

By the WAY #6

by W. Andrew York
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Commentary

It's been some time since I really took an extended vacation. So, I was looking forward to the time away from the phone, Email and the day-to-day routine. After a weekend of tying up loose ends, I was ready to head to the coast. However, there were some stumbling blocks that popped up along the way.

The biggest was, when having my tires rotated on Monday, the manager of the Costco tire center asked "has anyone else worked on your tires recently?" Fortunately, I was able to give him a straight answer that only the Costco folks had since I bought the tires over a year ago. It seems one of the studs broke off and, since only Costco had worked on the tires, he said to get it fixed and they'd reimburse the repair bill.

That floored me - an honest shop that, without haggling, took responsibility and offered fair compensation. I ended up spending a few hours that afternoon at Saturn getting the \$100 repair done - not what I was planning to do, but I didn't want to drive to the coast with a missing stud on a drive wheel. [[As a side note, the manager had indicated the repair should be about \$40. When I brought in the \$100 bill after my vacation, there was no complaint or hesitation. After making sure someone would cover the counter, he took me to the bookkeeping area and had a manual check cut immediately -- I was suitably impressed!]]

The next wasn't so much a stumbling block, but a delay. I had planned to leave on Monday, but a long-time friend's going away lunch was Tuesday at noon. So, I delayed my trip until Tuesday afterwards. Unfortunately, I did end up missing her big send-off party Saturday night.

The luncheon was a small group of folks who'd worked together years back at the Cooking School. We had a big lunch at Moonshine (mine - Buffalo Meatloaf with a side of pimento macaroni and cheese, yum!), then I headed south on IH35 to San Antonio. There I visited a friend. and we ate dinner at one of my favorite Thai places (it used to be Dang's, now the daughter (I think) runs it and renamed it to ??). I had loved their spicy chicken, but now it seems a bit sweeter than I recall (from nearly nine years ago). We also split a spicy beef salad (very spicy, tasty, that I never had) and ate their deep fried spring rolls with plenty of fish sauce (most excellent). Unfortunately, I was still stuffed from lunch and didn't eat all that much.

After dinner, headed coastward in a straight shot down IH37. Not too much traffic with nice countryside scenery along the way. As I neared the coast, it sprinkled a bit and, in the sky, a rainbow began to appear. As I continued driving, it became more and more distinct until it was fully formed, going from one side of the highway to the other - and I was driving right under it. I can't remember the last time I saw one of those and this one was perfect. I thought it was a good omen.....

How wrong I was, the last stumbling block came as I was ready to hit a bed. I cruised into Corpus about 9pm and checked into my motel. The AAA book had given it three diamonds and, when I called to make reservations, confirmed some amenities. However, the hotel was in the midst of an industrial park and had just a handful of cars in the front lot. That raised a red flag, but I was ready to get some sleep.

While checking in, I chatted with the desk clerk and was advised it was a good idea to park my car in the front after unloading. The front desk was manned all night, there were plenty of lights and the security guard would be walking around that area. Red Flag #2.....

The room I was given was on the extreme far backside of the hotel at the end of the parking lot. Heading back, I discovered that the back of the hotel abutted a field and there were no cars at all back there - what few were all parked on the front half of the hotel. Also, the parking lot lights weren't all working, some completely out, others flickering. Red Flag #3.....

Going up to the room, the back door was ajar (interior corridors) and would not shut automatically. When pulled shut, all it took was a modest yank and it opened again. The security camera on the inside of the door had been removed - the mount and cable were there, but no camera. Red Flag #4....

As I went up to the room, it appeared no one else was on the floor, the ice machine wasn't working (from what I discovered, it had been broken for some time), the promised in-room mini-fridge was missing and one of the walls had something spattered on it. I'd run out of red flags to fly.....

Needless to say, I was not in a good mood, but I was tired and just wanted to get to sleep. I went back to the desk clerk and explained my dissatisfaction. He understood and offered me another room - on the same floor a scant eleven rooms away from my original room. It "should" have a mini-fridge and is closer to "what should be" a working ice machine. None of the security concerns were addressed. I decided to take my business elsewhere - a week in lodgings such as this was not in the cards.

The desk clerk didn't try to hedge or make excuses. His basic position was he didn't have a problem with cancelling my reservation and not charging me anything. We'll see what my charge card shows when the bill comes. Interestingly, I was talking with another person in the City's hospitality industry and mentioned my experience. I was shocked when the person said, "you must have been at XXX" - she nailed it in one (if you're interested in the hotel name, Email me and I'll let you know in a personal letter).

