

June 7th, 1992

In the Air

Sometime in March I decided to go home to Oklahoma to see my ailing aunt and also attend the 100th reunion of my High School. Unfortunately my aunt died before I could get home. I called Sandy Treiber, our late Elinore's niece to arrange my travel schedule. According to my credit card I did this on March 30th. Then the airlines decided to have a price war and there was much to do about the original schedule. I finally worked it out with Delta by calling them well past midnight. When I was sure that all was well I said good-bye to my classes and I was ready to go.

Early morning June 7th, actually a half hour before the alarm went off, I was wide awake. I got up and fixed my coffee and went back to bed until I heard the bell alerting me the coffee was ready. After two cups of coffee and a bagel I got myself ready for the flight. I bathed and shaved, closed my luggage, which was no easy job. All this time Alex knew something was different. He followed me from room to room with his head cocked to one side. I could tell he wasn't going to like what was coming up. In fact the whole week hadn't been the normal routine. First he had his shots and the next day he was washed and groomed.

I called the limousine service to make sure that there were no slip-ups. That part went without a hitch. I knew I was going to have a difficult time leaving Alex. After all, we have never been separated this long before. After I was dressed I took him for a long walk. This was also not the time usual to have our morning outing. There were very few people on the street, and I took longer at every stop. Believe me, when Alex wants to stop he stops. He plants four paws into the side-walk and nothing but brute force will move him. I have often thought that we would do better with him on a skateboard.

Willie, the elevator man, allowed me to put the luggage in the elevator so I would not have so much to carry. Checking on the apartment was my next step. Water off, fans off, dishes washed and the apartment looking nice so when I returned I wouldn't be knocked over by the sight of what sometimes I become accustomed to. By the time I got to the front door the limousine was there. The ride to the airport was pleasant and the driver spoke English. Making conversation was fun. He was from Honduras. Those of us who live in New York City very seldom get a driver who understands a word you say, or at least they play like it.

At the Airport I checked in and set off all the alarm systems because of the metal brace I wear on my knee. I pulled my pant leg up but not far enough to show the whole brace. I was soon surrounded and had to hold my arms out like Jesus on the cross while they went over me with a scanner. I will say that the seats were so close together that it was not easy getting comfortable. We got drinks and lunch that was cold, but I ate it. After all I paid for it. Everyone knows how cheap I am. Oh yes! While at the airport I bought a teddy bear for Nick, my newest nephew, saying I LOVE NEW YORK.

I am writing this part while we are in the air to Dallas. I must say the computer is working very well, and helps pass the time. Every time someone passes in the aisle I get my arm hit. No one is small enough to get down the aisle without hitting those of us on the aisle seats. A small inconvenience.

When we landed at the Dallas Airport, I had to change planes from one gate to another. My connection to Oklahoma City was at least a mile and a half away from the boarding gate. By the time I got to the gate I was pooped out. The flight is so short that by the time we got to our flight level we began our descent. We got a free drink of soda, and before we could finish it the flight attendants were collecting our glasses.

I was met by three beautiful ladies: Wilma, Evelyn and Katie. They all looked twenty years younger than they are. Wilma's hair is the most beautiful silver I have ever seen. Wilma is 81 and she does not have a wrinkle. I got to spend the rest of the evening with these three ladies. Wilma is Uncle Russell's and Aunt Stella's daughter and Evelyn and Katie are the daughters of Uncle Mac and Aunt Vivan. We had an informal dinner and just talked. We all seemed to agree on every thing. Wilma and I both have total recall. I remember Wilma coming from Mo. and living with Uncle Mac and Aunt Vivan. In my mind they were almost like sisters, because every time I went to visit they were all there. We told stories of Aunt Oma and Aunt Vivan. They were my mother's sisters, but Aunt Oma always lived with Aunt Vivan. We always got a big laugh at their expense. They did not get along too well and yet they loved each other very much. I can't remember which one said it, but I grew up hearing, "Just because you are blood relatives doesn't mean you have to like each other."

There is something in our genes that makes us animal lovers. I do believe Evelyn is worse than I am. She has an alley cat, Vanessa, that is part wild and, Mackie, the cutest-dumbest dog, I have ever seen. The dog crawled in my lap and let me pet him for hours. As many of you know, Alex, my dog, gives me only five minutes a day of love and it must be in private. A stranger gets all the kisses and attention from Alex. I have always said if you have an ego problem Alex is not for you. That night I slept like a log.

