from a retired stewardess, who suggested that if I didn't want to publish, I should write for my grandchildren. She rung my bell, and I started writing, and before I finished, I had 80,000 words. It was mostly funny stories about Delta people. I had a unique perspective, because my best friends were senior management, so I knew the inner workings of the company. Management tried to make me the director of flight operations in 1981, and they thought I was a little bit arrogant when I turned it down. I explained to them that Billy and I had just borrowed 1.8 million dollars from an Atlanta bank, and I thought the bank would not be happy for me to be going to South Atlanta every day. I had a three hour lunch with Dave Garrett, shortly before he retired, I told him that "if I had known that you were going to pay senior vice presidents seven figures, I might have taken that job." I wrote fourteen chapters which went to about 3,000 people over about a year as they were finished.

When I moved back to Atlanta in 1967, dozens of pilots were living in Buckhead. Most guys who were golfers were members of Cherokee. One of my best friends had a hard time forgiving me for moving from the Athletic Club to Capital City. Pilots could afford to

live in Buckhead and send their kids to private schools in those days. I doubt if you will find many airline kids in Buckhead private schools today.

Those truly were "the good old days," and I could write a best seller about those days, if I was willing to embarrass my family and get thrown out of the church. In the early days of Apostles, Michael was having dinner with a doctor and his wife. During dinner the wife asked, "what does Gene Hall have to do with the church?" Michael told her I was one of the founding members and a vestry member. She got a faraway look in her eyes, and Michael asked her if she used to be a Delta stewardess, and she replied, "yes, how did you know?" Michael explained that, "Gene is not the person that you used to know."

As far as you Buster, I've enjoyed your friendship for how many years? I received twenty-seven replies to this last blog, and they all were believers except one that I'm not sure about. It went to at least fifty of our mutual friends. I hoped that I could start a dialogue with some non-Christians. I pray that I've planted a seed or two.

I look forward to breaking bread with you and your wife in the near future. Pass on Joan's and my regards to her.

The best,
Gene