So, at 10pm, I went to a Denny's to decide what to do. Rather than just sit at the counter, I ordered a soda. That was a \$2 mistake - I should have just sat in a parking lot somewhere rather than pay what must have been a 2000% mark-up or more on five swallows of soda, plus the tip. I didn't want to jilt the server due to corporate greed.

After checking with a full LaQuinta hotel, I ended up staying for the night at a Best Western at about 50% more than what I'd planned. However, it was a comfortable bed in a busy, well-lighted hotel - and I was more than ready for sleep. Breakfast included eggs, sausage and was filling.

In the morning, I went and found a Day's Inn a block from the Corpus Christi beach that was slightly more than I'd budgetted. However, it had everything I was planning on (mini-fridge, etc) and busy enough that security was not a concern. It didn't have a "hot" breakfast, but that wasn't a deal killer and I enjoyed my five nights there. The place could use some maintenance and renovations, but it was perfectly fine to stay in. On the plus side, the other folks staying in the hotel were friendly, as was the staff.

After relocating and settling into the new hotel, it was time to do some sightseeing. I drove around Corpus a bit, went to the Visitor's Bureau and had lunch at the recommended Silvarado Smokehouse. Large portions, good BBQ, though the sauce could have been a bit more spicy for my tastes. I'd go back.

Then, I visited the USS Lexington (docked just down the street from my hotel). Impressive ship! I've been on cruisers, submarines, battleships and other smaller craft; but this was massive. I'm sure the USS New Jersey was basically as large, but with the superstructure, you don't have the feeling of "BIG" that you get looking across the flight deck of a carrier or the hanger deck. It just goes on, and on, and on..... I can't imagine what a CVN would look like. Maybe, one of these days...

I had dinner at Blackbeard's and ate the recommended Garlic Especial (included scallops, shrimp and blue crab meat). Perfectly cooked, it was excellent and is highly recommended. The only complaint is that the restaurant is a bit dark for those who want to read while eating.

The next day, I opened with an omelet with home fries at Angie's....decent. Then, headed on a road trip around Corpus Christi Bay. Drove up to Port Aransas, took the ferry over to Mustang Island and then drove along the coast road. Every so often, there was a beach access road which took you right to the Gulf of Mexico and the beach - you actually can drive on the beach, park and set up for the day or camp overnight. Beautiful scenery and the Gulf is something to see.

Unfortunately, this may be a passing condition. While driving across the Island, I noted a plethora of "For Sale" signs, some promising beach access and others warning of no direct beach access. Interspered with the open land, there were a few resorts, housing developments and hotels. These portend a vast increase in developed land and a loss of access for the public to the beaches and the Gulf.

Lunch was back in Corpus at the Water Street Seafood. A baker's half dozen fresh gulf oysters (with horseradish, lime and cocktail sauce) and a house speciality of crawfish stuffed fried tortillas was excellent. They even made sure I had a well lighted spot so I could read during the meal.

In the afternoon, I visited the Museum of Science and History. The museum was filled with all sorts of displays and plenty of wonderful information. However, it was a mixed lot. One display, discussing research, probably hadn't been updated since the '50s - it included slide rules and other outdated research equipment while excluding computers. In another area, a bat exhibit was next to a display about collecting (by the way, don't collect guns, they might be stolen), which was next to one that had animal miniatures.

The highlight of the Museum was the Santa Maria, the Nina and the Pinta. Yep, those famous ships - not the originals, but replicas created from the best possible information in the early '90s in Spain. They were actually sailed across the Atlantic (I wouldn't have been a volunteer!) and did an East Coast tour. They ended up in Corpus where they had the largest turnout to see them. Based on that, the Spanish government first loaned, then donated, the three ships to the City. The Santa Maria and the Pinta are now

dry docked (hit by a barge a few years ago); but the Nina is still in the water - no tours, while it is waiting restoration.

After walking across the ships, they are TINY. I don't mean small, I mean scarily miniscule. The Pinta and the Nina are caravels, not designed to be outside of land for more than a day or two (per the guide). The Santa Maria is a bit larger, but not by much. Given the chance, I could have thrown a baseball from the stern of the Santa Maria and hit the front of the Pinta - they are really tiny. How they crossed the Atlantic, survived and eventually returned to tell of their discovery is an amazing event.