Evelyn came back from her aerobics class and we went over to see Wilma and her dogs. Wilma has one dog, medium size, named Adolph, and a Great Dane named Morgan. Morgan standing on his hindlegs must be seven feet tall.

Wilma took Evelyn and me to lunch in a quaint little restaurant, a place that would look more at home on Cape Cod. It was an antique shop with a small eating area. You order your food and pay before you sit down. Then they would call out your order and you get up and serve yourself. The food was not bad. We sat and talked. Wilma, as I said is in her 80's, and knows more about the family than anybody else. She remembers growing up on the farm and the cousins, Aunts and Uncles that I had only met once, when I was about 10 years old. She remembers the horse and buggy days. I will repeat, she doesn't have a wrinkle and her hair is pure white. Maybe I am prejudiced, but our family is really made up of physically beautiful people. I guess I forgot this, not seeing them very often.

On the way to Wilma's I wanted Evelyn to stop at a drug store so I could pick up powder for my rash. At the check-out counter there was a large display of condoms. Well, Evelyn and I could not help but to make some comment. The young girl behind the counter was quick to point out that they came in sizes. Evelyn thought that one size fits all. I said "Dear, it has been a long time, hasn't it?" I told the girl that in New York they also come in flavors. She knew what I was talking about, but Evelyn's comment was, "Why on earth?" and again I said it has been a long time. Evelyn muttered under her breath, "Not as long as you may think." I taught my 72 year old cousin some things that came with the invention of the wheel.

Evelyn, took Wilma and me to see where I was born. It is still there only it is boarded up and looked much smaller than I remembered it. We also drove by our old house on East 12th Street which is now a huge hospital complex that covers seven or eight square blocks. A few buildings I remember.

After dropping Wilma off, Evelyn still had some shopping to do and I sat in the sun while I waited for her. You New Yorkers don't understand that in Oklahoma strangers speak to each other. I was soon in conversation with everybody. White hair and beard are just a little out of place, but looking like a WASP that had gone wrong I was still treated like an Okie. When I come back and say t-i-n and really mean t-e-n don't be too surprised. It doesn't take long for that southern accent to come back. I don't want to imply that Okies are not smart because we are----we just talk funny.

After we got home I had Evelyn call Dixie to come to dinner, because she has a calming effect on Plato. Dixie is Evelyn's friend and couldn't be more of a family member if she has been born into it. In fact we have adopted her and vice versa. She has a clearer picture of our family because she can view us from a distance. I adore her.

Plato arrived an hour early and after a strained embrace said, "Man, I never thought you would ever be fatter than I." I have to go along with this, because he had lost alot of weight and looked great. Since I last saw him he had had a couple of serious operations. I looked at him very closely and said "For a man 72 you are really handsome." His retort to this was, "I am only 71 !!!". Dinner went very well although Dixie had to kick me under the table a few times. You see Plato remembers (if he remembers) things differently than the rest of the world. Evelyn and I agreed that my father's eyes were as blue as mine. Plato insisted that they were green. We finally compromised that they were blue- green. Whatever story I told he had to top me. This is the norm. Plato went to school with Lonny Chapman and Dennis Weaver. I made brownie points by telling the story that when our cousin Lou Antonio came to New York City and stayed with me, that Lou knocked on the door of Lonny Chapman's and when Lonny opened the door all that Lou said was, "I'm Plato's cousin." Lonny told me this story. He was invited in and later Lonny produced and directed an Off-Broadway show starring Lou. Lou won an award for this performance and the reviewer called him a young John Garfield. Lou went on to star in a number of Broadway shows. Later Dennis Weaver had Lou direct "Mr. Ben" starring Dennis. Before Lou left New York for the gold coast he played in "Faust" at the Phoenix with our own

Nancy Barrett. I must say telling this story and making Plato the hero made the rest of the evening nicer.

When Plato left he actually embraced me like he really did love me. I am sure in that screwed up mind of his he does. That was the end of day two.

Day three has just begun. Evelyn is leaving me to write so she can play tennis. She really bitches if she does not get to play with really good players. Like me she likes to move and be challenged. It is in our make-up. As you know I am not going to give you a class that doesn't push you to the edge.

Evening is approaching and our guests are beginning to arrive. Wilma was the first to arrive, then Plato, Mack, Carolyn his wife, and their two girls Katie and Gwen. I must say it is not hard to tell that we are related. Cot and Katie came in from the lake that they assured me was there when I lived in Oklahoma, but to tell the truth I never saw water except at the pool or at the reservoir, Lake Overholser.

