

INTRO 2

This will be redundant for a few of you, but not for most. My list of a few old friends who responded to my tribute to John Pott last year is growing by the minute since Travis Foster and Dave Roberts sent the intro out to their e-mail lists. I want to put this project in the proper context to try and head off as much misunderstanding as possible. After the Pott letter last year, I received about thirty e mails from people thanking me for writing it. Several encouraged me to write more about the “golden years”. A couple even said that they enjoyed my writing style. I didn’t even know that I had a writing style; I had to think about that one for awhile. At Hall Fletcher Junior High in Asheville, North Carolina in 1949, eighth grade English was all about grammar, punctuation, and diagrams. Miss Crawford the teacher was an old maid who was about as stern as a 1968 model MSY Stewardess Supervisor. I mostly looked out the window, and dreamed about baseball, and my history teacher. Not necessarily in that order because my history teacher was absolutely, completely, and stupendously, drop dead gorgeous. For some strange reason, Miss Crawford took a liking to me, and gave me a pass. That is why some of my periods are after the quotation marks when they should be before, and vice versa. You might see than when it should be then, etc. My daughters will edit the whole mess later, after I expand it with all the personal family history. They can also take some of my X-rated stories that I have rated PG, and either eliminate them or edit them to G for a family audience.

Corky Willens is a retired flight attendant. We never met on the line, but her e mail encouraged me to write a history of those times, if not for publication, then for my grand children. Her letter had a major impact because she complimented my story telling ability with a letter that was beautifully written. Heading off the misunderstanding earlier referred to, has to do with my coming to Christ when I was 41 years old.

Some of my old Baptist buddies are probably going to look at some of my writings, and say; “I don’t think I would have told that”. Some of my non “born again” buddies (at least half my current friends fall into that category} will say; “This has too much Jesus talk for me”. Well, this ain’t gonna be about Jesus, but at the same time I will not deny Him. I remember how shy I was about revealing my becoming a Christian in the beginning. I walked into ATL Ops one day, and my classmate Stan Jurgelsky (MSY) was entertaining a group of pilots. Stan stopped his comedy routine long enough to ask if what he had heard about me was true. I uttered yes, as I hurried by without stopping. I am no longer ashamed of the gospel, but by the same token, I still enjoy an occasional martini, good wine (and even some that might be classified as mediocre), and having a

good time. One second officer that I led to Christ told me that it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been a regular guy, not what he had envisioned that "born agains" were like. We flew four trips together, and our conversations took place in the cockpit, over beers in the hotel bar before dinner, and during dinner. His point became clearer when Joe Ivey asked me to start a pilot bible study with him. I asked him why in this world he would want me of all people to do that with him. He said; "Gene, when the doc took me out of my mother's womb, and slapped me on the butt, I turned the other cheek. I don't even remember when I wasn't a Christian. You on the other hand, have credibility with a lot of these guys. It is like the alcoholic helping the other alcoholic. They identify with you." I was sorry I asked, but I enlisted.

I have already written about some of the people that I am going to give you my impressions of. The world knows about the leadership style of C.E. Woolman. As a manager, he was probably not in the same league as some of the great corporate CEOs of his time, but as a leader, he was up there with the likes of General Patton.

I want us to remember that Tom Miller was the genius that started "bunching" the flights in Atlanta that not only led to ATL being the biggest airline hub in the world, but sparked the growth that put Atlanta in a different league from other Southern cities of the time.

I want you to know the real Rox. I bet that none of you ever experienced the chef in a restaurant running you out of his restaurant at the point of a butcher knife, but Frank Rox and I did.

I haven't sent the Captain Bill Tuero chapter to you, but it is written. I will add some material that Pat McGirl (MSY) sent this morning. The only thing that Bill could do as well as, or better than fly an airplane was pass wind. When Bill flew, Delta had to furnish the airplane, and fill it with gas. Bill on the other hand was always filled with gas, and he could pass it at will.

I am going to tell you about the accident that ended Rowe Davidson's airline career in 1966, and then meeting with Pre Ball. I have more to say about my buddies who were in the Hilton Inn accident that caused me to be a pall bearer for three of my best friends in a three day period. After 42 years, tears still come when I think of it.

I am going to tell some stories that some of you will be able to confirm, and I encourage that. Tell me some of your memories, and I will pass them along with credit to you. Joan and I sat in bed this morning and laughed so hard that we

cried, reading e mails from Keith Hagstette (MSY Crew Scheduler & later ATL Dispatch}, and Pat McGirl.

One more thing, the reason I have time to do this now is because I am in Atlanta for six weeks of radiation therapy. In early January, I was standing in the kitchen in Mississippi mixing a martini (Bombay Sapphire Gin mixed 8 or 9 to 1 with Nosily Pratt extra dry vermouth, on the rocks with 2 large olives. That is just in case you ever invite me to dinner), and I bumped my head on the stove hood. After saying a few words not becoming to a gentleman, I was assured that it was not bleeding. The next day, I felt something that seemed to be a very small scab. I assumed I had bled a little. A few days later it was still there, and I scratched it off. Lo and behold, it came back. You pilots know that most of us have had more than one spot frozen off the left side of our faces, and most are benign. My physician daughter looked at it, and said it didn't look dangerous, but it was time to visit the Dermatologist, and she would probably freeze it. Her practice is busy, and it would normally take 30 or 60 days for a routine appointment, but she had a cancellation, and saw me the next day. She shaved it, and called me two days later with the news that it was malignant melanoma.

When I am in Atlanta, I play golf on Saturday mornings with a group at the Piedmont Driving Club. One of my best friends in the group is Dr. Rein Saral. He was a pioneer in bone marrow transplant at Johns Hopkins. Emory recruited him to establish their bone marrow unit several years ago, and later promoted him to CEO of Emory Clinic. He retired from that a couple of years ago, and is now finishing his career as the Associate Director of the Winship Cancer Center at Emory. I telephoned him right after I talked with my Pastor, Dr. Michael Youssef. I was in Mississippi, but I was at Emory the next day. The operation was a success, and the lymph nodes were negative. I entered a trial program that checks me every three months, and I was informed that there was less than a 20% chance of reoccurrence. Three of them came back in four months. I have had them removed along with more negative lymph nodes. There is no indication that there might be future problems, but this time I am getting six weeks of radiation. Today was the second day. I should be glowing in the dark very soon.

The reason that I am telling you all of this is because airline pilots have a much higher incidence of skin cancer than mere mortals have. It is a product of all that nice sunshine above the clouds. Mine were amelanotic, meaning they were skin colored. They were so harmless looking that even when they returned my M.D. Anderson trained surgeon thought they were harmless. If you aren't going to your Dermatologist for a complete body scan on a regular basis, go! They are harmless if caught early, fatal if not.

It is by God's grace that I found this melanoma. It was the size of a dull number 2 pencil point, and could have been ignored for a long time. I tell people that martinis and golf have finally been good influences in my life. It was uncovered because of mixing a martini, and I received quick medical care because of golf.