Thinking of our reluctance and aversion to "risk", this journey would never have occurred if it was tried today. We don't send up the Space Shuttle due to risk and Columbus's voyage had a quantum leap in danger due to possible risks. It makes one wonder whether we'll ever make another amazing discovery with our risk aversion and need to ensure that nothing bad will happen if we do "something".

Ended the day with a bit of beach time and dinner at Kiko's. It is a Mexican place that obviously is a local draw. The parking lot was immense (and full) and the wait on Thursday night was 30+ minutes. I found the recommended "Special" plate wasn't all that special. I'd place it in the average range for Mexican places and the salsa was fair. I hope I hit the place on an off night, otherwise what are the locals thinking?????

Breakfast was at What-a-Burger (OK, a chain, but good breaky!). Went to the Texas State Aquarium, a bit expensive entry fee for the exhibits. Besides the static displays, which were decent representations of the Texas aquatic culture, they had on-going live presentations. The dolphin show was OK (nothing close to a SeaWorld event) and the reptile discussion was focussed on the rescued alligators (or was it crocodiles?). At least all who wanted to could pet the reptile.

Then, bayside for the rest of the day. I decided to spend the time on the Corpus Christi Bay beaches rather than travel to the Gulf beaches. The tide was similar, the crowd about the same (I suppose) and I was close to the hotel if I needed something. Unfortunately, I found out that the sun was more intense than around my apartment complex pool. I could set out for six hours at the pool and would be fine. However, at the beach, after four hours and I was redder on my shoulders than Santa Claus's suit. I had to buy aloe cream and, for the first time, sun block to fight the burn.

Lunch was at Pier 99, with a very attentive server. I ordered the Mucho Gumbo - a hearty bowl of Gumbo with three large shrimp, two crab leg clusters and a blackened fish filet. Excellent in taste and price. Had dinner at the Longhorn Saloon, cattlemen's cut steak. Tasty, but nothing special.

On Saturday, returned to Angie's for the weekend breakfast buffet. Good eggs, ham and such. Nothing to write home about, but decent. Went bayside for a bit and had a quick lunch at Subway. Spent the afternoon reading, resting and sunning. Dinner was at Bad Brad's Barbecue Joint - an unfortunately named restaurant. The potato salad and cole slaw were institutional, the BBQ sauce bland (non-offensive, I would guess) and the BBQ itself adequate. Interestingly, this is the only BBQ joint that I've been at that had fried bologna on the menu. Went back to bayside for the sunset and reflecting on personal priorities and goals.

Breakfast on Sunday was Sonic (good breakfast burrito combo) and then to bayside for a few hours. Returned to the hotel for a nap after lunch at Blackbeard's (the shrimp quesadillo - tasty!). Then, back to the beach for a few hours followed by dinner at Pier 99 for my final meal.

Unfortunately, this was a mistake. The server was barely adequate, never refilling my tea. The salad was served after a long wait and was immediately followed by the main course. The shrimp in the grilled shrimp dinner were very well seasoned but roughly 80-91 count (10 of them). The gumbo I had previously had probably 25-15 count shrimp - I think got as much shrimp in the gumbo as I did in the shrimp dinner, but the shrimp dinner cost twice as much! I was not impressed in the slightest - it was like I'd eaten at two different restaurants.

Monday, headed back to Austin after watching the sun rise over the bay. I stopped and visited my friend in San Antonio. Of course, we had lunch at Dang's (or whatever it is called today.....). I had the Garlic and Pepper Beef - excellent, along with the fried Spring Rolls with plenty of fish sauce. Yummy!

Back at home, I found a plethora of Email and mail to grab my attention. However, I was able to spend some time during the second week resting, poolside, vacation chores, reading, catching up and helping with a Tamale class at the cooking school. Now, back to work.....

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Feature: Texas is one of the more unique states in the United States and, more so than other states in my experience, it retains a strong identity distinct and separate from the citizens' identity as an American. Part of that, I'm sure, comes from it's history - fighting for and gaining independence from Mexico, then existing as an independent republic for a decade before becoming a state. From that independent existence, Texas had special provisions drawn into the articles of annexation. Two examples:

- the federal government was not given control over public lands. All land held as a public trust were retained by the State government. Since then, some land has been transferred to federal control, leased or otherwise sold; but, upon annexation, Texas was owned solely by the State.

- Texas retained the right and privilege to subdivide, creating up to five total states. If this article was invoked today (and upheld, nearly 160 years after being written), what had been Texas would have the same number of house members, but would increase it's presence in the senate from two individuals to ten - nearly 10% of the voting membership. The former state's influence in the Electoral College (the folks who actually elect the president) would increase in a similar fashion.