You see when I grew up the grass in Oklahoma City was yellow and the dust storms were regular occurrences. Now the grass is green and the trees are in full bloom. Katie called to my attention that we grew up during the drought in the thirties. That is when John Steinbeck wrote THE GRAPES OF WRATH. It is funny that in my mind I never grew out of that time. The drought and the depression are my deepest memories of Oklahoma.

I must say the evening went well, I actually enjoyed our conversations. Plato used to be a great story teller, most of them lies from start to finish, but fun to hear if you had to only hear them once. Now Plato's mind is slowing down and by the time he gets to the the end of a story it is all you can do to keep your eyes open. If you wait ten minutes he will tell the same story again. I am afraid there is a problem that no one wants to face.

Cot, Katie's husband, has become as addicted to his computer as I have to mine. This is not in the genes because Cot and I are not related by blood. He brought some of his stories for me to read. I have learned more about him from his writing than I have since we were youngsters in high school. Katie and Cot got married right after graduation. They had gone to school together. His family and ours have always been in some way attached. Cot's Father was the personnel manager at THE OKLAHOMA NATURAL GAS AND ELECTRIC CO. I do believe we all had worked for him at sometime in our lives. In fact I wonder if he didn't employ half of Central High School.

Evelyn's boys Mack and Kip are cut from the same cloth as me, bleeding heart liberal democrats. Mack and his wife Carolyn are into education and Kip works at the Oklahoma Zoo. He won't admit it, but I know he loves his animals, otherwise he would not have stayed for eight years. After a big meal (the only kind this family knows how to prepare,) I love the fact that they are all so health conscious, but precede every meal by saying "Oh! this is a one time event and won't hurt us." I heard this every day I have been here. Evelyn found in the back of her freezer a container of peach daiquiries. She swore that it had been there for ten years. I am sure it was pure alcohol. I drank three and felt great. The next

morning Evelyn went to her aerobic class and came home and I still hadn't moved. She was ready to call 911 when I finally wandered out of the room way past noon to get a cup of coffee.

Bill and Darlene Thrower, my high school buddies, called to get together. I was best man at their wedding, but after this trip, Bill is really the best man. They came by to pick me up for the day. I had not seen Darlene since I saw them off on their honeymoon in 1945. Bill stayed with me in New York City about 8 years ago. I do love them as much now as I did when we would double date. We got the Year Book out and went page by page trying to bring each of us up to date. With the war and the aftermath they moved all over the United States. Darlene's hair is white as snow and Bill, who was skinny and short in high school, has filled out as much as I had. What a pleasure to be around non-dancers who don't give a damn about their waistline. I didn't say anything about their size nor did they mention mine. Darlene brought out their wedding pictures with me as best man and I looked like a Hollywood star. I must say I never thought of myself as handsome then and as you know I don't now, but if I looked liked that picture I could have gone for myself. I hated the evening to end. We planned lunch on Friday and all day on Saturday with my high school girl friend coming in from Dallas. Do you know what it is to turn the clock back 50 years? Real love is good old friends. I tell you something, they live high off the hog on less than my rent. (Swimming pool included.) It is an enticing thought to move to Oklahoma, but then I would miss New York City. I guess I can't have my cake and eat it.

Dee, my brother, his wife Luella, his daughter Jeanna and her husband Phil and their new baby Nick are due any time. Dee is just one year older than me. I am 66 and Dee is 67. Mother and Daddy were horny little devils. (in case you are wondering how I got this way.)

When Dee's brood arrived and the house filled up, I was moved out of the bed I was sleeping in so Dee and Luella got the double bed. I went to stay with cousin Kip, Evelyn's younger son. He lives alone in this great house that he bought and is restoring. It is almost finished. I have a feeling we would all like this place if it was located in the heart of Manhattan.

Can you believe that I was awakened by birds singing outside the window. I almost forgot what a wild bird sounded like. I also saw a cardinal. When I lived here this was a common sight. I remember robins with their red breasts and blue jays. One time the cottonwood tree next door was black with crows on route to wherever. Many years later I saw the movie BIRDS and it all came back to me. I think it was a frightening sight even then. Kip has a large well behaved dog and cat. I really can't believe that there is not a dog and cat in every house of my relatives. Kip would transport me in the mornings back to Evelyn's. One thing--we all had friends left from our youth that would want us to eat with them or at least see the City that has changed so much that Dee, Plato and I got lost two blocks from Evelyn's. Everyone talked about streets and places that weren't there 50 years ago. I was a real tourist. The other times I went back I wasn't interested in seeing the changes, I think because I wasn't prepared for change. Shopping malls had replaced downtown. Hotels were replaced by large motor lodges, larger than anything we have in New York. My

friends Bill and Darlene helped make my life here a real treat. They made sure I saw all of the old places where we spent our youth.