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Review: In *Fantasy & Science Fiction's* September issue, they ran a story that was actually excerpts from a lengthy exchange of letters between James Tiptree, Jr. and Ursula Le Guin. The uniqueness of the correspondence, underscored by Tiptree's being in real life Alice Sheldon - this unbeknownst to the SF community, makes for a fascinating read. Definitely worth reading - seek this issue out. And, one would hope that the entire body of the letters would be collected and published in the near future.

Observation: Western society has almost defaulted to assume everyone has high-speed access to the Internet as a matter of course. Consider the news magazines and newscasts that relate "more information on our website by clicking on "XYZ"", the proliferation of commercial specials (coupons, deals or or discounts) available at our "website using code "ABC"", and the migration of some commerce/education solely to the Internet (E-Bay, magazine renewal sites and college information delivery). For those limited to dial-up or minimal bandwidth access (by choice or location), there should be a "text" only option required that removes gratuitous graphics, unnecessary formatting and other excessive bandwidth hogs. For instance, at the point I'm typing this, the column is 12,140KB as a word document but is almost 1/4 the size as text or .rtf - and that is with minimal text alternation (bolding, italicizing, etc) and no imbedded material. The Internet needs to be accessible to all - not just those that can afford swift, high cost, bandwidth to their computers.

Additionally, I fully support Internet Neutrality - where all webcontent is treated the same. There should be no preference in speed/access for those sites that pay a premium for preferential treatment by carriers. Otherwise, this is a another situation where someone can pay money to suppress (indirectly, I admit) the free speech of another by swamping the search parameters with their chosen, and paid for, preference bandwidth and access.

Playlist for this issue: Bat Out of Hell II (Meatloaf); CBS News (both local and national); Taking the Long Way (Dixie Chicks) <--I don't agree with some of their political views, but their music is worth listening to!; Kyle XY (tv show); Hell's Kitchen (tv show)

Coming up Next Time: ArmadilloCon Con Report and More Texas History.....

=====GAME SECTION=====

On TAP:

By Popular Demand (Join Now! Open to Anyone at Any Time!)
Let me know what else you're interested in seeing here.....(sorry, we're out of Shiner).

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BY POPULAR DEMAND

The goal is to pick something that fits the category and will be the "most popular" answer. You score points based on the number of entries that match yours. For example, if the category is "Cats" and the responses were 7 for Persian, 3 for Calico and 1 for Siamese, everyone who said Persian would get 7 points, Calico 3 and the lone Siamese would score 1 point. The cumulative total over 10 rounds will determine the overall winner. Anyone may enter at any point, starting with an equivalent point total of the lowest cumulative score from the previous round. If a person misses a round, they'll receive the minimum score from the round added to their cumulative total. And, if you want to submit some commentary with your answers, feel free to.

NOTE: I always acknowledge an Email submission. If you've sent something in and don't hear back from me after a couple of days, send again or check with Jim. I let him know if I expect to be away from the computer for any extended period of time.

Round Five Category – Summer Holiday

Round Five Results:

- 01) Vacation Destination: Disneyland/World 6, Beach 3, Hawaii 1
- 02) Length of Vacation: One Week 8, Two Weeks 2
- 03) Best Weekend Getaway Destination: Beach/Shore 3, Las Vegas 2, SeaWorld/Amusement Park 2, New York 2, Lake of the Ozarks 1
- 04) Mode of Travel: Car 8, Plane 2
- 05) Common Vacation Chore Around The House: Yard Work/Mowing 3, Stop Mail/Paper 1, Sweeping 1, Clean Out Garage 1, Boarding Pet 1, Gardening 1, Packing 1, Painting 1

Individual Scores:

01) Nathan Simmons:	DisneyLand, Week, SeaWorld, Car, Yard Work	= 74 + 27 = 101
02) Doug Kent:	DisneyLand, A Week, The Shore, Auto, Cleaning Out Garage	= 68 + 26 = 94
03) Jim Burgess:	DisneyWorld, One Week, New York City, Car, Painting	= 64 + 25 = 89
04) Jamie McQuinn:	DisneyWorld, Two Weeks, New York, Airplane, Gardening	= 75 + 13 = 88
05) Tom Howell:	DisneyLand, One Week, Beach, Auto, Lawn Mowing	= 58 + 28 = 86
06) Edi Birsan:	[No Entry Received]	= 73 + 8 = 81
07) Steve Koehler:	Beach, One Week, Beach, Car, Sweeping	= 59 + 23 = 80
09) Brendan Whyte:	Hawaii, Fortnight, Vegas, Plane, Kennel/Cattery for the Pet	= 68 + 8 = 76
09) Fred Davis:	Beach, One Week, Amusement Park, Auto, Stop Mail/Paper	= 51 + 22 = 73
10) Marc Ellinger:	Beach, One Week, Las Vegas, Car, Packing	= 49 + 22 = 71
11) Kevin Wilson:	DisneyWorld, 1 Week, Lake of the Ozarks, Car, Mow Lawn	= 39 + 26 = 65
12) Christopher Janik:	[No Entry Received]	= 46 + 8 = 54

Best possible score: 28. Best score achieved: 28 by **Tom!**

WAY's Commentary:

- 01) Vacation Destination: Tough one, but due to my vacation this year, I'd would have answered the Beach.

I have no interest in going to Disneyland/World (especially on my own, though if in a group.....). A cabin or cruise probably would have been my second choice. No one picked going to a gaming convention, I wonder why.....

- 02) Length of Vacation: This was going to be a toss-up between the American "one week" quickie vacation and the more sedate "two weeks" more common in Europe. I don't know what a common vacation length would be elsewhere in the world (Japan??). As most of the readership is American, the one week was the top vote getter. However, again based on my vacation this year, I would have chosen

- two weeks. I fondly remember the one year I was able to take “July” off of work for a very long and enjoyable vacation.
- 03) Best Weekend Getaway Destination: This was a toughie for me, long weekends for a getaway isn’t something I’ve done much of. The folks I think about doing these go to their vacation home/cabin or a spa. Vegas was a great choice, as were amusement parks.
- 04) Mode of Travel: Hands down, the car was expected as the number one choice. I did hope for one cruise ship or bus.....
- 05) Common Vacation Chore Around The House: Vacation chores, I never have one without the other. Great time for cleaning out closets, sorting through old boxes of “stuff”, rearranging furniture and detailing the car. This year, I’m plowing through, sorting and cataloging my magazines (old *Generals*, *Dragons* and *Europas*). Of course, I’m no where near done; but I did make a dent in things! For those who have houses, the heavy yard work is almost a given.

Player Commentary:

- 01) Vacation Destination: **[Jim-Bob]** while I’m NOT a big fan of the place at all, it whas got to be the top scorer. **[WAY]** And you are correct....
- 02) Length of Vacation: **[Tom]** figuring most folks will go with the mizely average US vacation. Two weeks is soooooo much better!
- 03) Best Weekend Getaway Destination: **[Kevin]** I don't expect to get many hits on the Lake of the Ozarks response to #3 but if anyone has been there, they won't pick much else for a weekend getaway. Think Mardi Gras on the Water on a holiday weekend. The rest of the time, it is just a great place to spend a long weekend. Plenty of restaurants, many on the water, plenty of nightlife if that's what you want. I've seen old bands from my high school and college days playing at local bars, not that I liked them all then but I did recognize the names. There is also plenty to do off the water if you prefer. All the tourist traps as well as golf, shopping, etc. **[Jim-Bob]** this could be a tough one, you could do generic “the mountains” or “skiing” (not right season) for this eon, but NYC IS a great Weekend Getaway place, expensive, but great.
- 04) Mode of Travel: **[Brendan]** Plane - cos you're all too energy-inefficient to use trains over there!
- 05) Common Vacation Chore Around The House: **[Fred]** Since we live in an apartment instead of a house, we don't have many chores to do before we leave. **[Tom]** I'll go with lawn mowing, although there are so many to choose from. Plumbing seems to be the task of choice at our place... Some kind of auto repair to get ready for vacation ought to be high on the list.

General Player Commentary:

[Kevin] Obviously I answered these from a US perspective. I wish more Americans followed the European pattern of more interesting places and longer visits. My wife and I have hit a few and tried the 10 day vacation and found them very relaxing. More so than the 1 week only.

Round Six Category – Dating

- 01) Worst Place to take a Date
- 02) Best Place to take a Date
- 03) Favorite Place to take a Date
- 04) Average Cost of a Date
- 05) Best Food for a First Date

Submit Email entries to wandrew88 of gmail.com or by mail to W Andrew York; POB 201117; Austin TX 78720-1117

Deadline is: August 26, 2006 at high noon Central Time