Friday noon we were to pick up our tickets and schedules at the Lincoln Plaza. Bill and Darlene drove me out and we got our tickets and got a great seat at the bar so we could watch for Martha, who was to be my date. Martha and I went together in High School. She is a widow now and lives in Dallas. As I said we had the best seats in the house. Not only could we see everybody that came in--everybody could see us. I would have these old people speaking to me, reminding me of things we did together, and although I remembered the names I could not put a face with the one I was looking at. 48 years really makes a difference. No matter what you do you will change. Believe it or not some for the best. Some of these men blossomed out to be real handsome guys, others did not fare as well. Out of our class of 650 only 38 showed up for this reunion. I met one man who graduated in 1926, the year I was born.

I went back in 1981 for a reunion and I was treated like I had the plague. Bill and Darlene did not come back at that time, but did return a few years later and they said that the reunion they went to was the same. Although they live in Oklahoma City now, they had not planned to attend until I called them to make sure we would be together. One girl, Mary Alice Reynolds from Jr. High remembered something that I had pushed out of my mind. In Jr. High my voice had not changed and I was the highest soprano in the music class. Having always been a goody-good boy the teacher did not want to leave me out of the musical. There was a part for a girl's trio----so they made it two girls and a boy. No one was to know that I was singing the high part. I hadn't thought about that since the year "one." Others came up with Gus stories which you could easily believe. I have not changed that much. The one thing I will never understand about all of us is why we don't tell people the nice things we feel toward each other. I was told more than once I was the idol of many of the younger students. One guy said that one of the great nights in the theatre he remembered was watching me in a play. He said he couldn't believe I would not have gone to Hollywood to be a star. I wish he had been a critic when the time came for me to make a name some place in the theatre.

Friday night Cot and Katie had the whole family for dinner. More food than anyone could eat, but we tried. I would say everyone was there except my niece Linda and her growing family from CT. also Randy, Elise and Donny. There is also Donald, the older brother of Evelyn and Katie. He lives in California with his family and he wasn't well enough to travel. In our family alone there were nine of us in Central: Three Androses, three Mac Donalds and the three Antonios. Katie married Cot Deal whose family was somewhat the same. Cot and Plato were singled out at the reunion. Dee's picture was on the wall and guess what was in the museum? They had a little corner for me. Someone said that they had seen my display in the museum and wondered why Plato's was three times larger than mine. Also when we were eating we sat with our class and one guy said it was a good thing that we weren't all there at the same time. I know we all made a mark while we were there, but Lou Antonio who calls me Cuz has done more than anybody else. It gets to me that a coach gets all the glory while one of America's best TV directors got no mention at all. James Antonio has been on more TV movies than you can name and still no mention

of him. I am afraid in Oklahoma sports is all that matters. It has always been that way and it's not going to change. Those of us in the arts will always have to make it someplace away from home.

Martha arrived from Dallas Friday afternoon and met us at the Lincoln Plaza. After all the hellos and hugs and kisses Martha drove me home to Evelyn's. We took a shower and changed clothes. We went to Katie's and Cot's for their big family dinner. Their house is on Silver Lake. You must know that there was very little water in Oklahoma as I was growing up and yet across from Silver Lake was Lake Heffner. Lake Heffner is really a large lake. It is a man made lake most of the lakes are man made. All this comes as a great shock to those of us who never saw water as a child. We had a great dinner, but Martha had not come from Dallas to spend the evening with my family as nice as they are. So we went back to the Plaza to get in on the singing of the school songs. Can you believe when the music started I knew the words. I hadn't heard these songs in 48 years, but I could sing every word. It was like your army serial number, you never forget it. We had a wonderful time with our high school buddies. I met my next door neighbor. I hadn't seen him in a long time. He told me stories of what the Andros boys did. I swear I wasn't part of it, but he could describe our basement to a T. He said that Plato took him to our basement to cut him up. Our house was probably the only house in the south with a wine cellar. The wine was in big vats. and Plato withdrew some red wine and told the boy it was blood. Knowing Plato I knew the boy was telling the truth.

One guy came over and said some very nice things he remembered about me. I think my life might have been different if I had heard any of this as I was growing up. Whatever people thought, they never said it to me. I don't believe any of them knew I had this terrible image of myself. I didn't come across that way, because I was covering up this picture of a real nothing kid. I found it hard to think anyone could love me, because nothing I did at home ever got a pat on the back. Mother once told me that I should move to the school, because I spent so much time there. I did that because I couldn't stand staying home. I believe if we have something nice to say let's not wait 50 years to tell somebody.

There were other very nice times I had. When I was in High School Dee, one of his friends and I triple dated. I am sure this happened only once. When the check came Dee and his friend argued over who was to pay the check. I hate this and stayed out of it, knowing that when we got home I would paid my share. When Dee had dropped everybody off and just the two of us were in the car, he jumped on me for not trying to pay. Before I could tell him I had planned to take care of this at home, he called me , "The cheapest son of a bitch in the world." At that point I thought "screw you." To make up for this slur I was determined to make up for this oversight. I took Dee, Luella, Evelyn, and Plato out to dinner. We went to a very nice Italian restaurant called Bellinis. We had a wonderful time together. A first, but I hope not the last.

The next morning Bill called and asked if I was free for the day and I was. Bill did the sweetest thing I can imagine. He had called Oklahoma University and told them that his friend from New York was a student at OU. He told them I was a ballet teacher and would

like to observe a ballet class. When I arrived, they treated me like a celebrity. The teacher was one of the best I've seen. She sounded like me on all of her corrections. I asked her about her background and her main teacher was our friend Maria de Baroncelli. Maria can be very proud that she left such a legacy as a teacher.

I want to thank Bill for thinking of such a great afternoon. I didn't even think of this for myself. The night before I left, Dixie and her boyfriend, Ernie, took Evelyn and me to a Mexican restaurant. We ate and drank till we had to leave. When Dixie comes back to New York I will find some way to repay her. You see the dinner was to be my treat.

The day I left Katie, Evelyn and Plato took me to the airport. I was wearing shorts and my knee brace. At the check-in counter the clerk made sure that I had an outside seat to Puerto Rico. My arrival in Puerto Rico was great until the baggage tram stopped and I still didn't have my luggage. I had to go and file a lost baggage claim. I was furious and loud. The lady filling out the claim ignored me completely. I turned to the man next to me and asked, "Did you lose your baggage?" and he said "Yes!" "Why aren't you mad? Why am I the only one losing it?" Without changing his expression he said "It always happen."

In Puerto Rico no one is allowed in the arrival area. Gail and James were afraid I had missed the plane. I am glad they waited and it was great to see them. They have been in PR for over a year. They have a lovely apartment and I had my own room and bathroom. The next morning my luggage arrived and now I could enjoy my stay.

Gail, better known as Chairperson of the board or head counselor, had our day planned from breakfast to bedtime. We saw a summer counselor with his charges all tied to a rope. James and I thought that it might be a good idea for Gail to tie us to the rope so we would not get lost.

Because of their planning I got to see more of PR than if I had gone on a tour. They had a car and James knew the roads like the back of his hand. We had dinner in the old city at a place called La Zaragozana. It was Spanish elegance. The food was great and so was the drink. We ate in a lot of places whose names I can't remember, most of the time in view of the Atlantic. I think once I may have embarrassed my hosts, but if you want to know what I did you will have to hear it from them. Gail had a small party for me to meet some of their new friends. I will say that they met some of the nicest people I have ever gotten to know: Adriana, Nestor, Susane, Bob, Yolanda and Pepe. One night we met Suzanne Glenn and her husband James Holton. They took us to dinner in a very swank Hotel, that once belonged to the Rockefellers. I knew that they would be there at the same time as I. It was a great coincidence. That was a great evening of food, drink and friendship.

Breakfast at the Condado Plaza with its view of the surf was a beautiful sight. One might see this from other beach hotels the world over, but the dinner we had in the mountains was spectacular. Gail and James took Yolanda, Pepe and me to this restaurant in the central island so high that my ears would pop. We had a window table that over looked the valley and over to another mountain. I just want to say that my stay in PR was wonderful because Gail and James went out of their way to make sure I saw as much as I could

emcompass. At the airport, getting ready for the flight back to New York I knew sometime in the future I would return.

The flight back was without incident. When I had to change in Atlanta I called the limousine company so they would pick me up. It may have cost me more but well worth it. I figure by the time I take another vacation I will have earned the same luxury. All in all I had a wonderful time.